

University of Southampton Research Repository

Copyright © and Moral Rights for this thesis and, where applicable, any accompanying data are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This thesis and the accompanying data cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder/s. The content of the thesis and accompanying research data (where applicable) must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder/s.

When referring to this thesis and any accompanying data, full bibliographic details must be given, e.g.

Thesis: Author (Year of Submission) "Full thesis title", University of Southampton, name of the University Faculty or School or Department, PhD Thesis, pagination.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

**Ambassador Donald R. Heath, the U.S. Embassy in
Saigon and the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954**

by

Alexander David Ferguson

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2018

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

Abstract

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

History

Doctor of Philosophy

AMBASSADOR DONALD R. HEATH, THE U.S. EMBASSY IN SAIGON AND THE
FRANCO-VIET MINH WAR, 1950-1954

By Alexander David Ferguson

This thesis provides the first scholarly analysis of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon from the American decision to support France's war against the Viet Minh with military and economic assistance in 1950 to Ngo Dinh Diem's appointment as prime minister of Vietnam in 1954. It explores the embassy's influence with Washington and its impact on events on the ground in Indochina. The major focus of the thesis is Donald R. Heath, the chief of the American diplomatic mission in Saigon in this period. The thesis contends that Heath played a key role in maintaining a U.S. policy that placed greater preference on sustaining the French war effort over the development of an independent, anti-communist government in Vietnam. Heath used his reporting to insist on the workability of this policy and intervened to counter the efforts of other Americans to reorient the balance of U.S. policy. Heath's repeated interventions with French, Vietnamese and American actors also helped to sustain the French commitment in Indochina, preventing diplomatic incidents in Saigon from encouraging the French to abandon their vital Cold War military effort. Heath's actions had unintended consequences, however. His prioritisation of the French effort over the development of anti-communist Vietnamese nationalism damaged the prestige of the United States in Vietnam and the Vietnamese government's chances of drawing political support away from the Viet Minh. Heath's embassy, which demonstrated activist tendencies after 1950, was also complicit in the deepening of American involvement in Vietnam. Embassy attempts to buck up the French and, after their European ally was defeated, the government of Ngo Dinh Diem committed greater American assistance and prestige to the struggle to prevent Vietnam's fall to communism, setting the scene for the later American war in Vietnam.

Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Academic Thesis: Declaration of Authorship.....	vii
Acknowledgments.....	ix
Acronyms.....	xi
Introduction.....	1
Individuals and Contingency in Vietnam.....	1
Ambassador Donald R. Heath, the U.S. Embassy in Saigon and the Franco-Viet Minh War.....	4
Argument.....	10
Structure.....	16
Chapter 1 – The Rise to Prominence of the American Diplomatic Post in Saigon, 1889-1950.....	19
The Beginning of an American Diplomatic Presence in Saigon.....	20
The U.S. Consulate in Saigon up to World War II.....	20
World War II, the Japanese Occupation of Indochina and the Closure of the Consulate.....	21
The Reopening of the Consulate.....	22
American Recognition of the Associated States.....	27
Chapter 2 – The Ugly Americans in French Indochina, 1950-1954.....	35
‘A New World’ and the Failure to Sell Southeast Asian Specialisation.....	37
Informal Preparation and Ideological Baggage.....	44
Tongue-Tied Foreign Service.....	48
Security Issues and Life in ‘Little America’.....	56
Chapter 3 – ‘To Supplement but not to Supplant’: Donald Heath and the Quiet Americans, July 1950-June 1952.....	65
A European Hand in Saigon.....	66
The Melby-Erskine Mission.....	68
RC4 and the Search for ‘Middle Ground’ Relations.....	72
De Lattre and the Quiet Americans.....	76
‘The Sacrificial Offering for which the Gods are Clamoring’.....	84
‘A Snowball has Started to Form’.....	93
Chapter 4 – ‘France is Fighting the Good Fight’: Donald Heath and Sustaining the French in Indochina, June 1952-December 1953.....	99
Tam and French War Weariness.....	100
‘Misinformed Traveling Prophets’.....	103
Getting France Back on the Offensive.....	109
Eisenhower in Office.....	111

Last Chance Saloon	116
‘Indochina, All But Lost’	118
‘Emotional, Irresponsible Nationalism’	125
Chapter 5 – The Dien Bien Phu Crisis, January-May 1954.....	135
Heath’s Fall from Favour	136
‘We Must Work with [the] French Through Existing Channels’	146
‘I Had No Indication of What Washington Thought of Recent French Suggestions Re [the] Internationalization of [the] War’	153
‘American Intervention in Indo-China Might be Interpreted as [a] Protection of Colonialism’	161
Chapter 6 – The Geneva Conference, May-July 1954.....	169
Saigon Diplomats at Geneva	170
The Embassy and U.S. Attempts to Sabotage the Conference	171
Accepting Partition.....	179
A Glass Half Empty or Half Full?	183
Changes to the U.S. Diplomatic Mission in Indochina	187
Chapter 7 – Ngo Dinh Diem and the U.S. Commitment to South Vietnam, July-November 1954	191
The Embassy and Diem’s Rise to Power.....	193
‘The Ablest Man in Southeast Asia’	196
Diem’s Domestic Campaigning.....	206
A Lame Duck Ambassador: Heath and U.S. Support for Diem	208
Heath’s Successor Arrives and the Resolution of the Diem-Hinh Crisis	227
Conclusion.....	233
Epilogue.....	241
Appendix 1 – Key Personalities	245
Appendix 2 – Oral History Consent Forms	249
Bibliography	257

Academic Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

I, Alexander David Ferguson declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Ambassador Donald R. Heath, the U.S. Embassy in Saigon and the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954

I confirm that:

This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

Parts of this work have been published as: 'Press Management and U.S. Support for France in Indochina, 1950-1954', *Diplomatic History*, 42 (April 2018), 228-253; 'The U.S. Embassy in Saigon and the Dien Bien Phu Crisis, 1954', in *Embassies in Crisis*, ed. by Rogelia Pastor Castro, Martin Thomas and Richard Toye (forthcoming with Routledge).

Signed:

Date:

Acknowledgments

I must express my deep gratitude to my supervisor, Kendrick Oliver. The concept for this thesis first emerged in one of Kendrick's undergraduate seminars almost a decade ago, and his fine stewardship has immeasurably improved the quality of the finished thesis. Andres Rodriguez, Adrian Smith and Ian Talbot, who all took on second supervisory roles at various points during the project, provided a great deal of useful advice. Particular thanks go to Ian for his incisive comments on the final draft. Thanks must also go to Adrian and Neil Gregor for the constructive feedback they offered during my upgrade viva.

I am thankful to the Royal Historical Society, the Humanities Graduate School at the University of Southampton, and the Harry S. Truman Institute for the generous travel funding they awarded me to complete my archival research in the United States. My seven-week trip to the United States was one of the great joys of this project. That I found so much useful material is down to the incredibly helpful archivists at the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, the University of Georgetown and the National Archives and Records Administration II. Special thanks go to Tim Rives and Chelsea Millner at the Eisenhower Library and Randy Sowell at the Truman Library for tracking down important documents and welcoming me so warmly to the Midwest. Thanks should also go to Kae and Moreta at the Higher Ground Hotel in Independence, who generously drove me through the snow to get to the Truman Library on my first day and to town when my laptop started to malfunction, and to the Eisenhower Foundation's Host Committee for providing a lift to Junction City. I am deeply appreciative of the efforts of Rakesh Ankit, my former colleague at Southampton, in sourcing copies of the Robert Blum Papers from Yale University and for his friendship and support as we navigated graduate study. Patrick Andelic kindly sent across copies of useful newspaper articles, and Karishna Bunwaree lent valuable assistance in translating important French-language texts – I express thanks to both.

Oral histories formed an important part of the research for this project. Rufus Phillips, William Cunningham, Donald Heath, Jr., Ian Adams, John Cloake, George Lambrakis, John Gunther Dean and William vanden Heuvel all kindly took the time to sit down with me and share their memories of diplomatic life in Indochina. Their insights helped shed important light on the Saigon embassy in the 1950s.

A range of scholars took time out of their busy schedules to offer valuable feedback on parts of the thesis. Great thanks go to David Mayers, Kathryn Statler, Fredrik Logevall, John Young and Christopher Prior, among numerous others, for their encouragement and constructive comments. James Nach generously sent me a copy of his unpublished study of the Saigon post's pre-1950 history. I would also like to thank the organisers and participants at a variety of conferences over the seven years of this project. Feedback at the annual meetings of HOTCUS, BIHG, SHAFR and the 2018 European Cold War Summer School helped improve the thesis immeasurably.

PhD study would not have been as fun if it had not been for the 'Lunch Brigade'. Rob Joy, Jane Ra, Robbie McGregor, Thomas Ellis, Joseph Higgins, Isaac Gustafsson-Wood, Abaigh McKee and Benjamin Paget-Woods provided welcome distractions from postcolonial Saigon. Particular thanks must go to Rob, who read the entire thesis and offered constructive suggestions on my work. I also owe a great deal of debt to the Recruitment and Outreach Team at the University of Southampton; work as a student ambassador provided an enjoyable escape from the PhD and the means to help fund my doctorate. My undergraduate and postgraduate colleagues, too, made my time as a student ambassador immensely gratifying. The staff in the Humanities Graduate School office also deserve considerable credit for their help in preparing the final version of this thesis for submission.

A number of other friends provided encouragement and much needed perspective. My thanks go to Graham Pavey, Andrew 'Potter' White, James Todd, Andrew Penn, Thomas Deamer, Lisa Kyle, Sophie Forster and Kim Edwards.

Huge thanks must also go to my partner, Anne-Marie Overend. Anne-Marie has put up with my absences from home to complete this thesis and obsession for Tottenham Hotspur with great cheer (and occasional well-deserved grumbles). Her love and support has helped sustain me through the PhD.

My greatest debt is to my sister Hannah and my parents, Jennifer and Shaun. Han kindly read parts of the manuscript and offered a publisher's perspective on my take on early U.S. involvement in Indochina. My parents provided financial support and encouraged me to pursue my passion for history. I dedicate this thesis to them.

Acronyms

AP – Associated Press

CFA – Committee for a Free Asia

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

DRV – Democratic Republic of Vietnam

ECA – Economic Cooperation Administration

EDC – European Defence Community

FOA – Foreign Operations Administration

FEC – French Expeditionary Corps

FSI – Foreign Service Institute

FSO – Foreign Service Officer

FSS – Foreign Service Specialist

IC – Indochina

JCS – Joint Chiefs of Staff

MAAG – Military Assistance Advisory Group

MDAP – Mutual Defense Assistance Program

MSA – Mutual Security Agency

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NSC – National Security Council

OSS – Office of Strategic Services

PRC – People’s Republic of China

PSA – Philippine and Southeast Asian Office, State Department

PSB – Psychological Strategy Board

RC4 – Route Coloniale 4

SEA – Southeast Asia

SOA – South Asian Office, State Department

STEM – Special Technical and Economic Mission

UMDC – Unites Mobiles de Défense des Chrétientés

USIS – United States Information Service

USOM – United States Overseas Mission

VM – Viet Minh

VNA – Vietnamese National Army

VOA – Voice of America

Introduction

Images of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon are among the most iconic of America's tragic involvement in Vietnam. The American media beamed back pictures of Vietcong soldiers lying dead after a failed assault on the embassy compound during the Tet Offensive in 1968 and American personnel and Vietnamese civilians fleeing from the embassy's rooftop during the final days of U.S. involvement in 1975. Commentators, too, often mistake Hubert Van Es's famous 1975 photograph of the evacuation of American personnel from 22 Gia Long Street, the home of the American aid agency and the CIA's deputy chief of mission, as an image of the embassy.¹ The Saigon embassy, therefore, looms large in popular memory of the American struggle in Southeast Asia. As the United States invested billions of dollars and committed hundreds of thousands of men to prevent Vietnam's fall to communism, the embassy became a key symbol of the American intervention and one of the most important diplomatic posts in the world. However, while scholarly investigation of American involvement in Vietnam shows no sign of abating, the U.S. Embassy in Saigon has received little sustained and detailed analysis by historians. Few studies deal directly with the embassy or its personnel and even the calls of the State Department in 2010 for papers on the embassy for its conference, 'The American Experience in Southeast Asia, 1946-1975', went unanswered.² This thesis aims to fill part of this gap through an examination of the embassy's role and influence in the early 1950s.

Individuals and Contingency in Vietnam

The dearth of scholarship on the U.S. Embassy in Saigon and its leading officials is surprising considering the increased importance historians have placed on the role of the individual in U.S. policymaking towards Vietnam in recent years. Challenging the long and widely held assumption that U.S. policy was the result of powerful overarching structural factors that made greater U.S. involvement inevitable, scholars have stressed the impact of personality and contingency in Vietnam policy.³ Historians like Edward Miller contend that American anti-

¹ Fox Butterfield and Kari Haskell, 'Getting it Wrong in a Photo', *New York Times* (hereafter *NYT*), 23 April 2000, <<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/review/042300photo-review.html>> [accessed 1 May 2018].

² For a programme of the papers given at the conference, see <<http://history.state.gov/conferences/2010-southeast-asia/reviews>> [accessed 27 September 2013].

³ For studies that stress structural factors and the inevitability of the war in Vietnam, see Richard K. Betts and Leslie H. Gelb, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1979); Gabriel Kolko, *Vietnam: Anatomy of a War, 1940-1975* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986); George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York: Wiley, 1979). For studies which stress the important impact of ideas about race and religion on U.S. policy decisions in Southeast Asia, see Seth Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem*,

communism, ideas on race and religion and economic factors alone provide an inadequate explanation for U.S. policy decisions in Vietnam.⁴ After all, while the vast majority of American officials shared a commitment to anti-communism and subscribed to racist ideas about Asian societies and people, policymakers frequently disagreed about the direction of U.S. policy in Vietnam during the twenty-five years of major American involvement.⁵ Historians suggest instead that the direction of U.S. policy can better be understood by an approach that gives greater weight to the role of the individual and the contingent nature of historical events.

The leading proponent of this thesis is Fredrik Logevall. Logevall first addressed the subject in *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam*. Focusing on what he calls ‘The Long 1964’, the period from August 1963 to February 1965, Logevall argues that the decision to Americanise the war in Vietnam ‘was highly dependent on individual decisions’.⁶ He identified cracks in the Cold War consensus that earlier scholars claimed made a U.S. military intervention in Vietnam unavoidable, pointing to the concerns that influential figures in the media, Congress, foreign governments and within the Johnson administration expressed about a U.S. intervention. Logevall believes that President Lyndon Johnson chose to go to war in 1965 not because of the weight of a Cold War consensus but because of partisan political considerations and concerns about his personal credibility.

Following Logevall, scholars have increasingly adopted methodologies which focus on the role of an individual. For the most part, however, historians have tended to concentrate on top U.S. officials in Washington such as National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy and his successor Walt Rostow, underlining their significant contribution to the construction of American policy.⁷ In recent years, Washington’s middle and lower level officials have attracted the

Religion, Race and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia (London: Duke University Press, 2004); Seth Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling: American Foreign Policy in Cold War Laos* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 2012); Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill, NC; London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁴ Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 9.

⁵ For studies that place greater stress on contingency and the role of the individual in U.S. policymaking, see David Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000); Mark Atwood Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005); Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012); H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997); Miller, *Misalliance*; Kathryn C. Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2007).

⁶ Logevall, *Choosing War*, p. xiii; p. xvi.

⁷ For works that focus specifically on the role and influence of a top-level Washington official, see Andrew Preston, *The War Council: McGeorge Bundy, The NSC, and Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

attention of scholars. While these individuals did not have the influence of their superiors, historical studies have revealed how figures like John McNaughton, Chester L. Cooper and Roger Hilsman, among others, left important yet more subtle imprints on U.S. policy in the 1960s.⁸

However, the activities of influential Americans working on the ground in Vietnam have not escaped historical study altogether. Historians have examined important figures like General William Westmoreland and John Paul Vann, as well as agencies in the U.S. diplomatic mission like the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), the Michigan State University Group and the United States Operations Mission (USOM).⁹ Certain Saigon ambassadors have received significant attention too. The ambassadorial tenures of Henry Cabot Lodge (1963-1964) and Maxwell Taylor (1964-1965), in particular, have featured prominently in the secondary literature on the war.¹⁰ The availability of extensive private papers, the reflective memoirs that both men produced and the crucial period in which Lodge and Taylor served in the embassy has ensured their place as central characters in broader studies of U.S. involvement in Vietnam.¹¹ During their

University Press, 2006); Gordon M. Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* (New York: Times Books, 2008); David Milne, *America's Rasputin: Walt Rostow and the Vietnam War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008); McMaster.

⁸ For studies examining the role and influence of middle ranked officials in Washington, see John Colman, 'Lost Crusader? Chester L. Cooper and the Vietnam War, 1963-68', *Cold War History*, 12 (2012), 429-449; Benjamin T. Harrison and Christopher L. Mosher, 'John T. McNaughton and Vietnam: The Early Years as Assistant Secretary of Defense, 1964-1965', *History*, 92 (2007), 496-514; Benjamin T. Harrison and Christopher L. Mosher, 'The Secret Diary of McNamara's Dove: The Long-Lost Story of John T. McNaughton's Opposition to the Vietnam War', *Diplomatic History*, 35 (June 2011), 505-534; Gerald J. Protheroe, 'Limiting America's Engagement: Roger Hilsman's Vietnam War, 1961-1963', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 19 (2008), 283-288.

⁹ For examples of studies that explore the role and influence of important American actors and agencies in Vietnam, see Lewis Sorley, *Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011); Gregory A. Daddis, *Westmoreland's War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (London: Cape, 1989); Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years of the United States Army in Vietnam, 1941-1960* (New York: Free Press, 1985); John Ernst, *Forging a Fateful Alliance: Michigan State University and the Vietnam War* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1998); Jessica Elkind, *Aid Under Fire: Nation Building and the Vietnam War* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016). The Michigan State University Group was a group of technical experts sent over to assist the development of South Vietnam under Ngo Dinh Diem's leadership. See Miller, pp. 148-157. USOM was the name for the U.S. aid agency in Vietnam from 1954. Elkind, p. 18.

¹⁰ For studies that detail the prominent role played by Lodge and Taylor in this period, see Francis X. Winters, *The Year of the Hare: America in Vietnam, January 25, 1963-February 15, 1964* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999); David Halberstam, *The Best and Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972); McMaster; Kaiser; and Logevall, *Choosing War*.

¹¹ See Henry Cabot Lodge, *The Storm Has Many Eyes: A Personal Narrative* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973); and Maxwell Taylor, *Swords and Ploughshares* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972). The Henry Cabot Lodge Papers can be found at the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston and the Maxwell Taylor Papers at the National Defense University, Washington, D.C. Memoirs of the period that detail the role of Lodge and Taylor include: John Mecklin, *Mission in Torment: An Intimate Account of the U.S. Role in*

tenures the United States gave its covert support for the 1963 coup that removed South Vietnamese leader Ngo Dinh Diem, began a bombing campaign against North Vietnam and committed American ground troops to the fighting. There have been some more detailed studies. Lodge's first ambassadorial tenure in Saigon received sustained attention in Anne Blair's *Lodge in Vietnam: A Patriot Abroad*. Robert Frankum has studied the Saigon tenure of Elbridge Durbrow (1957-1961), while Howard Schaffer's biography of Ellsworth Bunker (1967-1973) devotes considerable attention to his subject's time in Vietnam.¹²

The studies of the embassy that have been completed reveal its importance in U.S. policymaking, particularly prior to the introduction of U.S. ground forces. As Michael Adamson notes in his article on the Saigon ambassadorships of Elbridge Durbrow and Frederick Nolting in the late 1950s and early 1960s, 'U.S. ambassadors in Saigon prior to the introduction of U.S. combat troops occupied an especially critical post for the implementation of policy, commanded a wide array of organizational and financial resources, both civilian and military, and engaged the Diem regime on a continuous basis'.¹³ Adamson's work highlights that 'how both Durbrow and Nolting played their roles set parameters on subsequent policy making at the strategic level'.¹⁴ Blair, meanwhile, argues that the U.S. government's escalation of the conflict was strongly shaped by Lodge's 'approach to his diplomatic assignment, the choices he made, and the openings he failed to see at the time'.¹⁵ Geoffrey Stewart's work on Lodge, too, has suggested that the ambassador created 'the conditions for the coup' that removed Diem.¹⁶

Ambassador Donald R. Heath, the U.S. Embassy in Saigon and the Franco-Viet Minh War

With the exception of J. Lawton Collins's short six month tour in Saigon as special representative to the president (November 1954-April 1955), much less work has been completed

Vietnam (New York: Doubleday, 1965); U. Alexis Johnson, *The Right Hand of Power: The Memoirs of an American Diplomat* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984); and William Colby, with James McCargar, *Lost Victory: A Firsthand Account of America's Sixteen-Year Involvement in Vietnam* (Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books, 1990).

¹² Anne Blair, *Lodge in Vietnam: A Patriot Abroad* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1995); Robert Frankum, Jr., *Vietnam's Year of the Rat: Elbridge Durbrow, Ngo Dinh Diem and the Turn in U.S. Relations, 1959-1961* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014); Howard B. Schaffer, *Ellsworth Bunker: Global Troubleshooter, Vietnam Hawk* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003). See also Geoffrey C. Stewart, 'Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.: An American Proconsul in Diem's Vietnam', in *Diplomats at War: The American Experience*, ed. by Simon J. Rofe and Andrew Stewart (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Republic of Letters, 2013), pp. 231-250; Michael R. Adamson, 'Ambassadorial Roles and Foreign Policy: Eldridge Durbrow, Frederick Nolting, and the U.S. Commitment to Diem's Vietnam, 1957-1961', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 32 (June 2002), 229-255.

¹³ Adamson, p. 231.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Blair, p. xi.

¹⁶ Stewart, 'Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.', p. 231.

on the embassy in the initial stage of major U.S. involvement in Vietnam in the early 1950s.¹⁷ This thesis attempts to fill this lacuna in the historiography by providing the first sustained and detailed study of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon during the first four years of significant American involvement in Vietnam, 1950-1954. During this period, the American diplomatic post was led by Donald R. Heath, a career Foreign Service Officer who arrived as the first U.S. minister to Saigon in July 1950. His appointment to Vietnam came in the aftermath of two fateful decisions: the U.S. recognition of the newly created Associated States of Indochina (semi-independent, anti-communist governments in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) in February and the American pledge three months later to support France and her Indochinese allies with military and economic assistance.¹⁸ U.S. officials hoped that this assistance would provide the means for the French to repel the Viet Minh on the battlefield and for the Vietnamese government, led by the former emperor Bao Dai, to construct an anti-communist state capable of weakening the political appeal of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), the Vietnamese government established by the Viet Minh in 1945. The decision to send American aid marked what historian Mark Atwood Lawrence describes as ‘the first definitive American step towards embroilment in Indochina affairs, the start of a long series that would lead the administration of Lyndon Johnson to commit U.S. ground forces to Vietnam fifteen years later’.¹⁹ Indeed, over the course of Heath’s tenure, U.S. assistance to the French and Vietnamese increased markedly, with the American government footing more than two-thirds of the bill for the French military effort by the end of the Franco-Viet Minh War.²⁰

Heath occupied an influential role in this first major phase of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, remaining in Saigon as minister and then later ambassador (he was promoted in mid-1952) for four-and-a-half years, making him the second longest serving U.S. chief of mission in Vietnam behind Ellsworth Bunker.²¹ Heath oversaw the activities of a huge American diplomatic

¹⁷ For detailed examinations of Collins’s Saigon mission, see David L. Anderson, ‘J. Lawton Collins, John Foster Dulles, and the Eisenhower Administration’s “Point of No Return” in Vietnam’, *Diplomatic History*, 12 (1988), 127-148; Miller, *Misalliance*, pp. 108-123; Jacobs, *Miracle Man*, pp. 172-216; Statler, *Replacing France*, pp. 128-144.

¹⁸ Indochina was made up by the states of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, all of which had been under French colonial control since the latter part of the nineteenth century. Although the United States was concerned with communist pressure in all three states, the majority of their attention was focused on Vietnam, the state most at threat from a communist takeover. Vietnam was made up by three regions: the former protectorates of Tonkin in the north and Annam in the centre, and the former colony of Cochinchina in the south.

¹⁹ Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, p. 3.

²⁰ Laurent Cesari, ‘The Declining Value of Indochina: France and the Economics of Empire, 1950-1955’, in *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, ed. by Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 176-195 (p. 178).

²¹ Minister was the rank given to the chief of mission in a legation. Bunker held the position of U.S. ambassador in Saigon for six years between 1967 and 1973.

mission in Indochina that included U.S. posts in Saigon, Hanoi in northern Vietnam, Phnom Penh in Cambodia and Vientiane in Laos, and was the U.S. government's primary contact with key French and Indochinese officials. He was also responsible for administering a large American aid programme and his reports provided Washington with an important window into political and military developments in a deeply unfamiliar part of the world for U.S. officials.²²

Despite Heath's prominent position in the U.S. effort, he has received little sustained academic attention. Few scholars have attempted to assess Heath's performance, his impact on U.S. policy and the degree to which he shaped developments on the ground. In studies of the Vietnam War, Heath and his subordinates appear fleetingly, entering the narrative briefly to deliver the occasional well-placed quote or, in some cases, not at all.²³ This is partly because of the methodological decision of many scholars to begin their research in mid-1954, with the appointment of Diem as Vietnamese prime minister and the American assumption of the dominant Western position in Vietnam from France, and others to skip quickly from the initial U.S. commitment in 1950 to the French defeat in 1954.²⁴ Reflective of this tendency, the most sustained attention given to Heath in the literature has focused on his role in the early days of Diem's prime ministership. Even those historians that have given greater attention to the period of his ambassadorship, however, have generally avoided any deep analysis of Heath's contribution.²⁵

In recent years, much of the scholarship on the Franco-Viet Minh War has adopted an international lens, with historians taking advantage of newly opened archives around the world to uncover the important contributions made by actors in Beijing, Moscow, London and Paris.²⁶ Some of the most significant advances in our understanding of this period have come from historians who have immersed themselves in the Vietnamese archives. Work by Christopher Goscha and Pierre Asselin has, for example, furthered our academic understanding of the Viet Minh's diplomatic efforts, while Jessica Chapman and Edward Miller have illuminated the role played by influential anti-communist Vietnamese actors.²⁷

²² Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 2.

²³ For studies in which Heath receives little or even no mention, see Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991); Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History, The First Complete Account* (New York: Viking Press, 1983); and Herring, *America's Longest War*.

²⁴ For example, Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Philip E. Catton, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002); and A. J. Langguth, *Our Vietnam: The War 1954-1975* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

²⁵ See, for example, Logevall, *Embers of War*; Statler, *Replacing France*.

²⁶ Logevall, *Embers of War*; James Waite, *The End of the First Indochina War: A Global History* (New York; London: Routledge, 2012).

²⁷ Christopher E. Goscha, 'Courting Diplomatic Disaster? The Difficult Integration of Vietnam into the Internationalist Communist Movement (1945-1950)', *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 1:1-2 (February/August 2006), 59-103; Pierre Asselin, 'The Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the 1954

Historical works on the role of U.S. officials on the ground in Vietnam in the 1950s have tended to focus on Americans working outside of the embassy. Research by Jessica Elkind examines the role of U.S. aid workers in South Vietnam, exploring how American perceptions on how best to modernise the anti-communist state in Vietnam came into conflict with Diem's own plans for developing his country.²⁸ CIA operative Edward Lansdale, too, continues to attract scholarly attention. Max Boot's 2018 biography of Lansdale devotes substantial portions to Lansdale's work in the Saigon Military Mission (a second CIA station in Saigon) in the 1950s.²⁹ Stein Tønnesson's work has also revealed the important influence enjoyed by local French actors. Tønnesson's research reveals that a triumvirate of French officials in Saigon were largely responsible for the outbreak of the Franco-Viet Minh War in 1946.³⁰

When Heath and other embassy officials operating in Vietnam in the early 1950s are discussed in historical studies, it is often as exemplars of broader American perceptions of Indochina. In *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam*, Seth Jacobs uses embassy staff like Robert McClintock, Heath's number two in Saigon from 1952 to 1954, to demonstrate widely held American views on race and religion.³¹ In his follow-up work on U.S.-Lao relations, Jacobs uses the ethnocentric reports of American personnel in Laos to demonstrate the construction of a broader American interpretation of the Laotian people as unreliable allies in waging the Cold War.³² Jessica Chapman's *Cauldron of Resistance* uses the cables of American diplomats in Indochina to understand how broader thinking about the Cold War, religion and modernisation shaped American perceptions about Diem and his chief anti-communist rivals in South Vietnam.³³ Mark Bradley's *Imagining Vietnam*, focused on the period before 1950, reveals the role that diplomatic staff in Vietnam played in constructing an ethnocentric image of the Vietnamese that led U.S. officials to more easily conclude that the Viet Minh were a tool of Soviet imperialism.³⁴

Although the source material pertaining to Heath's tenure in Saigon is otherwise plentiful, he did not leave a set of private papers, write a memoir or record an oral history about his experiences in Saigon – the sort of evidence trail that might draw historians into studying this

Geneva Conference: A Revisionist Critique', *Cold War History*, 11 (2011), 155-195; Jessica Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 2013); Miller, *Misalliance*.

²⁸ Miller, *Misalliance*; Elkind.

²⁹ Max Boot, *The Road Not Taken: Edward Lansdale and the American Tragedy in Vietnam* (London: Head of Zeus, 2018).

³⁰ Stein Tønnesson, *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began* (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 2010), pp. 5-6.

³¹ Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man*, pp. 51-52.

³² Jacobs, *Universe Unravelling*.

³³ Chapman, pp. 52-60.

³⁴ Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam*.

period of the embassy's history. According to Heath's son, his father had been dissuaded from keeping private papers or writing a memoir after having seen and heard about many of his colleagues' records falling into the hands of foreign governments. Heath's inclination to avoid retaining delicate documents, his son suggests, was cemented during a previous assignment when Heath returned home early from a diplomatic dinner in Berlin to discover his locally employed cook making copies of sensitive documents belonging to Heath's wife, Louise. When he turned to writing a memoir in his later years he was prevented from completing it by a series of strokes.³⁵ Potentially illuminating material collected and produced by Heath's two most senior subordinates during his tenure in Saigon, Edmund A. Gullion (1950-1952) and McClintock (1952-1954), has also been lost. Although Gullion donated a set of papers to the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, many of his records relating to his two year tour in Indochina were lost when his office at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University was fire bombed in 1971 by anti-war activists angry at Gullion's support for 'Vietnamisation' and the School's supposed links to the CIA.³⁶ Gullion's successor, McClintock, was struck down by a car in France in 1976 before he could finish writing a book on the art of diplomacy.³⁷

Those scholars who have offered an assessment of Heath and his subordinates have tended to stress the embassy's lack of decisive influence in Saigon. Discussing the U.S. effort under the Truman administration, Leslie Gelb and Richard Betts assert in *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* that 'American officials in Vietnam contributed little to decisions about Vietnam being made in Washington during this period', while Kathryn Statler highlights Heath's failure to convince Washington of Diem's ineptitude and the futility of the American effort to save Vietnam prior to his departure in 1954.³⁸ It is difficult to make the case that Heath and his colleagues in the embassy exercised decisive influence upon U.S. policy during this period. The U.S. policy of dual support for the French military and anti-communist Vietnamese nationalism, after all, remained fairly consistent during the four-and-a-half years that Heath spent in Indochina.

However, research on embassies and the diplomats who staffed them has shown that the importance of embassies does not solely rest in their ability to enact decisive influence; an embassy's significance is often more subtle. As Richard Wevill notes in his study of the British Embassy in Washington in the late 1940s, 'The problem with this type of approach [looking for decisive influence], however, is that it runs the risk of underestimating the importance of other

³⁵ Author's Correspondence with Donald R. Heath., Jr., 17 August 2013.

³⁶ Wolfgang Saxon, 'Edmund Asbury Gullion, 85, Wide-Ranging Career Envoy', *NYT*, 31 March 1998, <<http://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/31/world/edmund-asbury-gullion-85-wide-ranging-career-envoy.html>> [accessed 13 January, 2018].

³⁷ 'Robert M. McClintock, 67, Retired U.S. Ambassador', *Washington Post*, 3 November 1976, p. B12.

³⁸ Gelb and Betts, p. 49; Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 284.

aspects of the embassy's work'.³⁹ Wevill found in his research that 'the importance of the embassy in the period under review resides [...] in the embassy's permanence as an institution or rather the knowledge and contact base that arose from that permanence'.⁴⁰

Wevill's study is part of a larger body of work which has in recent years reaffirmed the importance of embassies in twentieth century international diplomacy. Despite Under Secretary of State George Ball's assertion in the 1970s that 'jet planes and telephones [...] now largely restricted ambassadors to ritual and public relations', the development of faster communication and transport technologies has not made ambassadorial diplomacy redundant.⁴¹ Indeed, John Young argues in his study of David Bruce's London ambassadorship in the 1960s that the rise of summits and international conferences, forms of diplomatic interaction that increased in frequency because of technological advances, 'need not be seen as a threat' to embassies. Rather, he suggests, the increasing regularity of meetings between heads of states and foreign secretaries has 'tended to generate work for ambassadors'.⁴² In his work on the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, David Mayers argues that to assume that ambassadorial diplomacy had been unimportant in U.S.-Soviet relations 'would lead to faulty historical understanding'.⁴³ To Mayers, the embassy was a critical component of the U.S. policymaking machine that dealt with the issue of the USSR and helped avert many crises. The embassy, he argues, 'functioned in several ways on the frontline: as "eyes and ears" of the United States, an actor in the devising of strategy, a conveyor to the Kremlin of attitude and position', and as an important mediator in nuclear confrontation.⁴⁴ Furthermore, in their edited volume examining British ambassadors in Washington, Michael Hopkins, Saul Kelly and John Young argue that embassies 'fulfil an important role in bilateral relationships through the promotion of friendly ties, the negotiation of agreements, lobbying, clarifying intentions and promoting trade, as well as propagandising, political reporting and providing policy advice to their government'.⁴⁵

Some studies have moved beyond discussion of Heath's influence on specific policy decisions to consider his overall contribution to U.S. involvement during the Franco-Viet Minh War. Most of the commentary comes from Americans who worked in Indochina at the time and

³⁹ Richard Wevill, *Britain and America after World War II: Bilateral Relations and the Beginning of the Cold War* (New York; London: I.B.Tauris, 2012), p. 8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Quoted in G. R. Berridge and John W. Young, 'Conclusion', in *The Washington Embassy: British Ambassadors to the United States, 1939-77*, ed. by Michael F. Hopkins, Saul Kelly and John W. Young (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 229-234 (p. 229).

⁴² John W. Young, *David Bruce and Diplomatic Practice* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 168.

⁴³ David Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America's Soviet Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁴⁵ Michael F. Hopkins, Saul Kelly and John W. Young, 'Introduction', in Hopkins, Kelly and Young, pp. 1-13 (p. 1).

not historians. In his book *The Lost Revolution: Vietnam 1945-65*, Robert Shaplen, a *New York Times* correspondent who covered the Franco-Viet Minh War, criticised Heath for what he saw as the diplomat's role in the broader American failure to guide the Vietnamese revolution along nationalist rather than communist lines. According to Shaplen, the half-hearted U.S. effort to help facilitate Vietnam's independence from French colonialism marked a lost opportunity for the United States in which a more proactive stance 'might have helped immeasurably to avoid the two decades of bloodshed, civil war, and disillusion that have followed'.⁴⁶ Shaplen asserts that Heath's tendency to avoiding pushing the French too hard on ceding greater powers to Bao Dai's government made Heath 'simply the wrong person for the job – if the job was to accomplish what the United States kept saying it wanted; namely, a true independence for Vietnam'.⁴⁷

Other contemporary observers were less critical. Howard Simpson, a United States Information Service (USIS) official who worked as the embassy's press officer in the early 1950s, concluded in his memoir that Heath 'had performed an intricate diplomatic balancing act during a particularly difficult period'.⁴⁸ Simpson stressed Heath's ability 'to follow Washington's directives to keep the French fighting and relatively happy' as he concurrently 'reassured Vietnamese nationalists that U.S. policy supported a free and independent Vietnam'.⁴⁹ Simpson's sentiment is reflected almost word-for-word in Logevall's *Embers of War*, one of the few historical studies to reflect, albeit briefly, on Heath's overall contribution in Saigon. Logevall's focus, however, is on the Franco-Viet Minh War more broadly and his assessment of Heath's performance was not informed by deep archival research.⁵⁰

Argument

This study provides the first in-depth analysis of Heath's ambassadorship and the embassy in the early 1950s, exploring the role of the embassy, the influence of American diplomats in Vietnam on U.S. policy and the embassy's impact on developments on the ground. It contends that the embassy, and Heath in particular, made an important contribution to the construction and implementation of U.S. policy during this early stage of the American commitment in Indochina. Embassy officials kept Washington abreast of developments in Indochina, engaged in policy debates, represented the United States at important occasions, built contacts with influential local actors, participated in conferences, supervised the wider mission and American visitors, and managed the American press.

⁴⁶ Robert Shaplen, *Lost Revolution: Vietnam, 1945-1965* (London: Deutsch, 1966), pp. xx-xxi.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁴⁸ Howard R. Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire: An American in Vietnam, 1952-1991* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1989), p. 154.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 638-639.

The thesis asserts that neither the tendency to see Heath as badly miscast for his role or as an effective manager of a sensitive American equilibrium in Indochina is fully accurate. In implementing U.S. policy, Heath struggled to find a way to balance the conflicting goals of supporting a French colonial regime and the development of Vietnamese nationalism. For the most part, he prioritised support of the French effort, using his influence to impede Indochinese nationalists from taking steps that might threaten the commitment of the French military. His interventions with the Indochinese, whom he spoke of in orientalist terms, hurt U.S. prestige with nationalists in the area. Equally, however, Heath's pro-French leaning tendency and lack of diplomatic experience in Southeast Asia did not mean he was as miscast for his role in Saigon as Shaplen asserts. Heath's approach fit with senior policymakers' prioritisation of the French military effort over Vietnamese nationalism.

The dissertation argues that Heath played an important role in ensuring the maintenance of the French military effort during the final four years of the Franco-Viet Minh War. Heath's role in the U.S. effort to sustain the French war has been underappreciated by scholars. Although historians have noted the deep French sensitivity to the American presence in Vietnam, research has tended to focus predominantly on exploring the sources of Franco-American tension and the ways in which this inhibited the effort to combat the Viet Minh.⁵¹ For example, as George Herring notes on his essay on the topic, 'The conflict between the two nations [France and the United States] in Indochina had profound implications for the conduct and outcome of the war. It made fruitful collaboration very difficult'.⁵² Much less work has been done, however, to explore the efforts of American officials to try to calm Franco-American relations and to prevent disputes between the Western powers from escalating into incidents which might jeopardise the French commitment in Indochina. As this thesis demonstrates, French officials repeatedly threatened to withdraw their forces in response to American criticism and heavy-handedness.

Heath, this dissertation asserts, was at the centre of the U.S. effort to calm Franco-American relations. While scholars have demonstrated an awareness of some of the actions Heath took to try to minimise the tension and to repair the damage to Franco-American relations, this thesis provides the most detailed assessment of Heath's actions to date.⁵³ Heath's interventions

⁵¹ Statler, *Replacing France*; George C. Herring, 'Franco-American Conflict in Indochina, 1950-1954', in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954-1955*, ed. by Lawrence S. Kaplan, Denise Artaud and Mark R. Rubin (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1990), pp. 29-48; Laurent Cesari, 'The French Military and U.S. Participation in the Indochina War', in Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, pp. 49-54 (pp. 49-53); Mark Philip Bradley, 'Making Sense of the French War: The Postcolonial Moment and the First Vietnam War, 1945-1954', in Lawrence and Logevall, pp. 16-41 (pp. 23-24).

⁵² Herring, 'Franco-American Conflict in Indochina', p. 45.

⁵³ See, for example, William J. Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 99-101; pp. 116-117; Arthur J. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and*

were not, as the current literature's rather spotty recognition of his activities would suggest, isolated incidents, but rather part of a sustained effort by the ambassador over his four-and-a-half years in Saigon, involving interactions with French officials, Indochinese nationalists, American representatives, U.S. correspondents, and Washington. Furthermore, he consistently encouraged Washington to extend greater assistance to the French in an effort to sustain their military effort. Heath, too, played an important role in maintaining and legitimising a U.S. policy which gave greater preference to assisting the French, using his reporting to insist on the workability of American policy and to counter the attempts of other Americans to reorient the balance of U.S. policy towards the equally important task of constructing an independent, anti-communist government in Vietnam. One of the most serious challenges to the pro-French policy came from Heath's own staff. This thesis also investigates the views of other embassy officials, many of whom believed the United States needed to press the French harder on making political concessions to the Vietnamese, and the ambassador's efforts to minimise their ability to shift the focus of U.S. policy. French officials were deeply appreciative of Heath's efforts and the ambassador performed a vital firefighting service for U.S. policymakers keen to ensure that French troops continued the fight against communism in Southeast Asia.

Among the most significant new evidence that this thesis brings to light regarding Heath's efforts to prevent a French withdrawal in Vietnam is in its discussion of embassy attempts to shape American press coverage of the Franco-Viet Minh War. Studies of the press during the Vietnam War have focused almost entirely on the period of heavy U.S. involvement in the 1960s and 1970s. Historians who have discussed the role of the American press during the Franco-Viet Minh War, either in broader surveys of the media's involvement in Vietnam or of the First Indochina War itself, generally downplay its importance to U.S. officials. Studies suggest that the press largely shared policymakers' understanding of Vietnam's importance to the bipolar struggle against global communism and encouraged support of the French war, and that reporters in Vietnam itself, under-resourced and subject to strict French censorship, found it difficult to establish an independent perspective on the conflict.⁵⁴

However, this dissertation shows that the reports of the American press were a major concern of U.S. officials in both Vietnam and Washington in this period. French officials reacted strongly to stories in the American media criticising their military efforts and political failings,

Vietnam (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 216-219; Marilyn B. Young, "'The Same Struggle for Liberty': Korea and Vietnam", in Lawrence and Logevall, pp. 196-214 (pp. 201-207).

⁵⁴ Clarence Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), pp. 53-58; Louis Campomenosi III, 'The "New York Times" Editorial Coverage of the American Involvement in Vietnam, 1945-1965: A Case Study to Test the Huntington Thesis of the Existence of an Oppositional Press in the United States' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Tulane University, 1994), pp. 116-39; William M. Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas: 1998), p. 1.

viewing press reports as representative of the official U.S. government position. The thesis highlights that U.S. officials were deeply concerned about the American media's ability to exacerbate Franco-American tension, inhibit U.S. efforts to influence French decision-making and damage American attempts to sustain France's commitment in Indochina. It also reveals the central role played by the embassy and Heath, in particular, in trying to dissuade American reporters from publishing stories likely to antagonise the French and in pressurising French authorities to liberalise the harsh French press censorship system in Indochina that many U.S. officials believed encouraged the publication of critical and pessimistic articles about the war in the American press.

In bringing to light Heath's efforts to do what he could to maintain the French effort, this dissertation supplements scholarly work that has stressed a number of other crucial factors in explaining why France fought on in Vietnam as French domestic opposition to the conflict grew in the early 1950s. Martin Thomas stresses the significance of the emotional appeals of French ministers to national unity issued after the Cao Bang defeat in 1950 and views General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny's military efforts in 1951 as crucial in helping to 'stem the tide of parliamentary and public criticism' of the war in France.⁵⁵ Other historians have emphasised Indochina's importance to France's international credibility.⁵⁶ Laurent Cesari argues that French officials feared that the loss of Indochina would hinder France's attempts to retain its other colonial possessions, particularly its territories in North Africa.⁵⁷ Senior French officials such as Georges Bidault, who had played a central role in prosecuting the war since its inception in 1946, also had a deep 'personal stake in a successful outcome in Indochina', according to Logevall.⁵⁸ He argues that Bidault's inclination to continue the war was based, at least partly, on his feeling that a setback in Indochina would harm his own personal prestige. Statler points to the importance of the development of a Vietnamese National Army in reducing the strain on French forces.⁵⁹ Other historians also stress the importance of U.S. aid in keeping the French going, exploring how French officials played on American fears of communist expansion and linked developments in Europe to events in Asia to secure this assistance.⁶⁰ This thesis, therefore, expands scholarly understanding of the ways the U.S. government tried to keep the French in the fight, including Heath's role in pressing Washington to increase its investment in Indochina.

Analyses of the ramifications of the U.S. commitment during Heath's tenure in Saigon has, as with much of the literature, focused predominantly on the actions of leading

⁵⁵ Martin Thomas, 'French Imperial Reconstruction and the Development of the Indochina War, 1945-1950', in Lawrence and Logevall, pp. 130-151 (p. 149).

⁵⁶ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 488.

⁵⁷ Cesari, 'The Declining Value of Indochina', pp. 179-180.

⁵⁸ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 353.

⁵⁹ Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 28.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38; Young, "'The Same Struggle for Liberty'", pp. 196-214.

policymakers, the individuals with whom ultimate responsibility for U.S. policy rests. While, as historians like Logevall have noted, the initial commitment of the United States did not make a later American war in Vietnam inevitable, there is nonetheless a scholarly consensus that decisions taken during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations made it more difficult for those who succeeded them to resist escalating the war.⁶¹ Lawrence stresses that Truman's decision to pledge assistance to the French in 1950 'limited the options available to the administrations that followed'.⁶² Statler highlights the significance of the decisions made by Eisenhower in the years after the French defeat. She notes that the 'increased buildup of economic aid, American military advisors and administrators, and political support of South Vietnamese leader Ngo Dinh Diem' left the United States more committed to preventing Vietnam's fall to communism.⁶³ For Seth Jacobs, the 'commitment to Diem was the essential precondition for the ensuing measures that led to the defeat and humiliation of the United States'.⁶⁴

The scholarship on these issues has not been entirely consumed by top level officials. Historians have stressed the agency of a number of local American actors who played crucial roles in expanding the U.S. commitment in Vietnam during the 1940s and 1950s. In his examination of Truman's decision to provide assistance to the French effort, Lawrence highlights the crucial role played by what he calls 'the obscure bureaucrats who actually managed the issue'.⁶⁵ Among the individuals who played a role in 'recasting Indochina as a Cold War crisis by 1950' were several American diplomats working in Vietnam.⁶⁶ In studies of the U.S. decision to back Diem, historians have underlined the important supporting roles played by Michigan State University Group official Wesley Fishel and spy Edward Lansdale.⁶⁷

This thesis provides the first detailed assessment of the significance of Heath's tenure in Saigon. The legacy of Heath's ambassadorship is complex. On one hand, the ambassador spent much of his tenure fighting off the attempts of other Americans, including his own staff in the embassy and others in the American mission in Vietnam, to press the French for greater U.S. influence in Indochina. Although Heath shared the same confidence as these figures that the United States would likely do a better job than the French and, at times of frustration, moved to

⁶¹ Logevall, *Choosing War*.

⁶² Mark Atwood Lawrence, 'Explaining the Early Decisions: The United States and the French War, 1945-1954', in *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National and Transnational Perspectives*, ed. by Mark Philip Bradley and Marilyn B. Young (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 28-45 (p. 38).

⁶³ Kathryn C. Statler, 'Eisenhower, Indochina, and Vietnam', in *A Companion to Dwight D. Eisenhower*, ed. by Chester J. Pach (Chichester: Wiley, 2017), pp. 494-516 (p. 495).

⁶⁴ Jacobs, *Miracle Man*, p. 3.

⁶⁵ Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, p. 7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Statler, 'Eisenhower, Indochina, and Vietnam', p. 505.

try and secure a more influential position for the Saigon embassy, he feared that an aggressive American stance would only encourage a French departure. On the other hand, Heath encouraged Washington to increase its assistance to France to keep them in the fight, confident that greater U.S. investment would provide the necessary resources for the French to turn the war around, and to support Diem's government with resources once the French had been vanquished. Although Diem was not fully embraced by the U.S. government until spring 1955, U.S. support for his government began in 1954 during Heath's tenure.

As indicated earlier, Heath's role in the early stages of Diem's prime ministership has received more thorough coverage from historians than the four years of his tenure that preceded it because of the methodological tendency of many scholars to start their research in mid-1954. The majority of these historians label Heath as a critic of Diem. Scholars suggest that Heath's pessimistic reading of the prime minister clashed with the more optimistic assessments of other influential observers, leading the ambassador to try, ultimately unsuccessfully, to convince Washington that the United States should look for an alternative Vietnamese leader.⁶⁸ This thesis asserts, however, that while Heath did exhibit serious doubts about Diem, his views on the prime minister were largely in accord with those Americans that historians have more typically identified as keen supporters of Diem. It also suggests that Heath and his staff played an important role in U.S. efforts to preserve Diem's position in late 1954, encouraging an increased U.S. commitment to his government in his final few months in Saigon and moving to bring Diem's rivals into line. Heath, therefore, was more responsible for the deepening of the U.S. commitment in Indochina than has previously been acknowledged.

The thesis also reveals the imperial nature of much of Heath and his staff's activities in the embassy. A number of scholars, stretching back to the initial work done by the Wisconsin School in the 1950s and 1960s, have described U.S. activities in Vietnam in imperial terms. While noting the differences between the French and the American experience, particularly the more informal version of imperialism applied by the United States in the post-World War II world, various historians have nevertheless outlined that the U.S. intervention in Indochina had many of the 'main attributes of colonial interventions in the preceding centuries of European global domination'.⁶⁹ Some scholars have even described American ambassadors like Henry

⁶⁸ Miller, *Misalliance*, pp. 75-76; p. 95; Chapman, pp. 82-83; Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 638-639; Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 128; Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man*, p. 176; Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, pp. 8-10.

⁶⁹ Michael Adas, 'A Colonial War in a Postcolonial Era: The United States' Occupation of Vietnam', in *America, the Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and International Perspectives*, ed. by Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner and Wilfried Mausbach (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 2003), pp. 27-42 (p. 29); Michael H. Hunt and Steven Levine, *Arc of Empire: America's Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), pp. 185-250; Steven Hugh Lee, *Outposts of Empire: Korea, Vietnam and the Origins of the Cold War in Asia, 1949-1954* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995).

Cabot Lodge as pro-consuls for the demands they made of the local population and tendency to view Vietnamese officials through an orientalist lens.⁷⁰ Others, noting this behaviour, have revealed that Indochina's indigenous people began to view the Americans as colonisers.⁷¹

As with the literature on Vietnam more generally, much of the work on the imperial nature of U.S. activities has focused on the period after the Franco-Viet Minh War when the United States assumed the dominant Western role in Indochina.⁷² However, this thesis asserts that there was already a neo-colonial ambience to the embassy's activities prior to the French defeat. Embassy officials held deeply racist views of the Vietnamese, used American aid in an attempt to shape Vietnamese internal affairs, separated themselves from the host community by socialising predominantly with Westerners at French imperial social hubs, and attempted to establish a more activist embassy holding responsibilities beyond those of a normal diplomatic post. The thesis builds on excellent scholarship by Jacobs, Bradley and Chapman that has served to uncover the tendency of American diplomats to view the Indochinese through an ethnocentric lens and the European-orientated social habits of Americans in Indochina in the early 1950s, and assessed the impact that this had on Indochinese perceptions of the United States and American policy in Southeast Asia.⁷³ In doing so, this thesis reveals the neo-colonial nature of the embassy's operation in this period and the ways in which ethnocentric attitudes, social isolation from the host community and a lack of language skills damaged the accuracy of embassy reporting and forced a greater reliance on French interpretation.

The thesis makes use of primary source material from repositories in the United States and the United Kingdom. Access to the Robert Blum papers at Yale University and the embassy records at the National Archives, collections rarely employed by scholars, and close scrutiny of the State Department files yielded important new information. Freedom of Information Act requests resulted in the release of significant amounts of hitherto unseen records of the British Embassy in Saigon at the British National Archives as well as new material from the Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower presidential libraries. The dissertation also makes use of a great raft of oral history interviews, including those completed by the author with surviving members of the Saigon diplomatic corps.

Structure

⁷⁰ Stewart, 'Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.', p. 240; p. 248; Carnes Lord, *Proconsuls: Delegated Political-Military Leadership from Rome to America Today* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 147-157.

⁷¹ Jacobs, *Universe Unraveling*, p. 85.

⁷² Statler, *Replacing France*, pp. 249-276.

⁷³ Jacobs, *Universe Unraveling*; Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam*; Chapman, pp. 52-60.

The thesis is, with the exception of the second chapter, arranged chronologically into seven chapters. Chapter one traces the development of U.S. diplomatic representation in Saigon from the single consular agent appointed in 1889 to the establishment of a legation in 1950. It identifies how World War II, the Japanese occupation of Indochina, rising Cold War fears, and the fall of China transformed the role of the U.S. diplomatic post in Saigon from a small observation point on the periphery of the French empire to an activist legation tasked with overseeing a major American effort to check communist expansion.

Chapter two analyses the skills and knowledge-base of American diplomats sent to staff the newly important and activist U.S. posts in Indochina between 1950 and 1954, revealing the unpreparedness of the U.S. Foreign Service to handle the complex and significant mission demanded of U.S. diplomats in Indochina. It begins by assessing the state of American knowledge of Indochina and the failed attempts of Washington officials to produce a corps of Southeast Asian experts in the Foreign Service in the late 1940s. The second half of the chapter examines the impact that a lack of language skills and local knowledge, as well as the social habits of the U.S. mission and inaccurate perceptions of the Vietnamese people held by American diplomats, had on the embassy's ability to perform its function for the U.S. government and its tendency to defer to French readings of the situation.

Chapter three assesses the period between 1950 and 1952, Donald Heath's first two years as U.S. minister in Saigon. The chapter begins by examining Heath's appointment to Saigon, highlighting how his experience in Bulgaria was crucial in securing him the post. The chapter then turns to analysing Heath's decision to prioritise the French military effort over the development of the anti-communist Vietnamese government. It asserts that Heath's interventions with Washington, French and Vietnamese representatives in Indochina, his own staff, and visiting Americans were crucial in easing Franco-American tension and maintaining a U.S. policy that prioritised the French war effort.

Chapter four analyses Heath's contribution to the U.S. effort from the Saigon post's rise to embassy status in mid-1952 to the end of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's first year in office. It assesses Heath's ongoing efforts to sustain a French military commitment in Indochina as French leaders increasingly looked for a way out of the conflict. Heath's efforts continued to ensure the primacy of a pro-French leaning policy and served to deepen the U.S. commitment in Indochina. His interventions with the Indochinese also reveals the neo-colonial tinge to the embassy's operation.

Chapter five identifies the rather limited role played by the embassy during the discussions surrounding a U.S. intervention at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Whereas earlier chapters stress the embassy's importance in U.S. government deliberations, this chapter reveals the limitations to Heath's influence as senior policymakers began to question the pro-French policy he had implemented and take a lead role in policy formulation. The first half of the chapter assesses embassy activities in the months building up to the outbreak of the battle, linking the

concerns that built about Heath's performance in Washington with the Eisenhower administration's decision to leave the embassy out of major policy discussions on Indochina. The chapter then explores the embassy's limited influence over Eisenhower's decision-making at Dien Bien Phu, highlighting that its major contribution to U.S. efforts continued to be its attempts to promote a continuation of the French military effort.

Chapter six focuses on the contribution of American diplomats in Saigon to the American delegation's efforts at the 1954 Geneva Conference, where talks took place to end the Franco-Viet Minh War following the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. The chapter assesses the extent of embassy involvement at the conference, the degree to which Saigon diplomats shaped the tactics employed by the United States at Geneva, and how far embassy officials influenced the outcome of the settlement and American attitudes towards an acceptable compromise. It reveals the embassy's contribution to a set of accords that left open the possibility of increased U.S. involvement in Indochina as hopes for sustaining a French commitment evaporated.

The final chapter analyses the embassy's role in the U.S. effort to strengthen South Vietnam in the aftermath of the French defeat and the signing of an agreement at Geneva. It explores the embassy's involvement in Diem's appointment as prime minister of Vietnam and the efforts of American diplomats in Saigon to assist Diem's attempts to combat his domestic competitors in the final few months of 1954. The first half of the chapter examines the failed attempt of embassy officials in Vietnam to persuade Washington to authorise an American intervention to support an alternative candidate to Diem in the weeks running up to his appointment, stressing the neo-colonial nature of such an intervention. The chapter then reassesses Heath's final few months in Saigon, highlighting the ambassador's efforts to help shore up Diem's position and contending that Heath's removal from his post had little to do with his more pessimistic reporting about Diem. It argues that Heath did much to strengthen U.S. support for Diem's fledgling government. In fact, over the course of Heath's four-and-a-half years in Saigon, the embassy helped commit the United States more deeply to the maintenance of an anti-communist state in Vietnam through its support of a crumbling French effort and its attempts to sustain Diem's position.

Chapter 1 – The Rise to Prominence of the American Diplomatic Post in Saigon, 1889-1950

In February 1950, journalist Seymour Topping arrived in the Vietnamese city of Saigon. He was the first American journalist permanently assigned to cover the Franco-Viet Minh War. As he recalled in his memoirs, ‘The world knew little or did not care very much about this vast human tragedy unfolding in a remote colony’.¹ Topping was right, international press coverage of the conflict had been sparse and events elsewhere in the post-war world had so far overshadowed the war in Indochina. Yet this was set to change. Just days after Topping’s arrival, President Harry S. Truman took the first of a series of moves that transformed American interest in the little known war. In extending diplomatic recognition to the Associated States of Indochina, Truman took the first major step in the long U.S. commitment to prevent Vietnam’s fall to communism. Among the changes that followed, the tiny American consulate in Saigon, which Topping observed on his arrival, now found itself at the forefront of the U.S. effort to prevent communist expansion in Vietnam. In the years that followed, the Saigon post would become one of the largest and most important diplomatic posts in Southeast Asia.

This chapter explores why French Indochina became important for the United States and assesses how the Saigon post’s size, role and activities changed from the establishment of the Saigon post in 1889 to the American decision to recognise the Associated States and pledge aid to France’s war in 1950. The Pacific War and the five years that followed World War II were crucial in accelerating American involvement in Indochina and in changing the nature and importance of the work undertaken by the U.S. diplomatic post in Saigon. Then, following the American decision to support the French war effort with military and economic aid in 1950, the Saigon post took on ‘action responsibilities’ alongside its representational and reporting roles, involving itself in an attempt to direct both the pace and shape of decolonisation in Indochina.² This chapter builds on scholarly work on the U.S. diplomatic post in Saigon in the years up to 1950 by James Nach, Robert Hopkins Miller and Ronald Spector. It, however, focuses in more detail on how decisions in 1950 altered the nature of the Saigon post’s work.³

¹ Seymour Topping, *On the Front Lines of the Cold War: An American Correspondent’s Journey from the Chinese Civil War to the Cuban Missile Crisis and Vietnam* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), p. 122.

² Gullion to Hoey, 4 March 1950, lot 54 D190, Indo-China 1949-51, Box 7, Records of the Philippine and Southeast Asian Division, 1949-1952 (hereafter PSA Division), Record Group 59: Records of the Department of State (hereafter RG 59), United States National Archives and Records Administration II (hereafter USNA).

³ James Nach, ‘A History of the U.S. Consulate, Saigon, 1889-1950’ (unpublished manuscript, 2011 [revised 2018]); Robert Hopkins Miller, *The United States and Vietnam, 1787-1941* (Washington, D.C.:

The Beginning of an American Diplomatic Presence in Saigon

The origins of permanent U.S. diplomatic representation in Saigon lay in the nineteenth century. As U.S. trade ships stopped off in Saigon with increasing regularity in the 1860s, reports reached Washington from American diplomats in the Far East recommending that the government appoint a consul or consular agent in Saigon. The absence of a consular agent in Saigon, they argued, was having a damaging effect on American trading. As U.S. Consul to Singapore Sewell, wrote:

Now, there is no American Consular Agent at the port, and therefore, I think our maritime interests suffer; Seamen cannot be discharged or shipped; Vessels cannot be sold or bought; Invoices cannot be certified, etc. Other Governments have their Consular Agents at Saigon, and reap the benefit thereof.⁴

Despite repeated attempts at persuasion by these officials, the State Department decided against appointing a consular agent in Saigon until almost three decades later when the French had consolidated their control over Indochina and greater opportunities for foreign commerce existed. On this occasion taking the advice of its Far Eastern representatives, the State Department appointed Aimée Fonsales, a Frenchman and managing partner of a merchant organisation stationed in the port city, as U.S. consular agent to Saigon in 1889. His appointment marked the beginning of the American diplomatic presence in Indochina.⁵

The U.S. Consulate in Saigon up to World War II

Despite some marginal interest in trading in the region, U.S. involvement in Indochina remained fairly minimal right up until World War II. Whilst the U.S. diplomatic presence in Saigon had grown, with the one consular agent being replaced by a fully-fledged consulate in 1907, American diplomatic representation in Indochina continued to be small.⁶ One or sometimes two diplomats took care of consulate duties and its reporting, focused predominantly on the economic situation in Indochina, remained largely unimportant to policymakers in Washington. There was little opportunity for increased American business given the strict French economic laws in place in Indochina, the American population in the colony was small (100 people in total

National Defense University Press, 1990); Spector, pp. 7-10. Many thanks to Mr. Nach for kindly sending me a copy of his unpublished manuscript.

⁴ Sewell quoted in Miller, *The United States and Vietnam*, p. 72.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-144.

⁶ A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, By Country, Since 1776: Vietnam, Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State, <<http://history.state.gov/countries/vietnam>> [accessed 24 August 2017].

in 1935) and made up predominantly by Protestant missionaries and those working for oil companies in the area, and few Americans outside the country knew much or shared any interest in events in this far away French colony.⁷

Even those diplomats that arrived to staff the consulate knew little about their new post. Covering Quincy Roberts's home leave, Merritt Cootes arrived in Saigon in 1936. As he recalled years later, 'I knew nothing about Indochina – I barely knew where it was'.⁸ Fortunately for Cootes, Roberts had already prepared his end of year economic reporting and instructed him simply to make contact with French representatives in Hanoi just in case anything important happened. However, Cootes did not need to be too concerned, for there was seemingly little going on in Indochina to interest American officials in this period. So little, in fact, that one American diplomat of the period cabled Washington asking 'that the State Department excuse him from the requirement to submit monthly political reports because "there were almost no political developments to report"'.⁹

World War II, the Japanese Occupation of Indochina and the Closure of the Consulate

World War II brought about a number of changes that impacted American interest in Indochina and the importance of the work of the U.S. Consulate in Saigon. The French defeat to Nazi Germany in 1940 left Indochina weak and vulnerable. Japan, at war with China, sensed an opportunity to take Indochina from the French. Japanese officials valued Indochina's promise of raw materials and its potential as a launching pad for further military operations in the Far East. They were also keen to halt the flow of American weapons and Western supplies that had been reaching the Chinese from the railway that ran from Haiphong in northern Vietnam to Kunming in southern China. Lacking the necessary military strength to repel a Japanese invasion, French officials in Indochina decided against resistance and instead appeased the Japanese in an attempt to preserve what control they could. In June 1940, the French governor-general in Indochina accepted a Japanese ultimatum to stop the transportation of materials to the Chinese via the railroad. By late June, the Japanese had set up various check points in northern Indochina but stopped short of conquering the country. They preferred to let the French continue to govern, freeing up their own troops for the war against China.¹⁰

⁷ Nach, p. 27.

⁸ Oral History Interview with Merritt N. Cootes, 29 September 1991, Interviewed by Lillian Peters Mullin, *Frontline Diplomacy: The Foreign Affairs Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, Manuscript Divisions, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter *Frontline Diplomacy*), <<https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004coo05/2004coo05.pdf>> [accessed 24 August 2017].

⁹ Spector, p. 9.

¹⁰ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 27-30.

Despite the Japanese occupation, the U.S. Consulate in Saigon initially continued to go about its regular duties as normal. Reports documented developments in the French colony and the Japanese takeover of northern Vietnam. In November 1941, following the extension of Japanese occupation to the southern half of Vietnam, however, the activities of the consulate came under greater scrutiny. As Kingsley Hamilton, vice-consul in Saigon, recalled, ‘In November, the Japanese began following us to see where we were going. You’d see them not far behind when you moved about Saigon or out into the countryside’.¹¹ The bombing of the consulate building that same month, which U.S. officials suspected the Japanese were behind, was a further sign of increasing tension between the two countries. A month later, the Japanese took decisive action against the United States and the consulate. At 2:30am on 8 December 1941, Hamilton was awoken by the noise of low flying planes and then by a knock at the door. A group of Japanese officials informed the American that their armed forces had launched a surprise and devastating attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor and that their two countries were now at war. The Japanese then took Hamilton into custody. Initially kept in his apartment, Hamilton and the consulate’s other American Foreign Service Officer, Sidney Browne, were moved to join their British counterparts at their diplomatic residence in the city. Here they were interned in relative comfort. Unable to leave the house, the two American diplomats listened to the radio, read and played bridge while the war raged on. In their stead, the Swiss consul was put in charge of American interests and, Hamilton recalls, ‘became the contact between the Department, the Japanese, and ourselves’.¹² In 1942, Hamilton’s stay in Saigon was at end. He and Browne boarded a ship and were exchanged at a port in Mozambique for Japanese diplomats serving in the United States. By late August, the two Americans had arrived safely back in the United States and American consulate activity in Indochina was temporarily suspended.¹³ For the remainder of the war, Washington looked to its representatives in southern China for information on Indochina.¹⁴

The Reopening of the Consulate

Whilst the onset of the war in the Pacific had the immediate effect of closing down the U.S. Consulate in Saigon, the long-term impact of the war and the Japanese occupation of the colony increased the importance of Indochina to the United States and, therefore, also the status

¹¹ Oral History Interview with Kingsley W. Hamilton, 9 December 1994, Interviewed by Charles S. Kennedy, *Frontline Diplomacy*, <<https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004ham02/2004ham02.pdf>> [accessed 24 August 2017].

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam*, p. 90.

of the Saigon diplomatic post. Given its dominant operational role in the Pacific theatre, the United States held a prominent voice in discussions surrounding the post-war future of those areas formerly under Japanese control. Previously on the periphery of U.S. interests, Indochina emerged as an important part of the American effort to construct a lasting peace as victory was achieved by the Allies. It held important markets for the American vision of rebuilding Japan and Europe and, as Abbott Low Moffat, chief of the State Department's Southeast Asia Division, put it, occupied an important strategic position 'on the southern flank of China, with its potential naval base at Cam Ranh Bay, halfway between Hong Kong and Singapore and the same distance due West of Manila'.¹⁵

Although U.S. policymakers may have agreed on the importance of Indochina, they were deeply divided over its post-war future. On one side were the 'liberals', officials clustered in the Asian Bureau of the State Department who took their cue from the convictions of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Roosevelt was a committed anti-colonialist, who developed plans to transform former colonies into free and peace loving nations through international trusteeships. He reserved particular criticism for French colonialism in Indochina, and sought to prevent the French from retaking control of their colony and to accelerate Indochina's path to independence. Roosevelt and the 'liberals' believed that greater support to nationalist groups in colonial areas would prevent disruptive revolutions and open up markets for the U.S. economy. FDR's death in 1945, however, prevented him from implementing his plans for Indochina and brought to power a man who sided far more with U.S. policymakers who favoured a different approach.¹⁶

Harry Truman knew little about Roosevelt's plans for Indochina, lacked his predecessor's interest in the issue of colonialism and focused his post-war plans principally on Europe. Truman and the 'conservatives', officials predominantly based in the European Bureau of the State Department, felt that the United States could best pursue its post-war interests through the maintenance of close ties with their European allies. In particular, Truman wanted their help in rebuilding war-torn Europe and in countering the rising global threat of the Soviet Union.¹⁷

It is unsurprising, therefore, that the Truman administration rebuffed the attempts of Ho Chi Minh, leader of the Viet Minh, for U.S. assistance. On 2 September, Ho spoke to a large crowd assembled in Hanoi. A few days earlier, he had established an independent Vietnamese government, the DRV. In his speech, he quoted directly from the American declaration of independence to express his own nation's freedom from a colonial power. Ho, however, remained

¹⁵ Moffat quoted in Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, p. 49.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-52; Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 44-66. Some scholars assert that FDR had changed his mind on the restoration of French control in Indochina in the final days of his life. See Walter LaFeber, 'Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina: 1942-1945', *American Historical Review*, 80 (1975), 1277-1295.

¹⁷ Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, pp. 52-58.

only too aware of the French desire to reclaim control of Indochina and that lasting Vietnamese independence had not yet been secured. For both the French and the DRV, U.S. support for their cause was critical. Ho pleaded his case to Office of Strategic Services (OSS) officials working in Vietnam and southern China during the latter stages of the war and wrote directly to Truman asking for assistance. No reply came from Washington.¹⁸ In the end, conservative thinking won the day: a month before Ho's declaration of independence, Truman gave French leader Charles de Gaulle American support for the restoration of French control in Indochina. After attempts at negotiation failed, hostilities between the returning French and Ho's Viet Minh soon broke out and the Franco-Viet Minh War had begun.¹⁹

Following the end of the Japanese occupation, the U.S. Consulate in Saigon reopened its doors in February 1946 and was upgraded to a consulate-general in May of that same year in recognition of "the new importance Southeast Asia has to the United States as a result of the war".²⁰ A U.S. consulate in Hanoi was also established in January 1947.²¹ Still small in stature, the consulate-general in Saigon nevertheless fulfilled a crucial reporting role in what was becoming an increasingly important struggle between the French and the Viet Minh. Its diplomats relayed information about the prosecution of the war back to Washington and sought to try to mediate a solution to the conflict.²²

Deteriorating U.S.-Soviet relations began to reshape how American policymakers saw the Franco-Viet Minh War and other world events in the late 1940s. Disagreements over European reconstruction, Iran and Greece brought an end to the fragile but mutually beneficial war-time alliance between the two superpowers. Interpreting Soviet expansionism as a threat to America's own strategic and economic interests, U.S. officials began to view the successes of communist parties or organisations, whether or not there was direct evidence of Soviet involvement, as part of a worldwide communist movement that must be contained. In this atmosphere, Americans grew increasingly concerned that a Viet Minh victory would expand the Soviet sphere of influence. Ho Chi Minh's former associations with communist parties in Europe

¹⁸ Hassett to Secretary of State, 20 October 1945, Box 912, Official File, White House Central Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library (hereafter HSTL). On these letters not reaching President Truman and being filed away, see Oral History Interview with Kenneth Landon, in Harry Maurer, *Strange Ground: An Oral History of Americans in Vietnam, 1945-1975* (New York: Avon Books, 1989), p. 42; Dixee R. Bartholomew-Feis, *The OSS and Ho Chi Minh: Unexpected Allies in the War Against Japan* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006), pp. 303-304.

¹⁹ See Tønnesson, for the most detailed study of the outbreak of the Franco-Viet Minh War in 1946.

²⁰ Nach, p. 66. On 20 May 1946, Secretary of State, James Byrne, cabled the U.S. Embassy in Paris telling them to inform the French that the 'Consulate [in] Saigon [had been] raised to [a] Consulate General effective immediate'. Telegram 2427 from Secretary of State to Caffery, 20 May 1946, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1946. *The Far East*, Volume VIII (hereafter Vol. VIII), (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), p. 43.

²¹ Nach, p. 88.

²² Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam*, p. 144.

and Asia, Mao Zedong's victory in the Chinese Civil War and communist insurgencies that were gaining ground elsewhere in Southeast Asia led the U.S. government to conclude that a Soviet-controlled and coordinated offensive for the region was underway. This impression grew despite the failure of U.S. diplomats in Vietnam to find evidence explicitly linking Ho and the Viet Minh with the Soviet Union.²³

Increasing American concern with the activities of the Soviet Union was not lost on government officials in other Cold War capitals, including in Paris. Sensing an opportunity to build U.S. support for their goals in Indochina, hawkish French officials in Paris and Saigon embarked on a campaign to recast France's colonial war against the Viet Minh as part of the emerging Cold War after 1945. In conversations with American officials and in statements to the press, the French argued that their military was fighting on behalf of the West to prevent the Soviet-controlled Ho Chi Minh securing the Kremlin a foothold in Southeast Asia.²⁴ As Lawrence has shown, conservative factions in Britain, keen to preserve their own colonial holdings and fearful that Viet Minh victories would create unrest in Malaya and Burma, assisted like-minded Frenchmen in this effort.²⁵ However, despite continued concerns about Ho's allegiance and communist intentions in the region, Washington remained reluctant to throw its support behind the French effort in the late 1940s. U.S. policymakers held reservations about supporting a colonial power and sharp divisions between 'liberals' and 'conservatives' in the American bureaucracy over decolonisation in Vietnam remained. The United States stayed neutral for now.²⁶

The French, however, persisted in their efforts to win American support. As the Franco-Viet Minh War reached a stalemate and began to take a greater toll on the French economy in 1947, French officials realised that the war could not be won by military means alone. They also understood that while Ho could not obtain foreign aid for his effort his position remained vulnerable. Partly out of a desire to undermine Ho's movement and partly to gain international, particularly U.S., support for their effort, the French drew up plans to create an alternative Western-oriented and anti-communist Vietnamese government led by the former emperor, Bao Dai. Bao Dai had considerable influence among Vietnamese nationalists and the French hoped he could weaken Ho's political appeal, draw together the anti-communist nationalist groups in a joint effort against the Viet Minh and direct Vietnamese desires for independence down a route more beneficial to French interests.²⁷ Bao Dai's government was given a degree of independence,

²³ Ibid., pp. 166-169; Goscha, 'Courting Diplomatic Disaster?', pp. 63-65.

²⁴ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 185-186.

²⁵ Mark Atwood Lawrence, 'Transnational Coalition-Building and the Making of the Cold War in Indochina, 1947-1949', *Diplomatic History*, 26 (July 2002), 453-480 (p. 459).

²⁶ Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, pp. 176-178.

²⁷ The French had made earlier attempts to use Bao Dai's national status to quieten resistance to colonial rule in the 1930s. However, these attempts proved relatively unsuccessful, with Bao Dai withdrawing from

authorised by the Élysée Accords signed on 8 March 1949 (often referred to by American officials as the 8 March Accords), but considerable restraints remained on Vietnamese sovereignty and France retained control over the most important functions of government. Similar accords were signed with anti-communist leaders in Laos and Cambodia later in the year, resulting in the creation of the Associated States of Indochina. The three Indochinese states were given representation in the French Union, a federation designed to afford greater autonomy to colonial states but preserve considerable French influence.²⁸ French leaders could now argue that they were fighting for the Vietnamese people against the Soviet-controlled dissidents of the Viet Minh. The move certainly resonated in Washington, providing the means to satisfy the twin American goals of supporting self-determination for colonial peoples and preventing communist expansion.²⁹ If the French promised to liberally implement the accords, U.S. recognition of the Associated States and support of the French effort was not far away.

As France moved closer to authorising the 8 March Accords in the French National Assembly and giving a modest degree of independence to Vietnam, U.S. officials began to consider the implications for the U.S. Consulate-General in Saigon. As one State Department official noted in August 1949, 'Reports from Saigon indicate that there will be an increased volume of work, both political and economic, as a result of the evolution of the Bao Dai regime, which envisages taking over from the French many functions hitherto carried on by the French'.³⁰ 'These changes will have to be closely watched and reported upon', he suggested, 'if the Department is to be kept adequately and promptly informed of the developing Indochina situation'.³¹

Events on the Asian mainland were also critical in elevating the position of the diplomatic post in Saigon. The victory of Mao Zedong's Chinese Communist Party in the Chinese Civil War in 1949 and the U.S. refusal to recognise the People's Republic of China (PRC) increased the importance of posts on China's border, particularly those in Southeast

political affairs before eventually taking up the role of supreme advisor in the DRV in 1945. Trust between Bao Dai and the DRV quickly broke down, resulting in the former emperor abandoning his brief cooperation with the Viet Minh in 1946. He spent the next few years in exile in Hong Kong, where Vietnamese anti-communists and French colonial officials travelled to convince him to head up an alternative anti-communist state. Christopher Goscha, 'Bao Dai', *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War (1945-1954)*, <<https://indochine.uqam.ca/en/historical-dictionary/106-bo-i-nguyn-phuc-vnh-thy-jean-robert-19131997.html>> [accessed 30 May 2018].

²⁸ Christopher Goscha, 'French Union', *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War (1945-1954)*, <<https://indochine.uqam.ca/en/historical-dictionary/512-french-union.html>> [accessed 4 May 2018].

²⁹ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 198.

³⁰ Memorandum from Reed to Cowles, 'Personnel Required by SEA', 17 August 1949, lot 54 D190, S.E.A. U.S. Missions 1949-1950, Box 1, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Asia.³² Chinese language officers were brought in to monitor the activities of Chinese communities in these countries and to keep an eye on what was happening over the border. Mao's recognition of the DRV in early 1950, the presence of Chinese forces on Vietnam's northern border, American estimates of one million Chinese residents in Indochina, and whisperings that the Chinese had begun to provide the Viet Minh with training and aid made Vietnam a particularly important post for observing China. As William Lacy in the State Department's Philippine and Southeast Asian (PSA) office noted, 'The general importance of all things Chinese to Indochina need not be elaborated upon. PSA considers the assignment of an experienced China hand to the Indochina staff, either at Hanoi or Saigon as the Consul General considers best, would be of special value to the Department'.³³ Chinese linguists like Oscar Vance Armstrong were brought in to interpret the actions of this critical player in the Franco-Viet Minh War and to use Indochina as 'a window onto Chinese possibilities and intentions'.³⁴

American Recognition of the Associated States

Worsening conditions in Vietnam, concerns over Chinese intentions, a belief that the Bao Dai Government would fail without Western support, and French threats to pull out if they did not receive the assistance they wanted ensured that conservative officials in Washington eventually emerged victorious in the debate over Indochina. Years before President Dwight D. Eisenhower publicly spoke of a domino theory, American policymakers feared that Indochina's fall would start a chain reaction that would result in the loss of all of Southeast Asia to communism.³⁵ On 7 February 1950, following Soviet recognition of the DRV a few days earlier, an action that many U.S. officials felt vindicated their suspicions about Ho's allegiance to Moscow, the State Department announced American recognition of the Associated States of

³² Memorandum from Reed to Donelan, 'Personnel in Southeast Asia', 31 August 1949, lot 54 D190, S.E.A. U.S. Missions 1949-1950, Box 1, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

³³ Memorandum from Lacy to Capella, 'Reassignment of Personnel Now in China', 26 January 1950, lot 54 D190, S.E.A. U.S. Missions 1949-1950, Box 1, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

³⁴ Oral History Interview with Oscar Vance Armstrong, 28 March 1991, Interviewed by Willis Armstrong, Frontline Diplomacy, <<https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004arm02/2004arm02.pdf>> [accessed 24 August 2017]; Jean-Marc LePage and Elie Tenenbaum, 'The "Unquiet Allies": French and American Intelligence Relations during the First Indochina War, 1950-54', *Studies in Intelligence*, 55:3 (September 2011), 25-37 (p. 27). For an example of Armstrong's reporting, see Armstrong to Gullion, 'Attitudes of the Local Chinese Population', 12 June 1950, in Foreign Service Despatch 225 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Transmitting Report on Attitudes of the Local Chinese Population', 15 June 1950, 751g.00/6-1550, Box 3667, Central Files: 1950-1954 (hereafter CF 1950-1954), RG 59, USNA.

³⁵ Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, pp. 255-261.

Indochina.³⁶ In May, Secretary of State Dean Acheson pledged to provide economic and military aid.³⁷

This American commitment brought with it great increases in diplomatic staff to Indochina. The consulate-general in Saigon was upgraded to a legation, small posts were opened up in Phnom Penh in Cambodia and Vientiane in Laos, and other Americans arrived to administer the military and economic aid programmes agreed with the French. Within just a few months the tiny American diplomatic presence had been replaced by what Topping described as ‘the panoply of intervention: large diplomatic and information staffs, economic and military aid missions’.³⁸ The extent of the increase in personnel was reported in detail by Tillman Durdin in the *New York Times* in July 1950, who wrote:

The United States is engaged in rapidly building up for Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos the largest official mission assigned to any area in Southeast Asia. Between 150 and 200 Americans will soon be stationed, mostly at Saigon, as members of the diplomatic, Economic Cooperation Administration, military and information agencies.³⁹

Durdin reported that the legation:

will soon have a State Department staff of about forty. Offices of the United States military, naval and air force attaches have been opened here and will have staffs of about thirty Americans, including the crews of two legation transport planes. A legation guard of about half a dozen Marine Corps sentries is planned.⁴⁰

A CIA station was also set up within the U.S. legation.⁴¹

At the time of Acheson’s pledge to extend American assistance to the French, the legation was located at 26 Rue Lagrandière, a short walk from Saigon’s commercial district.⁴² According to Edmund Gullion, chargé d’affaires prior to the appointment of the first U.S. minister, the building’s office space was woefully inadequate for the increased responsibilities of the legation. Gullion described its facilities in March 1950 as akin to ‘those of a fuggy consulate in a banana town in an O. Henry story’.⁴³ In mid-July, however, the legation moved to the top

³⁶ For Soviet recognition vindicating American beliefs about Ho’s subservience to Moscow, see Dean Acheson’s comments contained in Editorial Note, 1 February 1950, *FRUS, 1950. East Asia and Pacific*, Volume VI (hereafter Vol. VI), (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950), p. 711.

³⁷ Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, pp. 1-2.

³⁸ Topping, p. 125.

³⁹ Tillman Durdin, ‘U.S. Indo-China Aid Gathering Weight: Military and Economic Help, Now on Way Will be Heavily Augmented Next Month’, *NYT*, 23 July 1950, p. 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ LePage and Tenenbaum, p. 26.

⁴² Roster of American Personnel, 7 July 1950, lot 57 D472, Indochina Background, 1950, Box 2, Records Relating to the Mutual Security Assistance Program (Far East), 1949-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁴³ Gullion to Hoey, 4 March 1950, lot 54 D190, Indo-China 1948-51, Box 7, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA. O. Henry was the pen name of American author William Sydney Porter, who coined the phrase ‘banana republic’. Kevin Coleman, *A Camera in the Garden of Eden: The Self-Forging of a Banana Republic* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2016), p. 81.

two floors of the Bank of East Asia building, a ‘solid [...] but drab, ordinary, office building’ at 4 Rue Guynemer.⁴⁴ The legation office would remain here for the rest of the Franco-Viet Minh War, relocating to another bank building on the nearby Boulevard de Somme in late 1954.⁴⁵ However, the move to the Bank of East Asia Building did little to alleviate the cramped conditions. In 1951 Saigon diplomats continued to complain about claustrophobic work spaces and the lack of private rooms for confidential discussions.⁴⁶ The Special Technical and Economic Mission (STEM), the organisation that was established to administer economic assistance to the Vietnamese, and USIS did not share these premises. They were situated at 106 Boulevard Charner just around the corner from the legation.⁴⁷ Difficulty obtaining property in Saigon and the expansion of STEM meant that by 1953 STEM offices were split across three different locations in the city, creating issues in ensuring the secure handling of documents.⁴⁸ USIS, too, expanded into the Paul Blanchy Apartments on Rue Lagrandière in 1950.⁴⁹ The Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), who handled military aid to the French, occupied a dilapidated building at 284 Rue Cai May in the Chinese-dominated section of Saigon known as Cholon.⁵⁰ The wide geographical spread of American agencies made effective cooperation between the different sections of the U.S. diplomatic mission difficult.

By spring 1950, the influx of new staff was badly needed. The legation was struggling to cope with the increased workload generated by U.S. recognition of the Bao Dai government and the large sums of American aid arriving. In March 1950, Gullion was clearly feeling the strain and informed Washington that the legation did not have the staff to do everything that was required of it. He said, ‘Up until now I have been doing merely “spot” stuff, not having the staff to undertake much basic reporting or “think” pieces [...]. By the time you get this, I should have begun in the other vein. Please be patient’.⁵¹ A month later he again raised the issue. He told Lacy that, ‘In our overworked condition we have had to focus on political matters, on U.S. aid, and on administration’.⁵² Officials, however, were arriving to help. Gullion observed that Don Catlett, the newly appointed second secretary, had arrived and that ‘others are coming in rapidly.

⁴⁴ Author’s Interview with William J. Cunningham, 4 October 2012; Nach, p. 123.

⁴⁵ Author’s Interview with William J. Cunningham, 4 October 2012; Nach, p. 123.

⁴⁶ Memorandum from Heath to Boyce, 20 January 1951, lot 54 D190, U.S. Embassy – admin, Box 7, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

⁴⁷ Roster of American Personnel, 7 July 1950, lot 57 D472, Indochina Background, 1950, Box 2, Records Relating to the Mutual Security Assistance Program (Far East), 1949-1954, RG 59, USNA; Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Garnett to Boyd, 8 May 1953, Personnel – Staffing – 1 of 2, Box 9, Subject Files, Office of the Director, Mission to Vietnam, Record Group 469: Records of U.S. Foreign Assistance Agencies, 1948-1961, USNA.

⁴⁹ Nach, p. 76.

⁵⁰ Spector, p. 119.

⁵¹ Gullion to Hoey, 4 March 1950, lot 54 D190, Indo-China 1949-51, Box 7, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

⁵² Gullion to Lacy, 27 April 1950, lot 54 D190, U.S. Embassy – admin, Box 7, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

I am proceeding immediately to work out a reporting section and hope to give you some systematic evaluations and reports and periodic summaries in addition to our telegraphic coverage'.⁵³ In May, following the arrival of greater numbers of staff to work in the legation, diplomats began to explore the country more deeply, compiling reports on the areas outside of the major cities and the politico-religious groups prominent there.⁵⁴ These reports were gladly received. In early 1951, a State Department cable revealed that Washington's greater preoccupation with events in Indochina 'increases [the] importance [of the] LEGs [legation's] reporting, [which is] already receiving wide distribution and attention'.⁵⁵

The commitment of U.S. aid in Indochina also altered the nature of the work of the Saigon diplomatic post. While the usual tasks of reporting on events on the ground and representing the United States at official occasions and meetings remained important, other tasks now emerged. Officials in STEM worked directly with the Vietnamese on technical, medical and civil works programmes, MAAG supervised the supply of military equipment to the French Expeditionary Corps (FEC), USIS embarked on an aggressive propaganda programme, CIA officials undertook covert operations, and diplomats in the legation liaised with the French and Vietnamese leadership on the war, decolonisation and the aid programme. This change was not lost on diplomatic personnel serving in Saigon. As Gullion reported,

I should like to point out what is becoming increasingly apparent here – our role in Vietnam goes beyond a reporting and representation one. We have action responsibilities not only with regard to weaning the new infants and deciding on the basis of an aid program but we must urge both parties to develop the independence of Vietnam at a rate consistent with an orderly transfer of command in the face of the enemy.⁵⁶

No longer was the U.S. diplomatic post in Vietnam merely an interested bystander in Indochinese affairs, it was now an active participant in the struggle.

French and Vietnamese officials understood how increased U.S. involvement had altered the nature of the United States' and the legation's modus operandi in Vietnam. Anti-communist Vietnamese nationalists, many of whom were critical of the constraints that remained on Vietnamese independence and doubted the sincerity of French promises that they would eventually provide full independence to Bao Dai's government, believed that American aid gave the United States a crucial bargaining chip with the French that they could use to press for greater Vietnamese autonomy. As Bui Diem, a prominent Vietnamese nationalist at the time, recalled:

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ For example, see Foreign Service Despatch 184 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Catholic Military Action and Organization in South Vietnam and Conditions in Villages under this Movement's Control', 13 May 1950, 751g.00/5-1350, Box 3667, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁵⁵ Telegram Unnumbered from Secretary of State to Saigon, 9 February 1951, 751g.00/2-951, Box 3669, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁵⁶ Gullion to Hoey, 4 March 1950, lot 54 D190, Indo-China 1949-51, Box 7, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

We were sure that the Americans, at least, would force the French to move steadily toward granting real autonomy. The United States had even opened an embassy in Saigon and appointed an ambassador. They certainly had no love for the French colonial system, and since they were the chief financial support for France's military efforts, they would have substantial leverage in this situation.⁵⁷

During the remainder of the Franco-Viet Minh War, Vietnamese nationalists would frequently visit the Saigon post in the hope of securing American support in their struggle against the French and the Viet Minh. According to Leon Pignon, the French high commissioner in Indochina between 1948 and 1950, the Vietnamese gave greater attention to the American legation than the French High Commission in Saigon.⁵⁸

On the other side, French officials viewed the expansion of the American presence in Vietnam with mixed emotions. Thankful for the American aid programmes that these officials had arrived to administer, the French were deeply suspicious about the enlargement of the U.S. diplomatic mission and feared that newly arrived U.S. representatives had dark designs on French interests in Indochina. As Gullion put it, 'The fact simply is that the French seem to think we want to spit in their soup'.⁵⁹ Pignon reported to Paris that U.S. officials were not shy at encouraging the Vietnamese to demand greater independence, while other French representatives expressed amazement at the size of the U.S. mission.⁶⁰ In June 1951, the acting diplomatic counsellor in the high commission told a legation secretary that one view gaining traction in French circles was that that the United States was 'looking forward to [the] day of ouster of Fr[ance] from I[ndo-]C[hina] and of seizing [the] opportunity for making I[ndo-]C[hina a] zone [of] US influence'.⁶¹ Expanding American informational activities, led by USIS, fed fears of an American cultural takeover. USIS Saigon headquarters quickly became 'the largest single publishing and distributing center for printed materials in all Indo-China', USIS English language courses were popular with the Vietnamese and the United States began circulating textbooks on American history.⁶² The French also believed that the Americans were using their diplomatic agencies as cover for the activities of the CIA. As a result, many U.S. officials found themselves

⁵⁷ Bui Diem with David Chanoff, *In the Jaws of History* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 66.

⁵⁸ Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 32.

⁵⁹ Gullion to Wallner, 17 May 1950, lot 54 D190, Indo-China, 1948-1951, Box 7, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

⁶⁰ Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 32; Telegram 2218 from Heath to Secretary of State, 14 June 1951, *FRUS, 1951. Asia and the Pacific*, Volume VI, Part 1 (hereafter Vol. VI, Part 1), (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1951), p. 427. In 1951, one French general claimed that there were over 700 American officials in Vietnam. See Telegram 597 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 22 April 1951, 751g.00/4-2251, Box 3670, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁶¹ Telegram 2218 from Heath to Secretary of State, 14 June 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 427.

⁶² Tillman Durdin, 'U.S. Center Meets Indo-Chinese Need: Information Service is Largest Publisher of Books, Bulletins, Pamphlets in 3 States', *NYT*, 12 March 1951, p. 5.

under the close observation of the Sûreté.⁶³ French suspicions were often quite close to the mark. Trevor Wilson, the British consul in Hanoi, who himself was likely working for the British Secret Service alongside his job as consul and had worked with numerous Americans operating in Vietnam during his career in espionage, certainly believed so.⁶⁴ He reported to the British Foreign Office that Wendell Blancke, the U.S. consul in Hanoi, 'is an ex-OSS man I think, and it would not be surprising if he is still engaged on some kind of special assignment'.⁶⁵ These concerns, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, created a tense Franco-American relationship requiring careful mediation by leading figures in the Saigon post.

However, the increased American commitment also presented an opportunity for French officials to gain U.S. assistance in shaping the direction and pace of decolonisation. Playing upon U.S. Cold War concerns in Indochina, the French pressed American diplomats to intervene with Vietnamese nationalists agitating for the French to cede greater control of the country on their behalf. French officials had two main trump card with the Americans. The first was the FEC. With the U.S. reluctant to commit further troops to the Asian mainland after the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, the FEC was the only force capable of keeping the Viet Minh at bay. French officials frequently asked their American counterparts in Vietnam why French troops should continue to fight the Viet Minh if only to give Vietnam to the Vietnamese? The second lever that the French enjoyed over their American ally was the U.S. desire for French support in rearming Germany; West German troops would help to supplement Western Europe's defences against a Soviet invasion. French officials, however, were highly sensitive to the idea and dragged their feet on plans to rearm their former invaders. If the United States was to gain French support for the move, it needed to keep French officials on side.⁶⁶

Both the French and Indochinese, therefore, looked to American diplomats in Saigon as a means to advance their interests and thus how these diplomats undertook their roles would have an important effect on the direction decolonisation took in Vietnam. In truth, however, American diplomats in the legation were instructed to find a way to encourage both the development of an independent anti-communist Vietnamese government and preserve the French military commitment, a policy which David Bruce, the U.S. ambassador to France, described as

⁶³ For evidence of French intelligence operatives reporting on the activities of the U.S. mission, see Telegram 648 from Saigon to Department of State, 8 May 1951, 400.1 – Intelligence Activities (2), Box 15, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, Record Group 84: Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State (hereafter RG 84), USNA; and Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 9.

⁶⁴ On Wilson still operating for the British Secret Service in Hanoi, see Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume 2, 1939-1955* (New York: Viking, 1994), pp. 481-488; Kevin Ruane, 'Hidden History of Graham Greene's Vietnam War: Fact, Fiction and *The Quiet American*', *History: The Journal of the Historical Association*, 97 (July 2012), 431-452 (pp. 447-449).

⁶⁵ Wilson to Gibbs, 26 May 1950, FO 959/54, The British National Archives (hereafter TNA).

⁶⁶ Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 36.

‘inherently antagonistic’ and in which ‘gains of one will be to some extent at [the] expense of other’.⁶⁷ Bruce was right. The maintenance of a considerable degree of French control limited the ability of the Vietnamese Government to increase its support base and weaken the political appeal of the Viet Minh. Likewise, American attempts to press the French to cede greater independence to the Vietnamese government might cause their European ally to abandon the fight and would do little to make them more amenable to U.S. plans in Europe.

Gullion likened the legation’s task of supporting both French colonialism and Vietnamese nationalism to that of the dilemma faced by Odysseus in Homer’s epic poem *The Odyssey*.⁶⁸ Desperate to get back to his family after the Trojan War, Odysseus attempted to navigate his ship between the six headed rock monster Scylla and the whirlpool like Charybdis through a narrow stretch of waterway thought to be the Strait of Messina. As he journeyed across trying to avoid the clutches of one monster he ultimately fell into the arms of the other. Six of his men were taken by Scylla when his ship passed too close and he was later left shipwrecked after getting caught in the swirling waters of Charybdis.⁶⁹ Just like Odysseus’s journey, Gullion concluded, ‘It is unlikely that US policies will always set a course exactly in mid-channel’.⁷⁰ Americans in the Saigon post would help to determine which way U.S. policy would lean.

Previously an unimportant post in an area on the periphery of U.S. interests, the Saigon diplomatic post’s importance increased rapidly following the conclusion of World War II. Japanese occupation of the country and the massive American commitment to the war in the Pacific drew America into discussions surrounding the post-war future of the French colony. As the Cold War came to dominate official thinking and France took steps to appease American anti-colonial principles, U.S. officials recognised the alternative Western-orientated Vietnamese Government and pledged economic and military assistance to the French effort. With the pledge of American assistance, the previously small and relatively insignificant diplomatic post in Saigon quickly expanded, taking on a more activist role in determining the direction of decolonisation and the fighting of the war against the Viet Minh.

⁶⁷ Telegram 2585 from Bruce to Secretary of State, 31 May 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 819.

⁶⁸ Telegram 407 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 3 June 1950, 751g.00/6-350, Box 3667, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁶⁹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. by Walter Shewring (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 143-153.

⁷⁰ Telegram 407 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 3 June 1950, 751g.00/6-350, Box 3667, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

Chapter 2 – The Ugly Americans in French Indochina, 1950-1954

From the comfort of his air-conditioned office, Ambassador Louis Sears looked out of his window in the U.S. Embassy in Haidho, Sarkhan to survey the hustle and bustle of the street beyond the embassy's gate. He might as well have been looking out at an alien planet; a career politician, Sears had little experience of Asia and had no idea where Sarkhan was prior to his arrival. He had taken the job on the promise of cheap liquor, a large entertainment allowance and a spacious mansion. Today, however, he was furious. He had just discovered another cartoon mocking him in the local press. At least, he thought it was. Like most Americans in the country, Sears could not speak Sarkhanese and was forced to rely on local translators whom he believed lied to him. Complaining to the Sarkhanese protocol officer, Sears threatened the withdrawal of U.S. aid if the press continued to make fun of him. At a meeting of the Sarkhanese cabinet, the protocol officer detailed his meeting with Sears. While the cabinet agreed to publish a flattering portrait of Sears in the paper's next issue to improve his mood, it was clear the ambassador's ignorance of their country and the way he addressed his Sarkhanese allies had done little to endear the United States to the indigenous government.¹ 'The Americans, for reasons which are not clear to me, have chosen to send us stupid men as ambassadors', the protocol officer noted.²

The story of Ambassador Sears' reaction to the Sarkhanese cartoon is one of many episodes detailed in Eugene Burdick and William Lederer's influential semi-fiction novel *The Ugly American*. Published in 1958 to great acclaim, *The Ugly American* told the story of a range of U.S. government officials and private citizens, some effective and some less so, as they sought to prevent communist encroachment in and around the fictional Southeast Asian country of Sarkhan. Although the authors' original intention was to write a non-fiction exposé of the ineptitude they observed among the U.S. diplomatic establishment in Southeast Asia in the 1950s, the book was instead published in fiction form because their publishers felt that readers would better connect to the material this way. All copies of the non-fiction version were reportedly destroyed.³ Nevertheless, it was clear that the book bore the influence of their real life experiences; Lederer and Burdick said as much in their introduction and epilogue.⁴ Disappointed by what they had observed of U.S. representatives abroad, they argued that the United States was losing the Cold War in areas like Southeast Asia because its diplomats lacked the necessary area

¹ William J. Lederer and Eugene C. Burdick, *The Ugly American* (London: Transworld Publishers, 1958), pp. 7-29.

² Ibid., p. 27.

³ James T. Fisher, *Dr. America: The Lives of Thomas A. Dooley* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), p. 176.

⁴ Lederer and Burdick, p. 6; pp. 273-287.

training, could not speak the local languages and offended the indigenous people with their racist and ignorant attitudes. U.S. officials were, they noted, not stupid; rather, they simply lacked the background, knowledge and training required to operate effectively.

Although *The Ugly American* was a novel of its time – indeed, the authors display many of the same ethnocentric perceptions of Asians as their characters – its assertions about the unpreparedness of American officials for the task at hand in Southeast Asia did hold a lot of truth.⁵ This was particularly the case in Indochina, the probable central focus of *The Ugly American*.⁶ Diplomats and aid officials lacked knowledge of Indochinese languages, knew little about the history and culture of the area they were working in, and displayed ethnocentric and racist attitudes towards the local population that they sparingly interacted with. This chapter explores why American diplomats sent to Indochina in the final four years of French colonial rule, 1950-54, were so poorly prepared for their post and examines how these deficiencies shaped and influenced their work in Vietnam.

The first part of the chapter assesses the level of Indochina and Southeast Asian expertise in the U.S. Foreign Service, and the U.S. government more broadly, in the early 1950s. In an attempt to explain the lack of available expertise for this area, observers have tended to stress the region's domination by the European colonial powers and relative unimportance to the United States before World War II (minus the Philippines), and the domestic attack on the Foreign Service's China experts (sometimes referred to as China hands) that rid the State Department of a number of talented diplomats with greater familiarity with Asia.⁷ While this chapter concurs that these factors were important, it shows that the unattractiveness of diplomatic service in Southeast Asia in this period was also crucial. Aware of the lack of qualified personnel for serving in Southeast Asia and worried about the impact it might have on U.S. foreign policy, Washington moved to begin creating a small corps of Southeast Asian experts in the late 1940s. However, such a scheme was undone by the tendency of American diplomats to view the region as dangerous and uncomfortable.

The second part of the chapter assesses the impact that these American deficiencies, and several factors outside of the U.S. government's control, had on the operation of the U.S. diplomatic mission in Indochina. In doing so, it builds on excellent studies by Mark Bradley, Seth Jacobs and others, that have served to demonstrate the miscalculations made by American diplomats as a result of their lack of familiarity with Indochina. These scholars have been particularly effective in identifying how the ethnocentric perceptions that American diplomats

⁵ Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling*, p. 94.

⁶ Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man*, p. 111.

⁷ See, for example, John F. Melby, 'Vietnam – 1950', *Diplomatic History*, 6 (January 1982), 97-110 (p. 97); Halberstam, pp. 110-112; Shaplen, *Lost Revolution*, p. 387; Christian G. Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and National Identity* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), p. 70.

brought with them about Indochinese people and East Asian religions distorted their view of the situation, influencing the U.S. tendency to see the Viet Minh as a tool of the Soviet Union in the late 1940s and the American embrace of Ngo Dinh Diem as prime minister in 1954.⁸ In his more recent book on U.S.-Lao relations in the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, Jacobs has also highlighted the inhibiting effect that the social habits of American officials in Laos had on the ability of the U.S. diplomatic mission to build relationships with the Laotian people and accurately interpret developments.⁹

This chapter makes a number of important additions to the work of Jacobs and Bradley. It reveals that American social habits in Vietnam helped prevent U.S. diplomats from challenging the stereotypes of the Vietnamese that shaped U.S. policy. It reveals, too, that the way American officials behaved and the ideas that they brought with them gave the embassy's activities a neo-colonial tinge. The chapter's most significant contribution, however, is in providing the first in-depth examination of the impact that the lack of Indochinese linguists had on American diplomatic practice in Indochina during the early 1950s. The linguistic deficiencies of the U.S. Foreign Service limited the ability of American diplomats to learn more about the domestic political situation, allowed inaccurate stereotypes about the Vietnamese to persist, frayed Franco-American relations, and disrupted U.S. propaganda efforts. American deficiencies also forced the U.S. diplomatic mission to rely primarily on the French for information and to view events through a French colonial prism.

'A New World' and the Failure to Sell Southeast Asian Specialisation

As USIS official Howard Simpson recalled in his memoirs, 'Indochina was a new world to the majority of American officials assigned to Saigon' in the 1950s.¹⁰ The U.S. Foreign Service had few experts on Indochina, with the United States having demonstrated little interest in Southeast Asia prior to the end of World War II. Indeed, the few OSS officials stationed in Vietnam during the latter stages of the war in the Pacific, like Archimedes Patti, and a handful of diplomats that had served in the small consulates in Saigon and Hanoi were the only Americans with any experience working in Indochina by 1950.¹¹ Few of these diplomats returned to or

⁸ Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam*; Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man*.

⁹ Jacobs, *Universe Unraveling*, pp. 82-128.

¹⁰ Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 74.

¹¹ One unknown diplomat claimed to have over twenty years of experience in Vietnam. In a letter to an official in the State Department in 1952, he said: 'In April I shall be working for the Embassy for over 20 years. Since my return from Japan, I have always been sick or tired – liver, lack of calcium, amibes etc [...] so I believe that 24 years in this country is really enough'. Unknown to John Getz, 28 August 1952, lot 58 D266, Correspondence 1952-54, Box 2, 1950-56, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs: Office of Southeast Asian

continued their work in Indochina. A report from the Saigon legation confirmed ‘an almost complete turn over in staff’ in the months following the American commitment to aid France’s war in Indochina in 1950.¹² The list of knowledgeable envoys the U.S. government could call on was limited further by investigations into the loyalty of many of the State Department’s most renowned China hands. Many of the country’s leading Asian experts lost their jobs or were never allowed to serve in the Far East again following their supposed contribution to Chiang Kai-shek’s defeat in the Chinese Civil War.¹³ Raymond Ludden, a Foreign Service Officer with over fifteen years of experience in China, was one of those ostracised. After Ludden, then in Brussels, expressed interest in a position available in Manila in 1951, State Department official John F. Melby told him:

I am sorry to tell you that Julian Harrington has been there since last spring. I did, as a matter of fact, try to get you for it but got the same answer as usual that it was contrary to general policy to send you old China characters back to the Far East for another year or two so you might just as well enjoy your Belgian foxhole while you can.¹⁴

The vast majority of Americans who arrived in Indochina in the early 1950s, therefore, knew little about the French colony that they had been posted to. As Jim Crane recalls after his appointment to the USIS office in Saigon in 1951, ‘I had this image of living in a house on stilts with the “natives” surrounding me. It would probably be a health hazard, I wouldn’t be able to get the right kind of food, and there’d be complete confusion. I hardly knew where Vietnam was’.¹⁵ Crane and his colleagues faced a complex situation. Franco-Vietnamese forces fought against the Viet Minh, anti-communist nationalist groups struggled for independence from French colonial rule, and influential politico-religious groups competed for regional and national influence. As one U.S. diplomat commented:

The difficulties inherent in the major quadripartite conflict of local interests are even further complicated by the rivalries among: Chinese Communists and Chinese Nationalists; metropolitan French of all stripes; among Laotian, Cambodian and Viet

Affairs; Subject Files, RG 59, USNA. For more on OSS activities in Indochina during World War II, see Bartholomew-Feis.

¹² Gullion to Admiral Berkey, 25 February 1950, 440 Visits, Missions, Box 20, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

¹³ Writers are divided on how the absence of China experts later influenced the ability of the United States to make effective decisions when dealing with Vietnam. Perhaps the strongest advocate of the position that the loss of these China experts hurt the United State effort in Vietnam is the journalist David Halberstam. See Halberstam, pp. 110-112. For a study that strongly contests this argument, see Michael Lind, *Vietnam, The Necessary War: A Reinterpretation of America’s Most Disastrous Military Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1999), pp. 143-146.

¹⁴ Melby to Ludden, 5 September 1951, Personal Correspondence File – 1951-52, Box 6, John F. Melby Papers, HSTL.

¹⁵ Oral History Interview with Jim Crane, in Maurer, p. 58.

interests; among the regions of Vietnam; and among the more or less obscure but significant nativist elements such as the Hoa Hao, Cao Tai [Dai], Binh Zuyen [Xuyen].¹⁶

At the time of France's final defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the three most powerful politico-religious groups in Vietnam (the Hoa Hao, Cao Dai and Binh Xuyen) controlled roughly a third of the territory in southern Vietnam. They could all call on military forces and had strong political ambitions.¹⁷ Great differences between the north and south of the country existed too. As Nguyen Cao Ky, South Vietnamese prime minister from 1965-67, wrote, 'the North [...] is as different from the South as New Orleans is different from Detroit, as Naples is from Milan'.¹⁸ Many of these details were lost on or unbeknownst to American officials arriving in Vietnam.

Hugely diverse, Vietnam was home to a variety of ethnic groups. As one American diplomat of the period recalled, 'You have the Chinese population there, you have the Montagnards, you have the Cao Dai, you have the sects, you have different ethnic streams that had flown into the population of Vietnam, you had ex-patriot Cambodians and Laotians [...] and you have this sense it is confusing'.¹⁹ Vietnamese culture also differed considerably from Western cultures that U.S. diplomats were more familiar with. As Loren Baritz said, 'The organic nature of Vietnamese society, the significance of village life, the meaning of ancestors, the relationship of the family to the state, the subordinate role of the individual, and the eternal quest for universal agreement, not consensus or majorities, were easily lost on the Americans'.²⁰

U.S. officials assigned to Saigon had very little to help them prepare for the complex world they were stepping into. Scholarly experts on Vietnam and courses on Vietnamese history in American universities were rare. As Justice William O. Douglas suggested in the early 1950s, 'Prior to World War I we had hardly any schools specializing in Asian history, Asian politics, [and] Asian literature. Even today we specialize in them at only a few centres'.²¹ However, there were signs of increasing U.S. academic interest in the region. Yale University had established a Southeast Asian studies centre during World War II to train military personnel heading to the region in language and area studies. By the late 1940s, American diplomats were starting to enrol in the University's programme, albeit in very small numbers.²² In September 1950, the centre appointed the noted French academic and former Indochina colonial official Paul Mus. While at Yale, Mus published his most influential book on Vietnam, entitled *Viêt-Nam: Sociologie d'un*

¹⁶ Gullion to Secretary of State, 3 June 1950, 751g.00/6-350, Box 3667, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁷ Chapman, p. 4.

¹⁸ Nguyen Cao Ky, *How We Lost the Vietnam War* (New York: Stein and Day, 1978), p. 13.

¹⁹ Author's Interview with William J. Cunningham, 4 October 2012.

²⁰ Loren Baritz, *Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us into Vietnam and Made Us Fight the Way We Did* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1985), p. 20.

²¹ William O. Douglas, *North of Malaya: Adventure on Five Fronts* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1953), p. 318.

²² Memorandum from Hopkins to Reed, 'Southeast Asia Specialization', 29 July 1949, lot 54 D190, Box 1, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

Guerre [Vietnam: Sociology of a War]. Despite Yale's success in attracting such a high-profile scholar, its programme remained in its infancy in the early 1950s and few other U.S. universities followed suit in offering Southeast Asia studies courses for diplomats to attend.²³

The information U.S. diplomats bound for Indochina received from their government was not much better; Washington's knowledge of Southeast Asia in this period was poor. When Kenneth Landon, a former missionary in Thailand, was called to go and make a report to Franklin Roosevelt during the war in the Pacific about Japanese involvement in Indochina, he was shown the U.S. government's files on Southeast Asia. 'But when they opened them', he recalled, 'there was only one folder. I looked in and there were four articles from Asia magazine – all written by me. I asked the major, "Suppose you wanted to know something. What would you do?" "Oh," he said, "we'd ask our allies"'.²⁴ The Foreign Service Institute (FSI), the organisation tasked with training American diplomats, had prepared few diplomats for service in Southeast Asia. In a July 1949 review of what had been done to produce 'language and area officers for Southeast Asia', the FSI outlined that only two Foreign Service Officers had been given specialist training for the region – Gilbert L. Newbold on Thailand and Francis J. Galbraith on Indonesia.²⁵ The State Department had no orientation course on French Indochina in the early 1950s.²⁶ Officials assigned to senior posts in the embassy had to make do with briefings from officers on the State Department's Indochina desk, many of whom had never visited the country, and with access to the flow of cable traffic between Washington and Saigon.²⁷ This provided them with, at best, a superficial understanding of Indochina.

For those lower down the diplomatic chain of command, the materials available were even more meagre. Howard Simpson's preparation for his posting to the USIS office in Saigon was representative of what most junior American officials received. It consisted of nothing more, he recalled, than 'a quick course at the Foreign Service Institute in Washington, and a hurried consultation in Paris'.²⁸ At the U.S. Embassy in Paris, a stopping off point for most U.S. officials en route to Indochina, Simpson was briefed by someone who 'had never been to Indochina'; the

²³ 'History of Southeast Asia Studies at Yale', <<http://cseas.yale.edu/history-southeast-asia-studies-yale>> [accessed 23 March, 2018]; David Chandler, 'Paul Mus (1902-1969): A Biographical Sketch', *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 4:1 (Winter 2009), 149-191 (p. 177).

²⁴ Oral History Interview with Kenneth Landon, in Maurer, p. 37.

²⁵ Memorandum from Hopkins to Reed, 'Southeast Asia Specialization', 29 July 1949, lot 54 D190, Box 1, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

²⁶ Author's Interview with William J. Cunningham, 10 October 2012.

²⁷ *Ibid.*; Hoey to Heath, 21 March 1951, lot 54 D190, Chrono SWO, Box 10, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA. There were some exceptions to this rule, however. See, for example, Getz to Wellborn, 25 November 1952, lot 58 D266, Correspondence 1952-54, Box 2, 1950-56; Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs: Office of Southeast Asian Affairs; Subject Files, RG 59, USNA.

²⁸ Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 2.

‘entire process took no more than 20 minutes’.²⁹ Reflecting later, he said, ‘None of this had prepared me for what I was to find in Indochina’.³⁰ In fact, when he reached Vietnam he found that much of what he had been told about the politico-military situation was inaccurate. At a meeting at the headquarters of USIS Saigon, Simpson told his new boss, based on what he had been told in his briefings, that he understood that the French military were doing well. Simpson recalled that his boss ‘frowned as if he’d been accosted by the village idiot. “That,” he said in his gravelly voice, “is pure bullshit!”’.³¹

The lack of available preparatory materials for U.S. officials sent to Indochina was symptomatic of the wider historical attitude towards training diplomats in the United States. As Hannah Gurman suggests, ‘In the longstanding tradition of diplomatic reporting, dating back to eighteenth-century Europe, American Foreign Service Officers were expected to learn less from formal training than from on-the-job experience and apprenticeship’.³² This attitude tallied with the lack of area specialisation and the tendency to periodically rotate officers to divergent parts of the world. As John Harr says, ‘Expertise in a particular area was not unknown before the [Second World] war, but it was the exception’.³³ Indeed, Robert Bowie, director of policy planning in the State Department during Eisenhower’s first term, recalled that ‘a person who dedicated himself to becoming a real expert in an area ran the risk of hurting his career’ in this period.³⁴

U.S. officials in the early 1950s were aware of the lack of qualified observers they had for service in Indochina and worried about how these deficiencies might inhibit American diplomacy in Southeast Asia. As a 1951 National Security Council Staff study detailed, ‘The formulation and execution of programs designed to support [the] objectives of the United States in Asia are handicapped by the lack of qualified and experienced personnel available to live and work in Asian countries’.³⁵ The Psychological Strategy Board (PSB), a short-lived committee set up by the Truman administration to coordinate and plan psychological operations, identified the lack of American appreciation of Southeast Asian cultural and spiritual traditions as one of the

²⁹ Howard R. Simpson, *Bush Hat, Black Tie: Adventures of a Foreign Service Officer* (Washington, D.C.; London: Brassey’s, 1998), p. 5.

³⁰ Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³² Hannah Gurman, “‘Learn to Write Well’: The China Hands and the Communist-ification of Diplomatic Reporting”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45 (April 2010), 430-453 (p. 433).

³³ John Ensor Harr, *The Professional Diplomat* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 163.

³⁴ Oral History Interview with Robert R. Bowie, 15 March 1988, Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, Frontline Diplomacy, <<https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004bow03/2004bow03.pdf>> [accessed 14 September 2017].

³⁵ Report to the National Security Council by Lay, NSC 48/5, ‘United States Objectives, Policies and Courses of Action in Asia’, 17 May 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 45.

several unfavourable circumstances facing the United States in that region.³⁶ To William Leonhart, who served in the Saigon legation from 1950 to 1952, the failure to ‘foresee and provide for a corps of experts in the less pleasant corners of the world which have suddenly become vital to us’ was ‘one of the few valid indictments of the Service’.³⁷ Referring to Indochinese language officers, he said, ‘If we had trained only two men a year since 1940 when the entry of Japanese troops into I[ndo-]C[hina] arguably made U.S. participation in the Pacific War inevitable’, he lamented, ‘we would now have twenty-two such officers; if since 1947 when the Communist capture of China became reasonably feasible, we would now have eight’.³⁸

In response to these concerns, State Department officials and members of the FSI sought to encourage the development of Southeast Asian diplomatic specialists in the U.S. Foreign Service in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The State Department’s Far Eastern Bureau understood that ‘in order to establish effective relations with the peoples and trends of the area it is necessary not only to know their language but to understand their background, culture and history’.³⁹ It proved a tough sell, however. They noticed an apparent ‘tendency on the part of officers to avoid specialization in SEA because of a fear that such specialization will eventuate in their spending all of their careers in the generally undesirable posts of that region’.⁴⁰ The region was disease ridden, dangerous and had a harsh and unforgiving climate. Officials returning from Southeast Asia without contracting a debilitating illness tended to be the exception and not the rule.⁴¹ As Robert Hoey in the PSA office told Ambassador Donald Heath after PSA director Philip Bonsal’s return from a trip around Southeast Asia, ‘Phil is the first visitor I’ve seen return from Southeast Asia with no complaints of dysentery. You obviously took excellent care of him’.⁴² Reports from Indochina documented dust storms, killer snakes, ambushes, assassinations, violent murders, and

³⁶ ‘Psychological Operations Plan for Southeast Asia’, in Memorandum from Berger to Antrum, ‘Southeast Asia’, 13 May 1952, 091.4 Southeast Asia – File #1 [2 of 2], Box 12, Staff Member and Office Files: Psychological Strategy Board Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, HSTL.

³⁷ Memorandum from Leonhart to Lacy, ‘Response to Request for Additional Measures which might affect the Indochinese Situation Favorably and U.S. Action in the Premises’, 1 April 1952, lot 58 D266, Background 1950-52, Box 1, 1950-56; Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs: Office of Southeast Asian Affairs; Subject Files, RG 59, USNA.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Summary of Meeting on Southeast Asian Training Program, 7 March 1950, lot 54 D190, SEA U.S. Missions 1949-1950, Box 1, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

⁴⁰ Memorandum by O’Sullivan, ‘Developments of specialists in Southeast Asia’, 20 July 1949, lot 54 D190, SEA U.S. Missions 1949-1950, Box 1, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

⁴¹ Keith Honaker, a MAAG official who arrived in 1952, recalled his apprehensions about working in Vietnam. ‘Although we enjoyed our stay in Vietnam, we always felt that our lives were at stake. It was impossible for us to have complete safety anywhere in Saigon, for the Communists were everywhere present on the street, in the rice paddies, in the markets, and in our offices and even in our homes’. Keith Honaker, *The Eagle Weeps* (Knoxville, TN: K and W Publishers, 1994), p. v.

⁴² Hoey to Heath, 1 December 1952, lot 58 D266, Vietnam – 1952, Box 5, 1950-56; Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs: Office of Southeast Asian Affairs; Subject Files, RG 59, USNA.

a lack of basic amenities and comforts.⁴³ Yale Richmond recalled of his experience in Laos that electricity ‘was available only in the center of town and not where we lived’ and that water arrived by truck and was ‘pumped by hand to 55-gallon drums on the roof, which gave us a gravity feed for a shower and toilet’.⁴⁴ ‘When there was no truck, which was quite often, there was no shower and no flush’, he remembered.⁴⁵

Given the reluctance of Foreign Service Officers to volunteer for such specialisation, officials in the PSA Office concluded that something needed to be done to ‘make careers in Southeast Asia more attractive’.⁴⁶ One idea was to limit the term of service to eighteen months, ‘at the end of which time each person shall be entitled to home leave and, if he so elects, reassignment to a less unhealthful post’.⁴⁷ Other voices suggested that ‘the establishment of an SEA area and language institute (possibly at Honolulu), longer periods of statutory or local leave, rest or vacation facilities within the area, extra differential pay’, might be considered as incentives.⁴⁸ Few of these recommendations were translated into action, with the result that only a very small number of American diplomats arrived in Saigon versed in the language, politics and culture of Vietnam during the early 1950s. The training of Southeast Asian experts was far down the priority list given the more immediate threat of the Soviet Union in Europe. Prospective candidates were also put off specialising in Southeast Asia by the more attractive propositions of other regional training programmes. As Teresa Fava Thomas notes, the Middle East training programme was particularly attractive because of the considerable number of embassies in the region, the excellent chances of promotion, and the utility of Arabic.⁴⁹ The establishment of the FSI in 1947, which placed greater emphasis on producing regional specialists and establishing more extensive area training programmes, had little impact on the expertise the United States

⁴³ Guest to Heath, ‘Viet Minh Developments, Political Situation, and Living Conditions in Laos’, undated, in Foreign Service Despatch 619 from Saigon to Department of State, ‘Transmitting Memorandum on Viet Minh Developments, Political Situation, and Living Conditions in Laos’, 12 April 1951, 751g.00/4-1251, Box 3670, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 802 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 9 October 1951, 751g.00/10-951, Box 3671, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 842 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 20 October 1952, 751g.00/10-2054, Box 3673, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁴⁴ Yale Richmond, ‘Nation Building in Laos’, *Foreign Service Life*, December 2011, <http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2012/0106/life/richmond_laos.html> [accessed 23 March 2018].

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Memorandum from Hopkins to Reed, ‘Southeast Asia Specialization’, 29 July 1949, lot 54 D190, Box 1, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

⁴⁷ Memorandum from Lacy to Reed, ‘Observations on personnel and establishment of posts in SEA’, 10 May 1949, lot 54 D190, Box 1, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

⁴⁸ Memorandum from Leonhart to Lacy, ‘Response to Request for Additional Measures which might affect the Indochinese Situation Favorably and U.S. Action in the Premises’, 1 April 1952, lot 58 D266, Background 1950-52, Box 1, 1950-56; Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs: Office of Southeast Asian Affairs; Subject Files, RG 59, USNA.

⁴⁹ Teresa Fava Thomas, *American Arabists in the Cold War Middle East, 1946-75: From Orientalism to Professionalism* (London; New York: Anthem Press, 2016), p. 35.

could call on in the Franco-Viet Minh War period. The U.S. government did not give the need to develop expertise in the region serious attention until after the French defeat in 1954. Fear of a ‘languages gap’, which *The Ugly American* helped to raise awareness of, grew in the late 1950s. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 provided increased funds for language and area study programmes.⁵⁰

Informal Preparation and Ideological Baggage

With few specialist diplomats available for assignment to Indochina and with little official preparation available in the State Department, U.S. officials interested in learning about their new post often turned to books and newspapers for information.⁵¹ Press interest in Vietnam had increased after the American decision to provide economic and military aid for the struggle in 1950.⁵² After Simpson embarrassingly demonstrated his lack of knowledge about Vietnam in his first meeting with his boss, his superiors advised that he go and speak to journalists like Tillman Durdin, Robert Shaplen, Lucien Bodard and Dennis Warner. Many of these men had extensive experience and contacts in the Far East and, as Simpson suggests, ‘all of them had a good idea what was happening beyond the confines of Saigon’.⁵³ ‘I began my real education on Indochina sitting with journalists in the bar of the Continental at the apero hour’, Simpson reflected.⁵⁴

Reading books about Indochinese history and culture was another means by which some U.S. officials sought to educate themselves. However, in light of the lack of academic attention given to Indochina in the United States, few English language books existed and those that did were almost twenty years out of date – as one historian put it, ‘a virtual millennium given the revolutionary upheavals that had taken place in Southeast Asia since World War II’.⁵⁵ Indeed, a young Bernard Fall, who would later emerge as one of the foremost scholarly experts on Vietnam, was left frustrated ‘by a dearth of solid material’ in the United States when he embarked on his doctoral research on Indochina at the John Hopkins School of International Studies in the early 1950s.⁵⁶ Stocks in Indochina were no better. Although he did manage to track down a book on Indochinese religions, Heath described the materials he had to hand in Saigon in

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 47-50.

⁵¹ Author’s Interview with William J. Cunningham, 4 October 2012.

⁵² Alex Ferguson, ‘Press Management and U.S. Support for France in Indochina, 1950-1954’, *Diplomatic History*, 42 (April 2018), 228-253 (p. 230).

⁵³ Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 6.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Jacobs, *America’s Miracle Man in Vietnam*, p. 45.

⁵⁶ Dorothy Fall, *Bernard Fall: Memories of a Soldier-Scholar* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2006), p. 57.

1950 as ‘antiquated and entirely inadequate to support the increased political reporting responsibilities of this post’.⁵⁷ Heath continued, ‘There are no basic modern works on international law, no general historical material, no complete treaty series, no up to date reference information either on Indochina or on other parts of Southeast Asia or the Far East’.⁵⁸ Frustrated by the shortage of material on Indochina, Heath turned to Shakespeare to try to make sense of the Vietnamese chief of state Bao Dai, whom he compared to Prince Hamlet.⁵⁹ It was not until the Americans seemed ready to usurp France in Vietnam as the dominant Western power in mid-1954 that American academics began to give Indochina more serious attention.⁶⁰

When diplomats did track down copies of the limited English language studies of Indochina that were available during the period, they were exposed to crude and racist portrayals of the Vietnamese people. Thomas Ennis’s *French Policy and Developments in Indochina* (1936) and Virginia Thompson’s *French Indo-China* (1937) reeked of ethnocentrism and they portrayed the Vietnamese people as primitive, lazy and open to foreign manipulation.⁶¹ Commenting on Vietnamese psychology, for example, Thompson wrote, ‘They lack the driving power given by strong desires and needs’.⁶² The ways in which the authors represented the Vietnamese are far from surprising, given their inability to speak the indigenous language and their reliance on French sources.⁶³ For those able to speak French, much of the academic work available in France presented the Vietnamese in a similar light.⁶⁴ Through these studies, therefore, Americans received a French-tinged colonial reading of Indochinese history and culture.

However, the views put forward by these authors would not have shocked readers like they do today. Much of what Thompson and Ennis wrote about Vietnam and the Vietnamese people tallied closely with that written on Indochina by American journalists, travel writers and American diplomats in the years up to 1950.⁶⁵ Their representations of the Vietnamese people

⁵⁷ Heath Diary Entry, 15 August 1950, lot 54 D190, Religion, Box 8, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA; Foreign Service Despatch 91 from Saigon to Department of State, ‘Enclosing List of Reference Materials Available at Amlegation, Saigon, and Discussions of Related Matters’, 22 August 1950, 400.1 Intelligence Activities, Box 15, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

⁵⁸ Foreign Service Despatch 91 from Saigon to Department of State, ‘Enclosing List of Reference Materials Available at Amlegation, Saigon, and Discussions of Related Matters’, 22 August 1950, 400.1 Intelligence Activities, Box 15, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

⁵⁹ For Heath reading Hamlet to better understand Bao Dai, see C. L. Sulzberger, *A Long Row of Candles: Memoirs and Diaries, 1939-1954* (London: Macdonald & Co, 1969), p. 611.

⁶⁰ Ellen Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina in 1954* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1954).

⁶¹ Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam*, p. 46. Bradley reveals that Ennis’s study was used directly as a means to prepare U.S. officials for Indochina service in the 1940s. See Bradley, p. 207.

⁶² Virginia Thompson, *French Indo-China* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1937), p. 43.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 11; Bradley, p. 47.

⁶⁴ Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam*, p. 55.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

also reflected general American attitudes to Asians and Buddhism in the period. As Jacobs notes, for a large number of Americans, Buddhism, the majority faith in Vietnam, was linked to ‘certain assumed traits, including passivity, weakness, selfishness, depravity, impracticality, and cowardice’.⁶⁶ Popular film, theatre and television productions, including celebrated classics like *South Pacific* and *The King and I*, were studded with representations of the Far East and the Asian characters that appeared were – like the Vietnamese described in scholarly works of the time – naïve, childlike and in need of Western instruction.⁶⁷ Despite being well educated and travelled, the diplomats that arrived to staff the newly important post in Saigon were very much of their time. Largely unfamiliar with that part of the world and unable to grasp the complexities of the situation, they drew from these racist views of non-whites and other ideological currents that deeply penetrated broader American culture in the 1950s to make some sense of what they observed. As Jacobs notes, this ‘ideology gave American policymakers their keys to Vietnamese reality’.⁶⁸

The distorted views that American diplomats brought with them affected how the Saigon embassy approached its work in Vietnam. Ideas about the ineptitude of the Vietnamese character led American diplomats to the conclusion that the anti-communist Vietnamese could not construct an independent state on their own. As Heath told Washington in 1952, ‘Even if all [the] restraints were removed [on Vietnamese independence] [the] Viet[name]s[e] w[ou]ld not automatically produce results. Our leverage must be continuously applied’.⁶⁹ Even those officials who stressed the importance of greater provisions of independence for the Vietnamese believed that true independence could only come with Western supervision and tutorship. American diplomats lectured the Vietnamese about what they should be doing and scolded them like a parent would their child when they took actions that damaged U.S. interests.⁷⁰ The result was that the embassy’s activities took on a neo-colonial character similar to other diplomatic missions in the developing world. As Gullion noted, ‘An ambassador occasionally finds himself thrust into something like a proconsular role in a new country, looked to for advice on a range of things that rarely reach embassies in more established nations. He is also much more likely to be accused of interference in domestic affairs’.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Jacobs, *America’s Miracle Man*, p. 12.

⁶⁷ For a detailed assessments of the representation of Asia found in American film and television in the 1950s, see Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow, 1945-1961* (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 2003).

⁶⁸ Jacobs, *America’s Miracle Man*, pp. 8-9.

⁶⁹ Telegram 2224 from Heath to Department of State, 12 May 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954. Indochina*, Volume XIII, Part 1 (hereafter Vol. XIII, Part 1), (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952-1954), p. 140.

⁷⁰ Telegram 672 from Heath to Department of State, 17 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 830.

⁷¹ Max Frankel, ‘Greater Latitude for Envoys Abroad: Ambassador Gullion Urges “Independent Judgment”’, *NYT*, 23 March 1964, p. 13.

The tendency for American diplomats to want to dictate the direction of decolonisation in Vietnam was motivated by more than racist attitudes of the Vietnamese. It was also a reflection of broad American assumptions about the nature of its own society and role in the world. Ever since John Winthrop spoke of a City on a Hill, Americans have held a belief in the superiority of their form of government and way of life. American success in World War II generated even greater faith in American exceptionalism. As Christian Appy notes, ‘At perhaps no other point in U.S. history did a greater portion of Americans share the powerful conviction that their nation was the greatest in the world’.⁷² Convinced that the United States represented the pinnacle of the path to development and that it should act as an important example for others to follow, American officials believed in the exportability of the American model for the rest of the world. The lack of any serious attempt to educate its diplomats about the particularities of Vietnamese culture, politics and history was partly a reflection of this belief.⁷³ As Loren Baritz asserted, ‘Americans were ignorant about the Vietnamese not because we were stupid, but because we believed certain things about ourselves’.⁷⁴

The ideology of American exceptionalism manifested itself in postcolonial nations in the language of development. Development theories, such as modernisation theory, provided the justification for U.S. officials to press on foreign governments a particular path of development.⁷⁵ Viewing Asian and African nations as essentially similar in their primitive and backward nature, Americans saw these societies as malleable to their own ideas. U.S. policymakers felt they could speed up the process of development, in which Western, industrial nations like the United States were at the top and ‘backward’ nations like Vietnam were at the bottom, by pressing on them an American model that had proved, it appeared, successful in the American colonial project in the Philippines. By doing this these nations would be made stronger and could better resist communist expansion, so the logic went. Americans would find that these societies were not as malleable as they believed. American ideas often did not cross cultural boundaries successfully and the Vietnamese often resisted U.S. guidance in favour of their own ideas about development. American interference in Vietnamese internal matters also led many Vietnamese to view U.S. efforts, as Jessica Elkind asserts, ‘as a continuation of previous attempts by foreign powers to assert their influence in Vietnam’.⁷⁶ Development theories proved a poor guide for American actions in Vietnam, but guide American diplomats they did.⁷⁷

⁷² Appy, p. 6.

⁷³ Baritz, pp. 19-49.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷⁵ Elkind, p. 7.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁷⁷ Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill, NC; London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 10-18; Elkind, pp. 5-11.

This American belief in the superiority of its own model of development also impacted American relations with France in Vietnam. While U.S. officials understood the strategic value of the continuation of a French presence in Vietnam, American diplomats, reflecting an anticolonial heritage, had long been critical of French rule in Indochina. The harsh and repressive French management of the Indochinese reported by American diplomats on the scene compared poorly with what U.S. officials saw as the ‘successful’ American enterprise in the Philippines, where the United States had catered for the desires of the Filipinos for independence through progressive reforms.⁷⁸ Believing the French a decadent people whose repressive actions and failure to provide steps towards self-government had radicalised Vietnamese nationalist groups, U.S. officials were convinced that the situation in Indochina needed their insight. Although some U.S. officials were more understanding of the French position than others, virtually all believed in the necessity of increased American involvement and held little fondness for the perpetuation of French colonialism.⁷⁹

Ethnocentric perceptions of the Vietnamese, coupled with American ignorance of Vietnamese domestic politics and a tendency to view events through a Cold War lens, led to a faulty reading of internal developments in Vietnam by embassy officials. U.S. officials, as we shall see throughout the thesis, often struggled to find any rationality in the actions of anti-communist nationalists in Vietnam, particularly when these groups took moves that threatened the chief American goal in Indochina: the continuation of the French military effort. Unable to draw on any detailed understanding of Vietnamese internal politics, they relied on ethnocentric perceptions to make sense of the decision of Vietnamese nationalists to take actions contrary to U.S. Cold War policies. American diplomats thus tended to view nationalist decisions, particularly when they came into conflict with American geopolitical priorities, as symptomatic of the perceived emotional and naïve nature of the Vietnamese. As a result, U.S. representatives often missed or underestimated the domestic and nationalist impulses behind Vietnamese actions. This inhibited the creation of a close relationship between the Americans and Vietnamese nationalists, and generated inaccurate reporting from the embassy.⁸⁰ As the rest of this chapter highlights, a lack of language skills, travel restrictions and the nature of the American social scene helped to shore up the ethnocentric perceptions that embassy officials brought with them.

Tongue-Tied Foreign Service

⁷⁸ Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam*, p. 46. On the questionable success of U.S. ‘colonial’ policy in the Philippines, see Ben Walker, ‘Demanding Dictatorship? US-Philippine Relations, 1946-1972 (unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Manchester, 2016).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-63; Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 6.

⁸⁰ Author’s Interview with William J. Cunningham, 21 August 2012; Chapman, pp. 5-11; pp. 41-60.

The vast majority of American diplomats that worked in Vietnam in this period could not speak Vietnamese. William Dunn, a vice consul and second secretary in the Saigon post from 1951 to 1953, and John Donnell, a vice consul in the Hanoi consulate from 1950 to 1952, were the only American diplomats able to speak Vietnamese fluently in the early 1950s. Dunn had developed a keen interest in Southeast Asia in the 1940s, volunteering for specialist training in the region's language, history and culture with the FSI, and devoted over twelve hours per week to learning Vietnamese at one point during his tenure in Saigon. Donnell, according to his wife, had learned Vietnamese in the 1940s in the Army Specialized Training Program.⁸¹ There was little impetus to teach a corps of American diplomats a language which had no utility outside of Vietnam. Furthermore, France had done a good job of providing Indochinese elites with a French education and most of Vietnam's major players spoke French, the essential qualification the State Department insisted on for service in Indochina.⁸² It meant, however, that American diplomats who arrived to staff the post in Saigon could not communicate with the mass of the Vietnamese population.

For those American diplomats keen to learn Vietnamese, it was not an easy task. The first challenge was the complexity of the language. As Virginia Thompson wrote, 'Not only is it the most difficult spoken language in the Far East, because of the rules of intonation, but it is pronounced differently in the three Annamite countries, varying even from province to province'.⁸³ Furthermore, few tools were available to aid Americans in this period.⁸⁴ When State Department official Albert Seligmann began trying to learn Vietnamese in the late 1940s, he could not find a Vietnamese-to-English dictionary. Instead, Seligmann was forced to use two dictionaries, converting Vietnamese into French, and then French into English.⁸⁵ Given the

⁸¹ Telegram WIROM USITO 144 from Department of State to Saigon, 15 November 1954, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, Supplemental Classified Records, 1950-1955, RG 84, USNA; Memorandum from Leonhart to Lacy, 'Response to Request for Additional Measures which might affect the Indochinese Situation Favorably and U.S. Action in the Premises', 1 April 1952, lot 58 D266, Background 1950-52, Box 1, 1950-56; Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs: Office of Southeast Asian Affairs; Subject Files, RG 59, USNA; Memorandum from Hopkins to Reed, 'Southeast Asia Specialization', 29 July 1949, lot 54 D190, Box 1, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA; Reiner to Tri, 8 May 1953, 1952 Records, Box 1, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, Supplemental Classified Records, 1950-1955, RG 84, USNA; Donnell's wife's recollections are contained in Danielle Flood, *The Unquiet Daughter* (Portsmouth, NH: Piscataqua Press, 2016), p. 341.

⁸² Author's Interview with John Gunther Dean, 16 January 2013.

⁸³ Thompson, p. 45. Annamite is an outdated term to describe the Vietnamese.

⁸⁴ Heath discovered what he believed to be the first known American-Vietnamese dictionary in 1951. Foreign Service Despatch 275 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Conversation with CaoDaist Sympathizer Pham Xuan Thai', 30 November 1951, 751g.00/11-3051, Box 3671, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁸⁵ Oral History Interview with Albert L. Seligmann, 27 January 2000, Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, *Frontline Diplomacy*, <<https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004sel01/2004sel01.pdf>> [accessed 26 March 2018].

scarcity of Americans who could speak Vietnamese, the lack of experts on the region and the few Vietnamese immigrants who had entered the United States, qualified Vietnamese language teachers in the United States were difficult to find.⁸⁶ The State Department did begin to broker deals with some American universities – Georgetown, Yale, Cornell and Columbia – to create a corps of Vietnamese speaking diplomats in 1953.⁸⁷ Few diplomats enrolled on the course, however, and those that did were not ready for service until after the final French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.⁸⁸

Some American diplomats, including Heath, tried to learn Vietnamese whilst in Vietnam.⁸⁹ Few ever became fluent. Diplomatic responsibilities kept many from investing the time necessary to master the language.⁹⁰ Senior staff in the smaller American posts in Hanoi, Phnom Penh and Vientiane were particularly short of time. Difficulty finding new recruits to go to Indochina and accommodation to house them meant staff in these posts were forced to take on administrative responsibilities that ate up time that could otherwise have been spent learning local languages and on political reporting and cultivating contacts.⁹¹ In April 1951, the Hanoi consulate reported that they were completely overburdened by the administrative work required of them. The reporting officer asserted:

[The] paucity of substantive reporting [over the] past week owes to [the] fact [that the] 2-man substantive staff ([my]self and Rosen) [are] snowed under [by] procedural demands [...]. [The] Con[sul] [has] had no (r[e]p[ea]t no) admin[istrative] Vice Consul since [Melvin] Sonne left [in] early Feb[ruary] and admin[istrative] work has been [at its] heaviest just at [the] time of [the] political-mil[itary] crisis.⁹²

⁸⁶ Hoey to Newton, 31 July 1950, lot 54 D190, Cultural and Informational – Indochina, Box 8, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

⁸⁷ Binh N. Ngo, 'The Vietnamese Language Learning Framework, Part One: Linguistics', <<http://www.seasite.niu.edu/jsealt/past%20issues/volume%2010/VN%20LLF%20Part%20I.pdf>> [accessed 23 March 2018], p. 1.

⁸⁸ Oral History Interview with Christian A. Chapman, 3 March 1990, Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, Frontline Diplomacy, <<https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004cha06/2004cha06.pdf>> [accessed 24 March 2018].

⁸⁹ Oral History Interview with John F. Melby, 14 November 1986, Interviewed by Robert Accinelli, Internet Copy, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, <<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/melby2.htm>> [accessed 19 May 2018]; Reiner to Tri, 8 May 1953, 1952 Records, Box 1, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, Supplemental Classified Records, 1950-1955, RG 84, USNA; Telegram 344 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 26 November 1951, 751g.00/112651, Box 3671, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁹⁰ Author's Interview with George Lambrakis, 20 November 2012; Andrew Graham, *Interval in Indo-China* (London: Macmillan and Co Ltd, 1956), p. 35; Author's Interview with Ian Day Adams, 7 July 2014.

⁹¹ Telegram TOECA A_3 from ECA Saigon to Secretary of State, 25 January 1951, 500 ECA Agreement, Box 20, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

⁹² Telegram 590 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 20 April 1951, 751g.00-4-2051, Box 3670, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

Similar problems existed in Phnom Penh in Cambodia. Heath reported in 1953 that chargé Joe Montllor was reportedly 'so burdened with housekeeping detail that he does not have a chance to get out of his office and to attend to questions of higher policy'.⁹³ Matters had improved little by late 1954, with a report to the State Department indicating that the Phnom Penh post's one code clerk made it impossible 'to maintain [a] 24 hour communication schedule'.⁹⁴

Nevertheless, a small number of American representatives managed to develop a reasonable command of Vietnamese during their time in Vietnam. James P. Hendrick purportedly picked up enough of the language during his short stay as special representative of the economic mission in Hanoi in 1953 that he was able to successfully present a speech to a Vietnamese audience in their native tongue. He recalled in a letter to Henry Cabot Lodge ten years after he left Vietnam, 'A rudimentary knowledge of the language was not hard to get – I made several short speeches in Vietnamese (one before a crowd of some 2,000 at the start of a deratinization program) and could tell by the audience's expression and laughter (at the right places) that they understood what was being said'.⁹⁵ Samuel Clifford Adams, Jr. was another U.S. official to develop a good grasp of the language in Vietnam. Taken under the wing of a Vietnamese man who worked with him as an employee of the U.S. economic mission, Adams spent all the time he could with the man and his family, learning the language and about the Vietnamese way of life. This, he felt, gave him some important advantages. He believed it broadened the range of people that he could interact with and enabled him to travel widely throughout the country without molestation, visiting places that Americans could not normally get to.⁹⁶ Few Americans in Indochina enjoyed such advantages.

The lack of Indochinese linguists in the U.S. mission blighted its ability to perform its duties in a number of ways. Translating important documents from Vietnamese to English was a struggle. In November 1950, the Hanoi consul Wendell Blancke revealed that he was unable to provide the State Department with a translation of a study of the situation in the Tonkin Delta by the leader of the influential Dai Viet nationalist group, Le Thang, because he lacked the resources to do so. He reported that 'the study was not considered worth translating into English [...] given the Consulate's reduced facilities in this respect'.⁹⁷ An inability to speak Vietnamese, therefore, inhibited the efforts of the U.S. diplomatic mission to scrutinise the nature and objectives of key

⁹³ Heath to Bonsal, 4 September 1953, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1953, Box 3, Records of the Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs (hereafter PSA Director), RG 59, USNA.

⁹⁴ Telegram 337 from Phnom Penh to Secretary of State, 7 December 1954, 751g.00/12-754, Box 3682, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁹⁵ Hendrick to Cabot Lodge, Jr., 9 August 1963, 'Special Papers', Box 6, James P. Hendrick Papers, HSTL.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Hanoi to Department of State, 20 November 1950, 751g.00/11-2050, Box 3669, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

anti-communist groups, increasing a reliance on French interpretation and the inaccurate stereotypes that American diplomats brought with them about the Vietnamese.

The U.S. mission's language deficiencies also damaged its ability to communicate effectively with the indigenous population. With so few Americans able to speak Vietnamese, the mission was forced to rely on locally employed interpreters to translate public statements and propaganda. Unable, attaché Herbert Reiner noted, 'to obtain what I believe are thorough security checks on them', U.S. officials expressed concern at the loyalty and, therefore, accuracy of the material produced by indigenous employees.⁹⁸ Simpson worried that the propaganda material sent out by the Saigon USIS office, which was checked by local translators but not by an American, 'could have contained pro-communist material or even calls to action for Vietminh cells based in Saigon'.⁹⁹

The lack of language skills also disrupted the delicate diplomatic balancing act that the U.S. diplomatic mission had been asked to perform between the French and the Indochinese. In 1952, George Olcott, an American information officer from the post in Phnom Penh, was invited by the Cambodian government to go along on a tour through the countryside. Unable to speak Cambodian, he was unaware when a group of Cambodian politicians in his party made a series of anti-French speeches along the way. When French officials found out that an American had been present during this tour, they were furious. Suspicious about the relationship of U.S. officials with strongly nationalistic Cambodian leaders like Son Ngoc Thanh, French officials pressured Heath to have this U.S. official removed for his apparent support of these anti-French protests.¹⁰⁰ The ambassador was, however, able to convince the French that it was 'not criticizable in view of the circumstances'.¹⁰¹ He wrote to Philip Sprouse in the U.S. Embassy in Paris, 'Olcott, not speaking Cambodian, had no idea what [Son Ngoc] Thanh was saying'.¹⁰² While French officials eventually backed down and Olcott stayed at his post, blunders of this sort contributed to the tension between French and American officials that prevented an effective working relationship in Indochina.

Perhaps the greatest damage done by the lack of language skills, however, was the effect it had on the ability of Americans to ascertain accurate and objective information about the country, the mood of the Vietnamese population and the military-political situation in the countryside. Incapable of speaking directly to most Vietnamese, diplomats relied chiefly on the French and a small group of French-educated Vietnamese officials, many of whom were closely

⁹⁸ Reiner to Heath, 9 December 1952, 301 Diplomatic Privileges and Immunities, Box 65, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, General Records, 1936-1963, RG 84, USNA.

⁹⁹ Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁰ Heath to Sprouse, 10 April 1952, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1950-1952, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

associated with colonial rule, to interpret the situation.¹⁰³ Although U.S. officials did make their own contacts with anti-communist Vietnamese more critical of the French, their efforts to do so were repeatedly circumscribed by French suspicions. The Saigon post often restricted the degree and nature of its contact with significant Vietnamese groups and officials to avoid irritating Franco-American relations.¹⁰⁴ It left U.S. diplomatic reporting, the chief American window into a country in which the United States had little experience or expertise, to a large extent open to the influence of the French. As George Allen, an intelligence officer working on Indochina during this period, recalled, 'Although we had information from a wide variety of sources – some good, some not so good – through 1955 we depended heavily on the French'.¹⁰⁵ What they provided, he argues, 'put the best possible face on their [French] actions' and 'naturally downplayed, discounted, or ignored those aspects that did not'.¹⁰⁶

William A. Pruett, an American missionary who had learned Vietnamese during an eighteen year stay in Vietnam and who was working for the Voice of America (VOA) in Washington, felt an inability to speak the Indochinese languages was skewing American understanding of the situation in Vietnam.¹⁰⁷ He told U.S. officials in 1953 that a lack of Vietnamese linguists forced a reliance on foreign, particularly French, views and interpretations. He suggested that 'the viewpoints of the native people, (the Vietnamese, the Cambodians, and the Laotians) have seldom been permitted to be given to the American people'.¹⁰⁸ 'Most Americans', he argued, 'therefore have a distorted, lop-sided view of the situation in Indo-China'.¹⁰⁹ Fluent in Vietnamese himself, Pruett offered his services in Vietnam. However, the offer was rebuffed partly because Pruett was regarded as anti-French.¹¹⁰ He was not the sole American with some expertise of the region to find his offer of help rejected by Washington. In 1954, the State

¹⁰³ Vietnam was not the sole part of the Third World where this was problematic for the United States. See Thomas, *American Arabists*, p. 54.

¹⁰⁴ Telegram 1454 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 18 February 1951, 751g.00/2-1851, Box 3670, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 700 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 3 June 1951, 751g.00/6-351 Box 3670, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Saigon to Secretary of State, 13 June 1952, 751g.00/6-1352, Box 3672, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Melby, p. 105.

¹⁰⁵ George W. Allen, *None So Blind: A Personal Account of the Intelligence Failure in Vietnam* (Chicago, IL: Iva R. Dee, 2001), p. 12.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ The VOA is a U.S. government radio station that broadcasts globally.

¹⁰⁸ Pruett to Edman, 5 August 1953, Declassified Document Reference System (hereafter DDRS), Declassified 18 May 1982. Vietnamese officials in Saigon made the same point to American diplomats. See, for example, Telegram 599 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 30 March 1951, 751g.00/3-3051, Box 3670, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Jackson to Pruett, 22 March 1954, OF 181-C Indo-China, Box 716, Official File, White House Central Files, Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers (hereafter DDE Papers), Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library (hereafter DDEL); Washburn to Jackson, 16 March 1954, OF 181-C Indo-China, Box 716, Official File, White House Central Files, DDE Papers, DDEL.

Department thanked Kingsley Hamilton, who had served in Saigon during World War II, for his offer of assistance but took the matter no further.¹¹¹

Among the areas where U.S. diplomats were most reliant on the French was in the acquisition of information about the Viet Minh. The U.S. decision to recognise Bao Dai's government and assist the French removed what diplomatic contact there had been between U.S. representatives and Ho Chi Minh's government. The attempts of some former OSS officials and journalists, who had met with Ho Chi Minh during World War II, to convince American diplomats of the need to reopen contacts between the United States and the Viet Minh fell on deaf ears.¹¹² The Viet Minh remained a mystery to U.S. representatives throughout the latter half of the Franco-Viet Minh War. As William Cunningham recalled, 'there was no one that I knew of or was aware of or even suspected that had any direct line of communication to the Viet Minh. We saw them through the eyes of the French and probably through the eyes of French intelligence, to the extent that we saw them at all or understood them at all'.¹¹³ Although France had established a fairly efficient intelligence apparatus in Indochina, American diplomats often doubted the trustworthiness and openness of French reports.¹¹⁴ U.S. officials believed that the French sometimes exaggerated the Viet Minh threat to encourage the United States to increase its financial support to the French military. 'We are sometimes at [a] disadvantage in assessing [the] true position [of the Viet Minh] because French estimates on [the] V[iet]M[inh]'s strength for [the] purpose [of] getting foreign aid and support do not always tally closely with [our] intelligence estimates', Gullion noted in October 1951.¹¹⁵

U.S. diplomats did employ other sources to supplement their information on the Viet Minh, however. Viet Minh propaganda, the testimony of Vietnamese who had fled Viet Minh held territory for Bao Dai's government, captured Viet Minh documents, and materials obtained

¹¹¹ Hamilton to Smith, 10 February 1954, 751g.00/2-1054, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Cook to Hamilton, 8 March 1954, 751g.00/2-1054, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹¹² Phelan to Hagerty, 30 September 1953, in Memorandum from Hagerty to Robertson, 3 October 1953, 751g.00/9-3053, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Memorandum of Conversation between Ogburn and Isaacs, 'United States Policy in Indochina', 17 April 1950, lot 54 D190, US Policy Papers of Indochina, Box 9, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

¹¹³ Author's Interview with William J. Cunningham, 21 August 2012.

¹¹⁴ For the relative efficiency of French intelligence gathering in the second half of the Franco-Viet Minh War, see Alexander Zervoudakis, "'Nihil mirare, nihil contemptare, omnia intelligere": Franco-Vietnamese Intelligence in Indochina, 1950-1954', in *Knowing Your Friends: Intelligence inside Alliances and Coalitions from 1914 to the Cold War*, ed. by Martin S. Alexander (London; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1998), pp. 195-229; Memorandum of Conversation between Stephen McClintic and 'Source', 'French Reverses in Tonkin', 9 October 1950, in Foreign Service Despatch 245 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Transmittal of a Memorandum of Conversation of French Reverses in Tonkin', 10 October 1950, 751g.00/10-1050, Box 3668, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Theodore Lewis to Lydman, 15 December 1952, 500 Economic Reporting, Box 21, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA; LePage and Tenenbaum, p. 28.

¹¹⁵ Telegram 852 from Gullion to Secretary of State, 16 October 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 537.

from outside of Indochina were used in league with French-supplied information to analyse the health of the DRV and Viet Minh forces.¹¹⁶ The Saigon post reported that the clippings it had received from the Joint Press Reading Service in Moscow were ‘of great assistance in attempting to appraise the degree of influence and interest the Soviet Union attaches to [the] Indochina situation generally and to the fortunes of the Viet Minh Communist instrument. These clippings, and an occasional survey of the FBIS, have been almost the only means the Legation has had to attempt this very important appraisal’.¹¹⁷

However, this information provided at best a partial and patchy insight into the DRV. While U.S. officials were aware of developments like the merger of the Lien Viet, a nationalist front organisation set up by the Viet Minh in 1946, and the Viet Minh in March 1951, they often found ‘the enemy’s morale and intentions [...] shrouded in mystery’.¹¹⁸ American diplomats were reluctant to accept the information provided to them by deserters and sources affiliated with the communists.¹¹⁹ For example, after interviewing Pierre Huard, an academic at the University of Hanoi reportedly on good terms with Viet Minh leaders in the mid-1940s, about the DRV, the reporting officer from Saigon suggested that Huard’s views be treated carefully because of his alleged ‘neutralist’ views and openness to Viet Minh occupation in the north.¹²⁰ Unable to substantiate many of the rumours about the Viet Minh that reached them, American diplomats were often forced to use the Viet Minh performance in battle to make broader conclusions about conditions within the DRV. In August 1952, Secretary of State Dean Acheson concluded that the upcoming campaign season ‘will provide [the] best test’ of the rumours floating around about shortages in the DRV’s food supplies and problems in recruiting new troops.¹²¹ So limited was

¹¹⁶ See, for example, Telegram 1704 from Heath to Secretary of State, 24 March 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, pp. 410-412; Foreign Service Despatch 640 from Saigon to Department of State, ‘Interrogation of a Viet Minh Rallie: Chu-Ngoc-Lien from Nghe-An Province (Central Vietnam)’, 27 June 1952, 751g.00/6-2752, Box 3672, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 148 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 19 July 1952, 751g.00/7-1952, Box 3672, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 346 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 11 August 1952, 751g.00/8-1152, Box 3672, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹¹⁷ Telegram from Saigon to Moscow, ‘Moscow Note July 30’, 25 August 1951, 350.21 – Communism. Bolshevism. 1950, Box 70, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, General Records, 1936-1963, RG 84, USNA.

¹¹⁸ Memorandum by Bonsal to Robertson, ‘General O’Daniel’s visit to Indochina, November 6-15, 1953’, 8 December 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 906; Telegram 1704 from Heath to Secretary of State, 24 March 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, pp. 410-412.

¹¹⁹ Foreign Service Despatch 151 from Saigon to Department of State, ‘Viet Minh Propaganda’, 5 October 1953, 751g.00/10-553, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 2702 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 9 June 1954, 751g.00/6-954, Box 3679, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²⁰ Memorandum of Conversation between Stephens and Huard, 20 July 1954, in Foreign Service Despatch 38 from Saigon to Department of State, ‘Conversation with Dr. Pierre Huard of the University of Hanoi’, 22 July 1954, 751g.00/7-2254, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²¹ Telegram 569 from Acheson to Saigon, 16 September 1952, 751g.00/9-1652, Box 3673, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

U.S. information about the Viet Minh that the United States was unsure by 1954 if Ho Chi Minh remained alive.¹²²

Security Issues and Life in ‘Little America’

Alongside language difficulties, security issues prevented regular American interaction with the majority of the indigenous community residing in the countryside and limited opportunities for first-hand observation in Indochina, ensuring a further reliance on French interpretation.¹²³ Poor Vietnamese roads and the threat of Viet Minh ambush made travelling by car unappealing. Furthermore, officials in the French military and high commission were reluctant to authorise American trips into the countryside, fearing that the death of an influential Westerner would create bad press or that they would perhaps discover something unfavourable.¹²⁴ As Graham Greene, the British novelist, noted during one of his many trips to Vietnam, ‘It’s very difficult to see any action here as the French are so concerned for our safety’.¹²⁵ The acquisition of an embassy plane in 1950 allowed slightly greater freedom of movement for American diplomats, removing the need to beg a lift on French planes and reducing French control over American contact with Indochinese nationalists.¹²⁶

With strict curfews in place in Saigon, opportunities to view the war and the majority of the Vietnamese people were, on the whole, limited to brief forays into the countryside to inspect the progress of American-funded economic projects and U.S. equipped French and Vietnamese troops. As Saigon diplomats were driven or flown in for these short visits, they could only view the Vietnamese people from afar.¹²⁷ As one British official recalled from his tenure in Saigon,

Two busy years spent for the most part in semi-siege conditions in the European quarter of the capital city [...] give me very little right to talk about the people of a nation. The overwhelming majority of them live and work in the country, in the rice-fields; and these I only saw from the bumpy seat of a jeep, driving along main roads.¹²⁸

When embassy officials did travel outside of Saigon they tended to follow well-beaten paths approved by the French and American attempts to go and visit Vietnamese nationalist groups

¹²² Chester L. Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1970), p. 76; Chester L. Cooper, *In the Shadows of History: Fifty Years Behind the Scenes of Cold War Diplomacy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005), p. 116.

¹²³ Quentin Pope, ‘Bare Indo Bungle’, *Chicago Tribune*, 15 July 1954, p. 1.

¹²⁴ Melby, p. 101.

¹²⁵ Greene to Walston, 16 November 1951, Folder 27, Box 12, Walston-Greene Papers, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Joseph Mark Lauinger Memorial Library, University of Georgetown.

¹²⁶ Gullion to Hoey, 4 March 1950, lot 54 D190, Indo-China 1948-51, Box 7, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

¹²⁷ Author’s Interview with Ian Day Adams, 7 July 2014.

¹²⁸ Graham, p. 25.

were treated with suspicion and often closely chaperoned by a French official.¹²⁹ During his visit to Ben Tre Province to talk with Jean Leroy, the leader of the Unites Mobiles de Défense des Chrétientés (UMDC), in August 1950, legation official Gardner C. Carpenter was unnerved by just how closely a captain in the French Marines kept watch.¹³⁰ ‘It subsequently became apparent from certain of Captain Carre’s chance remarks and from the assiduity with which he remained in close proximity’, Carpenter wrote, ‘that General Chason [the French commander in southern Vietnam] had not wholly welcomed certain unauthorized (by him) journeys to [...] Ben Tre [...] and that he desired that future excursions of this sort be accompanied by a representative of his office’.¹³¹

Given these French suspicions, many American trips into the countryside proved unfruitful. Efforts to gain an insight into the French use of U.S. military aid and to garner how Vietnamese units were doing in the field regularly met with frustration. Visits were often cancelled at the last minute and French officials went to extreme efforts to prevent Americans from fulfilling their duties.¹³² As Simpson recalled of one inspection,

Our arrival inevitably coincided with the lunch period. A sumptuous mess table would have been laid for us. The meal would be preceded by generous glasses of pastis, the four courses would be washed down by white and red wines and terminated by cognac toasts offered by the senior French officer present. When we finally emerged, poleaxed, into the bright afternoon sun, it would be too late to visit the outlying posts.¹³³

These end-use inspections quickly became known by Americans in Vietnam as ‘end-use charades’ and accentuated the reliance of American diplomats on French sources of information.

Small American listening posts in Hanoi, Dalat and Hue did, however, provide some sort of insight into developments in important regions elsewhere in Vietnam. These officials sent reports to the embassy, Washington and briefed their Saigon colleagues in person when they

¹²⁹ Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 47.

¹³⁰ The UMDC was a mobile militia of about 3,000 troops made up of Vietnamese Catholics and other religious groups in Ben Tre province near Saigon. It was led by Jean Leroy, a French-Vietnamese army officer who created the group in 1947 to combat the DRV. As explored later, this group received some admiring glances from U.S. officials. For more information, see Christopher Goscha, ‘Unites Mobiles pour la Defense des Chrétiens’, *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War (1945-1954)*, <<http://indochine.uqam.ca/en/historical-dictionary/1520-unites-mobiles-pour-la-defense-des-chretiens-umdc.html>> [accessed 24 May 2018].

¹³¹ Memorandum from Carpenter to Heath, ‘Visit to An-Hoa Island, Ben Tre Province, Center of Activities of *Unités Mobiles de Défense des Chretientes* (U.M.D.C.) in South Vietnam’, 19 August 1950, in Foreign Service Despatch 42 from Saigon to Department of State, ‘Visit to An-Hoa Island, Ben Tre Province, Center of Activities of *Unites Mobiles de Defense des Chretientes* (U.M.D.C.) in South Vietnam’, 25 August 1950, 751g.00/8-2550, Box 3667, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹³² Honaker, p. 338; Melby, p. 105.

¹³³ Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 36.

visited the city.¹³⁴ Officials in the economic mission and USIS, who travelled more widely around the country, also provided a medium with which to gauge what was going on in the countryside.¹³⁵ The Vietnamese they interacted with were also often less French influenced and more inclined to criticise the constraints that remained on Vietnamese independence. Unsurprisingly, these officials tended to garner a different view of the situation to that of senior diplomats who spent their time encamped in Saigon, arguing for the French to move more quickly to provide the Vietnamese Government with independence. These reports were not always accepted, however. As Simpson remembers after giving a pessimistic report about the situation at Dien Bien Phu in early 1954, ‘Certain American officials preferred to accept the information fed to them by the French military authorities’.¹³⁶

The way American diplomats in Saigon chose to live and socialise further restricted their ability to garner a genuine understanding of the country and people that they were accredited to. In Saigon, American diplomats largely resided in the colonial or European quarter of the city.¹³⁷ Here, their neighbours were French businessmen, colonial bureaucrats and diplomats from other nations that had recognised the Bao Dai Government.¹³⁸ If one was to explore the area one could be excused for thinking, if not for the climate, that they had just walked into a provincial French town.¹³⁹ The streets bore the names of famous Frenchmen from Indochina’s past and French architecture, shops and bars dominated the area. To many, Saigon felt more French than Vietnamese. As Philip Jessup, Truman’s ambassador-at-large, observed during a visit to the city in early 1950, ‘In Saigon I felt that I was in a French city where some Vietnamese officials were

¹³⁴ As Richard Matheron recalled, ‘Every time I went to Saigon, I was invited over to the embassy to chat with the ambassador and DCM about developments in Hue, which was the former imperial capital, where there were still members of the royal family’. Oral History Interview with Richard C. Matheron, March 1989, Interviewed by Lee Cotterman, Frontline Diplomacy, <<https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004mat01/2004mat01.pdf>> [accessed 26 March 2018]. For further evidence of Matheron briefing the embassy on goings on in Hue, see McClintock to Department of State, 11 June 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954. Indochina*, Volume XIII, Part 2 (hereafter Vol. XIII, Part 2), (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952-1954), p. 1681.

¹³⁵ See for example, Foreign Service Despatch 14 from Saigon to Department of State, ‘Impressions Obtained by USIS Officer on Trip to Several Provinces in South Vietnam’, 10 July 1952, 350 Associated States. 1952 - , Box 69, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, General Records, 1936-1963, RG 84, USNA; Oral History Interview with Jim Crane, in Maurer, p. 60; Telegram 286 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 27 October 1951, 751g.00/10-2751, Box 3671, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 286 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 27 October 1951, 751g.00/10-2751, Box 3671, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹³⁶ Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 116.

¹³⁷ Roster of American Personnel, 7 July 1950, lot 57 D472, Indochina Background, 1950, Box 2, Records Relating to the Mutual Security Assistance Program (Far East), 1949-1954, RG 59, USNA; Email from William J. Cunningham to Author, 28 June 2013.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1978), p. 124.

allowed to function'.¹⁴⁰ Another touring U.S. official concluded that life in Saigon made it 'easy to adopt an attitude of "never-mind," to begin to think in French, to view things through French eyes'.¹⁴¹

Saigon offered American diplomats a life far removed from that of the rest of Vietnam. Symbols of the war could be seen in the city's military checkpoints and the grenade cages positioned on café windows, but Saigon was not subject to the major military operations that threatened communities elsewhere in the country and Americans enjoyed access to many amenities they enjoyed back in the United States. The embassy office and ambassadorial residence both had air conditioning, a rarity in Vietnam in those days, and U.S. officials employed servants to take care of their home and cooking.¹⁴² American children brought to Saigon with their parents attended an English language school funded by the State Department and diplomats took advantage of a beneficial exchange rate to illegally add to their earnings.¹⁴³ The contrast in how American diplomats lived in Saigon and the war raging in the countryside, therefore, could not have been starker.¹⁴⁴ On a trip to northern Vietnam in 1952, Howard Simpson noted, 'I had the impression that the European facade of Indochina exemplified by Saigon had been ripped away and I was seeing Asia for the first time'.¹⁴⁵

The American social scene in Saigon was extremely vibrant. As one British diplomat wrote, 'I seem to go to a dinner party or cocktail party or both every night – nearly all given by Americans who have a very large staff'.¹⁴⁶ Gatherings took place predominantly in the homes of American officials.¹⁴⁷ The most prolific American entertainer in Saigon in the early 1950s was Everett Dixie Reese, an official working in the economic mission and photographer who was killed in Vietnam in April 1955. Located at 213 Rue Catinat, Chez Dixie, as Reese referred to it in his invites, became, according to his wife, the epicentre of American social life in Saigon.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁰ Notes on a Visit to Saigon and Hanoi, Indochina, by Philip Jessup, 24 January 1950, 751g.00/1-2450, Box 3666, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁴¹ Lewis to Lydman, Kattenburg and Schumkler, 15 December 1952, 500 Economic Reporting, Box 21, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

¹⁴² On air conditioning in the legation offices, see Unknown to John Getz, 28 August 1952, lot 58 D266, Correspondence 1952-54, Box 2, 1950-56, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs: Office of Southeast Asian Affairs; Subject Files, RG 59, USNA. Howard Simpson was assigned a guard, a cook and a wash amah when he arrived in Saigon. Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 8.

¹⁴³ For information regarding schooling for the children of U.S. personnel in Vietnam, see Honaker, p. 309; and on the accumulation of illegal wealth for U.S. officials, see Honaker, pp. 132-133.

¹⁴⁴ Author's Interview with Ian Day Adams, 7 July 2014.

¹⁴⁵ Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 47.

¹⁴⁶ Letter Extract, 20 August 1952, Brigadier T. H. Spear Papers, National Army Museum.

¹⁴⁷ Email from William J. Cunningham to Author, 28 June 2013.

¹⁴⁸ 'Farewell Drinks for "Jim" Hendrick', MSA – Mission to N Viet Nam – Hanoi – Farewell Party in Saigon – AID, Box 6, James P. Hendrick Papers, HSTL; Oral History Interview with Dorothy Reese Bloomfield, 27 June 2006; 12, 21, 28 July 2006, Interviewed by Laura M. Calkins, Oral History Project,

Other popular American hangouts in Saigon included former bastions of French colonial society. U.S. diplomats met at the Continental Hotel on Rue Catinat for pre-lunch drinks in the company of Corsican businessmen and French military officers.¹⁴⁹ Americans also congregated at the Majestic Hotel (300 yards from the Continental) to enjoy French food and music and at other bars and cafés in the colonial sector of the city.¹⁵⁰ When Admiral James M. Shoemaker, head of the economic mission in Hanoi, joined an embassy celebration in Saigon, he commented, ‘It carried me back to pre-war France, for which I shall always have a great nostalgia’.¹⁵¹

To exercise, American diplomats utilised the Cercle Sportif, a beautifully landscaped recreational club in the centre of the European residential area of Saigon boasting ‘all the amenities of an exquisite country club with swimming pools, tennis courts, and pool-side cafe’.¹⁵² Leading American officials in the embassy, like Heath and Gullion, regularly stopped by to take a swim or play tennis.¹⁵³ To escape Saigon’s suffocating temperatures and humidity, U.S. officials took vacation outside of the city. From time-to-time they would travel to Cap St. Jacques, a colonial beach resort at the mouth of the Saigon River, and Dalat, a colonial resort in the southern highlands of lower central Vietnam.¹⁵⁴ The French equivalent of the British hill station in Simla, Dalat was designed to replicate an alpine resort and housed a number of private villas, a couple of hotels and offered various leisure opportunities.¹⁵⁵ Critically it offered relief from the suffocating temperatures and humidity of Saigon. As Andrew Graham, British military

The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University,

<<https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/reports/images.php?img=/OH/OH0542/OH0542.pdf&from=website>>, p. 46.

¹⁴⁹ Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 6.

¹⁵⁰ Oral History Interview with Dorothy Reese Bloomfield, 27 June 27, 2006; 12, 21, 28 July 2006, Interviewed by Laura M. Calkins, Oral History Project, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University,

<<https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/reports/images.php?img=/OH/OH0542/OH0542.pdf&from=website>>, p. 34.

¹⁵¹ Shoemaker to Hendrick, 18 June 1953, Correspondence with Admiral James H. Shoemaker, Hendrick’s Successor as Special Representative for North Viet Nam, 1953-54, Box 6, James P. Hendrick Papers, HSTL.

¹⁵² Honaker, p. 189.

¹⁵³ See Heath Diary Entries, 10 August 1950 and 15 August 1950, lot 54 D190, Religion, Box 8, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA; Gullion to Reiner, 8 June 1953, 1952 Records, Box 1, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, Supplemental Classified Records, 1950-1955, RG 84, USNA.

¹⁵⁴ For evidence of U.S. officials taking such trips, see Meloy to Getz, 18 March 1954, lot 58 D266, Correspondence 1952-54, Box 2, 1950-56: Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs: Office of Southeast Asian Affairs; Subject Files, RG 59, USNA; Oral History Interview with Dorothy Reese Bloomfield, 27 June 2006; 12, 21, 28 July 2006, Interviewed by Laura M. Calkins, Oral History Project, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, <<https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/reports/images.php?img=/OH/OH0542/OH0542.pdf&from=website>>, pp. 35-36.

¹⁵⁵ For a detailed study of Dalat during and after French colonial rule, see Eric Jennings, *Imperial Heights: Dalat and the Making and Undoing of French Indochina* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

attaché in Saigon, recalled, 'It sounds ordinary enough, but for us it meant the luxury of being able to breathe, to wear European clothes, and to sleep under one blanket at night'.¹⁵⁶

The choices made by Americans with respect to their social routines limited their interaction with the Vietnamese people, lowered their chances of gathering a greater understanding of the country they were working in and allowed stereotypes about the Vietnamese to persist. In fact, the host community was almost entirely absent from the places that Americans chose to spend their free time. The only Vietnamese to be found at the Continental Hotel were those working as room boys and strict discriminatory membership rules meant that few indigenous people could enjoy the facilities at the Cercle Sportif; the majority of Vietnamese present at the Cercle Sportif were employed to carry drinks to Western patrons lounging in the sun.¹⁵⁷ Such exclusion, MAAG official Keith Honaker feared, would come back to bite the Westerners at a later date. He said, 'There was an aristocratic feeling of being materialistic at the expense of the Vietnamese [...]. There must come a day of reckoning, I thought'.¹⁵⁸ Such behaviour, too, likely strengthened the tendency of some Vietnamese to view the American diplomatic mission in colonial terms.

Although American diplomats did establish friendships with indigenous citizens and some Vietnamese attended U.S. social events, American social occasions centred on the English-speaking community. According to the wife of a British citizen working for a French insurance company in Saigon, those who 'spoke English, Anglos and other foreigners who were fluent in it tended to gravitate towards one another'.¹⁵⁹ There is little indication that Americans regularly left the European dominated districts of Saigon and while references can be found to Americans celebrating George Washington's Birthday, Independence Day and even French holidays like Bastille Day, evidence suggesting U.S. diplomats in Saigon engaged regularly in Vietnamese celebrations or festivals is much harder to find.¹⁶⁰ In fact, it appears Americans exhibited little interest generally in attending Vietnamese cultural events. As Cunningham recalled, 'I cannot recall that there were Vietnamese festivals or shows Americans attended. Some did wander through Cholon, almost completely Chinese, but whatever genuinely Vietnamese cultural institutions there were in Saigon were not prominent nor attention getters'.¹⁶¹ In fact, when

¹⁵⁶ Graham, p. 54.

¹⁵⁷ For the scarcity of Vietnamese in the Continental Hotel, see Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, pp. 6-7; and for the absence of the Vietnamese at the Cercle Sportif, see Honaker, p. 189.

¹⁵⁸ Honaker, pp. 189-190.

¹⁵⁹ Michelle Breen quoted in Flood, p. 302.

¹⁶⁰ While the letters of Brigadier T. H. Spear, the British military attaché to Saigon, document the great volume of Western social events in Saigon, they describe few instances in which the diplomatic corps engaged in indigenous celebrations, festivals or cultural events. Howard Simpson's detailed memoir also contains few references to Americans engaging in Vietnamese culture events. Brig T. H. Spear Papers, National Army Museum; Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*.

¹⁶¹ Email from William J. Cunningham to Author, 28 June 2013.

Westerners did try to explore the less well known areas outside of the European section of the city, their movements were regarded as suspicious by the French authorities. Norman Lewis, a British travel writer, was arrested for suspected trafficking by French customs agents when he began to explore the city's side streets during his visit in the early 1950s.¹⁶² 'From this happening', he wrote, 'it was clear that Europeans rarely leave the wide boulevards where they belong'.¹⁶³

The Americans that arrived to staff the U.S. diplomatic mission in Indochina during the last years of French colonial rule shared more than a common location. Apart from the rare exception, these diplomats had little experience in dealing with Indochina and could not speak Vietnamese, Cambodian or Lao. Efforts to rectify this deficiency made little progress, with Foreign Service Officers reluctant to specialise in a region renowned for its danger and poor standard of living. Those men and women sent to serve, therefore, were largely drawn from a corps of French-speaking diplomats that had little knowledge of Asia. Lacking any deep understanding of Vietnamese history or culture they relied on shared views on race, French colonialism, and America's role in the world to interpret the situation. The ideas they brought with them ensured that diplomats would strive to impress on their French and Vietnamese allies their own ideas about decolonisation and the war effort. While diplomats in Saigon and the wider mission, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, held varying ideas on how U.S. policy goals should be achieved, they held in common an understanding that postcolonial Vietnam must be anti-communist, Western tutored and American influenced. This approach, coupled with the social lives American diplomats enjoyed in Saigon, gave a neo-colonial feel to the mission's activities.

With little expertise and experience to call on, the U.S. Government looked to its diplomats in Indochina for information. Yet, the lack of language skills, security considerations and the way that Americans lived and socialised inhibited the ability of the U.S. diplomatic mission to provide Washington with an accurate insight into developments in Indochina. American diplomats relied heavily on the French for information on the war; this information was weighted, as William Cunningham notes, in 'favor of outcomes preferred by the former colonial regime and its Vietnamese adherent community'.¹⁶⁴ Language deficiencies, a lack of knowledge about the area and limited interactions with the local population also promulgated misleading stereotypes about the Indochinese that meant that Washington continued to receive

¹⁶² Norman Lewis, *A Dragon Apparent* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1951), pp. 19-20.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁴ Email from William J. Cunningham to Author, 28 June 2013.

faulty readings of internal developments as the U.S. role in Indochina deepened in the early 1950s.

Chapter 3 – ‘To Supplement but not to Supplant’: Donald Heath and the Quiet Americans, July 1950-June 1952

On 5 July 1950, a short, slight man with an uncanny resemblance to the comedian Stan Laurel stepped off a plane at Tan Son Nhut airport just outside of Saigon. He was greeted by senior French civilian and military officials and given full military honours. The diminutive figure was Donald R. Heath, the new and first U.S. minister to the Associated States of Indochina.¹ Heath had arrived to head a rapidly expanding American diplomatic mission during a period in which Indochina was assuming increasing Cold War importance for the United States. The failure of France to secure meaningful victories in the war, increasing evidence that Viet Minh forces were now benefitting from Chinese aid and the outbreak of the Korean War had all increased American concerns about the vulnerability of Southeast Asia to communism. The Franco-Viet Minh War, too, was becoming increasingly costly in both blood and treasure for France, with opposition to its continuation beginning to find greater mainstream support in French political circles. A lot, it seemed, depended on the United States. French officials stressed that they could not continue the fight without further U.S. aid and threatened to abandon the country to the Viet Minh if American pressure for greater Vietnamese independence became too strong.

This chapter examines Heath’s appointment to Saigon and the activities of the Saigon legation from his arrival in Vietnam in July 1950 to the decision to upgrade the post to embassy status in June 1952. There has been little reflection on Heath’s appointment as U.S. minister in Saigon in the historical literature; scholars who have touched on Heath’s tenure have tended to leap straight into the action, providing only a few details about his earlier career and reasons for his selection.² This chapter provides the first detailed assessment of Heath’s appointment. It argues that Heath’s French language skills and familiarity with France, the controversy surrounding the U.S. Foreign Service’s China hands, Heath’s experience of the horrors of communist rule, and his capacity to live and work in dangerous circumstances helped him secure the post. However, it asserts that his most important qualification was the experience he had gained in Bulgaria, where he had been tasked with upholding American prestige and interests under the type of hostile diplomatic environment he would find in Vietnam.

The chapter then turns to analysing Heath’s first two years in office. It contends that the way Heath went about his job – influenced by his instructions, experience and approach to

¹ Heath Diary Entry, 5 July 1950, in Heath to Hoey, 9 August 1950, lot 54 D190, Indo-China, 1948-1951, Box 7, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA. For Heath’s resemblance to the comedian Stan Laurel, one half of the famous comedy double act Laurel and Hardy, see Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 5.

² Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 75; Duiker, pp. 99-100.

diplomacy – was crucial in maintaining a U.S. policy which gave greater preference to the French military effort over the development of Vietnamese independence. In doing so, Heath contributed to a policy which gambled away American leverage with the French, limited the development of a viable anti-communist Vietnamese government and deepened the U.S. commitment in Indochina. Although Heath's efforts to sustain this policy and a French commitment to the fight in Vietnam between 1950 and 1954 (chapter 4 will examine his actions in the period from 1952 to 1954) have received some attention in the literature, there has been insufficient appreciation of the persistent nature and importance of Heath's interventions in this regard.³ His efforts supplemented the other tools that American officials employed to keep France in the fight, namely the U.S. assistance programme. Heath's interventions included: optimistic reporting about French chances of winning the war and the policy he had been sent to implement, efforts to counter pessimistic reports that appeared and minimise the influence of those who disagreed with him in the mission, attempts to appease French concerns about increased U.S. involvement, and the decision to limit the pressure he applied on the French to grant further powers to the Vietnamese.

A European Hand in Saigon

Like the vast majority of his staff, Heath arrived in Saigon unable to speak any of the Indochinese languages and having never previously visited Vietnam. Indeed, despite his extensive experience as a career diplomat, Southeast Asia was new to him. He had spent the majority of his diplomatic career in Europe, including postings in Berlin, Berne, Bucharest, Warsaw, and, most recently, Sofia, Bulgaria.⁴ His time in Bulgaria had been particularly tumultuous, ending prematurely when he was declared *persona non grata* for allegedly using Traicho Kostov, a former Bulgarian government official, to illegally obtain economic information for the United States. Kostov was tried and executed as those communists closely aligned with the Soviet Union took control of the Bulgarian government.⁵ Heath categorically denied the accusations and described the decision to declare him *persona non grata* as the 'climax [of] the campaign of "calculated insult and vilification" of the United States that had

³ See, for example, Duiker, pp. 99-101; pp. 116-117; Dommen, pp. 216-219; Young, "'The Same Struggle for Liberty'", pp. 201-207.

⁴ For full details of Heath's different diplomatic postings, see *Who's Who in America: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Living Men and Women, Vol. 26, 1950-51 (Two Years)* (Chicago, IL: The A. N. Marquis Company, 1951), p. 1191; Memorandum for the President by James E. Webb, 'Nomination of Donald R. Heath as Minister to the State of Vietnam and Kingdoms of Laos and Cambodia', 19 June 1950, Box 1832, Official File, White House Central Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, HSTL.

⁵ J. F. Brown, *Bulgaria Under Communist Rule* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1970), pp. 20-22.

begun with the withdrawal of the Allied Control Commission in October, 1947'.⁶ Despite his strong denial, these accusations may not have been too far from the truth. As a diplomat in Nazi Berlin, Heath had been commissioned by Secretary of the Treasury James Morgenthau to seek out dissenters from the regime to gain economic information for the United States, striking up a close relationship with members of what the Gestapo called the 'Red Orchestra'.⁷ He may have been employed on a similar assignment in Bulgaria.

At first glance, Heath could have seemed a strange appointee for the Saigon post. But with few of their diplomats intimately familiar with the situation in Indochina and Southeast Asia more generally, the State Department looked for alternative qualifications. Heath spoke fluent French, which allowed him to communicate with French and leading Vietnamese officials, and was familiar with France having spent a semester abroad at the University of Montpellier while at college.⁸ Many of the State Department's China experts, who would have at least had some familiarity with the region if not intimate knowledge of Indochina, were also unlikely choices to lead the Saigon post given the accusations made about their complicity in Chiang Kai-shek's defeat in the Chinese Civil War. Additionally, having witnessed the brutality of authoritarian rule in Berlin and Sofia respectively, Heath was well placed to explain to the Vietnamese the horrors that awaited them if communism prevailed in Indochina.⁹ The danger of the Saigon post also did not intimidate Heath and his wife, Louise. As Thomas Dewey, governor of New York and former presidential nominee, wrote of the Heaths in his reflections of a 1951 visit to Indochina, 'Since they had been evacuated from three countries just ahead of invading troops and shot at in two, Saigon would be nothing new'.¹⁰

The dominant position of the European Bureau in State Department discussions on colonial affairs in Southeast Asia helped Heath's cause. Europeanists desired to have a man on the spot who would promote a policy sensitive to American goals in Europe. Most crucial to Heath's appointment, however, was his experience in Bulgaria. In Sofia he had demonstrated an ability to fulfil his diplomatic responsibilities in trying circumstances. As Acting Secretary of State James Webb noted in a message to Truman recommending Heath for the Saigon post in

⁶ M. S. Handler, 'Heath Hears Sofia Plans New Trial: U.S. Envoy, on Way Home, Says Purge of Followers of Dimitrov Continues', *NYT*, 26 February 1950, p. 25.

⁷ Shareen Blair Brysac, *Resisting Hitler: Mildred Harnak and the Red Orchestra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 225.

⁸ *Who's Who in America*, p. 1191.

⁹ Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution*, p. 86.

¹⁰ Thomas Dewey, *Journey to the Far Pacific* (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1952), p. 179. Heath was fortunate to escape with his life in wartime Berlin after a huge bomb exploded close to the Brandenburg Gate. Supposed to be at his desk for night duty, Heath avoided a splinter of the bomb that destroyed his desk and much of his office after being told to go home early that night. For Heath's close call in Berlin, see William L. Shirer, *Berlin Diary: The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent, 1934-1941* (Aylesbury: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1941), p. 395.

May 1950, 'As Chief of Mission [in Bulgaria] he was confronted with the extremely difficult task of upholding American prestige and interests under a hostile regime, which function he fulfilled in an exemplary manner'.¹¹ This ability to tread lightly would certainly come in handy in Indochina, where he would have to deal with French suspicions and implement a delicate dual American policy aimed at encouraging the development of an effective anti-communist government and sustaining the FEC's war effort. As *New York Times* reporter Hanson Baldwin noted in early 1951:

The role of American officials in that country – never an easy one – may be doubly difficult, for they must possess the virtues of tact and an understanding of the volatile Gallic mind, but they must also have the unyielding strength to insist upon needed reforms lest United States aid be wasted.¹²

The State Department believed they had the right man. They instructed Heath to ensure that U.S. activities in Vietnam 'supplement but not supplant' French interests, charging him with jockeying the French into providing greater independence for the Indochinese while preventing the U.S. mission from aggravating the French.¹³

The Melby-Erskine Mission

Just ten days after Heath's arrival in Saigon, the first of many survey missions that he would have to manage during his tenure arrived to examine the situation in Indochina and make recommendations to Washington regarding how a U.S. military assistance programme could be made effective. The Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) mission was led by the State Department official John F. Melby and Major General Graves B. Erskine of the U.S. Marines. Remaining in Indochina for three weeks, the mission required considerable preparation and careful handling by the legation. It compiled large amounts of documentation for the group, translated reports provided by French officials, organised meetings with key French and Vietnamese figures, and set up trips to various parts of the country so that the mission could assess military units, installations and the war.¹⁴ Heath and other figures in the legation also travelled with the mission as intermediaries for the group.

One of Heath's central concerns was ensuring that members of the mission were made aware of the importance of avoiding actions that might cause unnecessary Franco-American

¹¹ Memorandum for the President by James E. Webb, 17 May 1950, Box 1832, Official File, White House Central Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, HSTL.

¹² Hanson Baldwin, 'The Crisis in Indo-China: French Reforms are Termed Inadequate to Meet Increasing Communist Danger', *NYT*, 5 January 1951, p. 4.

¹³ Telegram 2355 from Heath to Secretary of State, 29 June 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 433.

¹⁴ Time Schedule of the Melby Mission, Saigon, 17 July 1950, 1950 (Chronological File), May – December, Box 12, John F. Melby Papers, HSTL.

friction. If Heath had any doubts over French sensitivity to American involvement in Vietnam, he was quickly made aware of it. After Heath presented his diplomatic credentials in Phnom Penh and Saigon, French officials complained to him about the absence of any reference to the French Union in his letters.¹⁵ If members of the MDAP mission made similar gaffes, publicly criticised French actions, or got too close to Vietnamese nationalists then the Truman administration worried that the French might follow through on their threats to abandon the fight in Indochina. When Pignon offered 'polite but unsolicited suggestions about [the] course the mission should pursue in contact with [the] Viet[name]se', Heath assured him that the MDAP mission had been briefed on such issues and would operate in accordance with Franco-American agreements.¹⁶

Despite Heath's best efforts, it did not take long for the mission to irritate French officials. General Erskine, in particular, made a poor impression. Describing him as a 'military prima donna if there was ever one', Heath reported to Washington that the general had 'got his feelings severely lacerated and behaved pretty badly to the French and everyone around him during the trip North'.¹⁷ Reports from British diplomats in Saigon indicated that Melby had upset French officials, too. A Reuters correspondent told them that 'Melby more or less accused the French of not getting on with the war' at a press conference.¹⁸ Heath was also outraged when Melby complained that the legation had provided insufficient preparatory material for his mission.¹⁹ He leapt to his staff's defence in a message to the head of the State Department's Far Eastern Bureau, Dean Rusk, in January 1951.²⁰ 'The legation compiled a considerable amount of documentation for the group, which we had the greatest difficulty in persuading them to examine, and which was not in fact studied by them until the all-night drafting sessions of the final two days in Saigon', Heath argued.²¹

However, more important was the MDAP mission's findings, which, as historian William Duiker underlines, 'broke with the official optimism that had marked much of the recent debate in Washington and painted a dark picture of the situation in Indochina'.²² Although the mission accepted conventional wisdom regarding Indochina's Cold War importance and

¹⁵ Heath Diary Entry, 13 July 1950, in Heath to Hoey, 9 August 1950, lot 54 D190, Indo-China, 1948-1951, Box 7, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁶ Telegram 100 from Heath to Secretary of State, 25 July 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 837.

¹⁷ Heath to Lacy, 2 August 1950, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1950-1952, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁸ Memorandum from Saigon to Foreign Office, 6 August 1950, FO 959/54, TNA.

¹⁹ Foreign Military Assistance Coordinating Committee, Final Report of Joint MDAP Survey Mission to Southeast Asia, 11 December 1950, Southeast Asia File – General, 1950-52, Joint MDAP Survey, Southeast Asia Regional Conference, Box 11, John F. Melby Papers, HSTL.

²⁰ Rusk would go on to play a key role in the U.S. decision to intervene militarily in Vietnam in 1965 as secretary of state under President Lyndon B. Johnson.

²¹ Heath to Rusk, 15 January 1951, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1950-1952, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

²² Duiker, p. 99.

recommended increases in aid, it stressed that the French military were in a weak position and questioned the very policy that Heath had just arrived to implement. Melby argued that the French military could only prevent a communist victory for a limited period and that the long range problem could only be solved by granting greater autonomy to the Vietnamese.²³ Melby proposed a deadline for independence, a gradual build-up and takeover of administrative responsibilities by the Vietnamese, and a UN public guarantee and supervision of the transfer of power. Failure to do so, Melby felt, would turn the Vietnamese against the West and ‘constitute a continuing drain on French strength and in [the] end benefit only the Communists’.²⁴

Before the mission’s preliminary findings were sent back to Washington, Heath and Melby argued for hours over the report’s content. ‘We just didn’t see eye-to-eye on anything’, Melby recalled.²⁵ Although Heath welcomed Melby’s report as a ‘pessimistic but valuable appraisal of Indochina policy’ and recognised that ‘present French policy and efforts may not succeed’, he disagreed with several of the mission’s conclusions.²⁶ Heath felt it premature to ‘write off our new policy of both encouraging local nationalism and French efforts in Indochina’, despite the difficulties inherent in such a policy.²⁷ He argued that French military morale remained high and that French military opinion in Indochina maintained ‘that Viet Minh guerrilla and terrorism activities can within two years be reduced to local police portions’, as long as the Chinese Communists didn’t make big step ups in aid to the Viet Minh.²⁸ Heath deemed any kind of political *démarche* to the French to cede further control to the Vietnamese as unnecessary at this time.

Despite Heath’s defence of the current policy, Melby’s argument found some support in Washington. On his return to the United States, Melby reported his findings to representatives of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff.²⁹ On 16 August, the Policy Planning Staff prepared a memorandum stressing the need for a re-examination of policy. Criticising the French for their prioritisation of the military situation, they concluded, like Melby had, that ‘the only hope for a solution lies in the adoption of certain drastic political measures by the French themselves’.³⁰ They thus recommended that the United States highlight to the French the necessity of ‘independence by a definite date – perhaps two years hence, at a maximum’ in order to improve Franco-Vietnamese relations and to generate greater Southeast Asian support for Bao Dai’s

²³ Telegram 171 from Heath to Secretary of State, 7 August 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 847; p. 848.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 848.

²⁵ Oral History Interview with John F. Melby, 14 November 1986, Interviewed by Robert Accinelli, Internet Copy, HSTL, <<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/melby2.htm>> [accessed 19 May 2018].

²⁶ Telegram 171 from Heath to Secretary of State, 7 August 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 849.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*; Telegram 183 from Heath to Secretary of State, 9 August 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 850.

²⁹ Melby, p. 109.

³⁰ Memorandum Prepared in the Policy Planning Staff, ‘United States Policy Toward Indochina in the Light of Recent Developments’, 16 August 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 858.

government.³¹ Such a move, they argued, would improve the Bao Dai government's chance of success, allow the United States to reduce its commitment and facilitate the French 'the least humiliating means for the inevitable retirement from the Indochina scene'.³² 'If Paris does not feel that it can adopt a bolder political approach with respect [to] Indochina', they warned, 'we must recognize that the French and we may be heading into a debacle which neither of us can afford'.³³

However, Heath had not given up. On 23 August he argued his case again. He was convinced that the current policy could be successful. In his eyes, limited concessions within the framework of the 8 March Accords, in particular the acceleration of the development of a Vietnamese National Army (VNA), could 'point [the] way out of [the] dangerous situation of political impasse and inconclusive military progress'.³⁴ This decision, he felt, 'might also help convince the doubters of the honesty of French intentions to grant them full independence' and draw greater indigenous support to Bao Dai's government.³⁵ Heath had an important ally in the shape of U.S. ambassador to France, David Bruce.³⁶ A few days earlier the influential diplomat had cabled the State Department along similar lines. Highly sensitive to French political opinion, Bruce suggested that 'any major alteration in the organic political relationship between France and the Indochinese states is impossible of realization within the immediate future'.³⁷ Like Heath, he believed that the 'creation of a strong Vietnamese army [...] seems to us to be the logical starting point to bring an end to the present unhealthy state of affairs'.³⁸

While Melby injected renewed energy into the debate, by early September it was clear that the State Department had sided with Heath and Bruce.³⁹ In a cable to Heath, Acheson was full of praise for the reporting from his diplomats in Paris and Saigon. He wrote, '[Yo]ur[']s and

³¹ Ibid. Out of the thirty-three nations that had recognised the Associated States of Indochina by September 1952, the only Asian nations to do so were Thailand and South Korea, strong allies of the United States. Hoey to Heath, 26 September 1952, 360 – Government Recognition, Box 14, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

³² Memorandum Prepared in the Policy Planning Staff, 'United States Policy Toward Indochina in the Light of Recent Developments', 16 August 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 858.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Telegram 265 from Heath to Secretary of State, 23 August 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 865.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ A former OSS official, Bruce had served as the U.S. ambassador in Paris since 1949. He would later undertake two other high profile ambassadorships in West Germany and Britain. Christopher Goscha, 'Bruce, David Kirkpatrick Este', *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War (1945-1954)*, <<https://indochine.uqam.ca/en/historical-dictionary/182-bruce-david-kirkpatrick-este-18981977.html>> [accessed 22 May 2018].

³⁷ Telegram 845 from Bruce to Secretary of State, 17 August 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 859.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Less than three years later, Melby was fired by the State Department because of his romantic ties to a suspected communist, the acclaimed American author Lillian Hellman. On the affair between Melby and Hellman and his subsequent firing, see Robert P. Newman, *The Cold War Romance of Lillian Hellman and John Melby* (Chapel Hill, NC; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

Paris[’s] recent reporting this related subj[ect]s[,] of which [yo]ur Aug[ust] 23 outstanding[,] have been very helpful’.⁴⁰ For Acheson, the national army project represented a means to satisfy the twin goals of supporting the French military and Vietnamese nationalism, and would also allow French units to begin to be sent back to strengthen European defences against Soviet attack.⁴¹ With the security of Vietnam reliant on the French military, Acheson was reluctant to do anything which might make them lessen their commitment or that might reduce French cooperation in Europe.⁴² U.S. policy would continue as before; Heath’s reporting had helped legitimise and maintain this policy.

RC4 and the Search for ‘Middle Ground’ Relations

In autumn 1950, a series of critical defeats for the French along the northern border of Vietnam undermined Heath’s view that the French could break the back of the Viet Minh’s resistance within two years. French forces were driven out of a chain of forts along Route Coloniale 4 (RC4) by a Viet Minh force supplied with Chinese military hardware. French forces lost control of virtually all of North Vietnam to the Red River; the defeat opened up much of the frontier with China and panic began to sweep French residents in Hanoi and Haiphong. Hanoi Consul Wendell Blancke reported in mid-October that Air France flights from Hanoi were starting to book up with French wives being sent to safety by their husbands.⁴³ Blancke was himself making plans for the evacuation of U.S. consulate staff and American citizens from the area, and rumours circulated that French military officials were chewing over whether to abandon Tonkin altogether and withdraw back to their defensive lines in northern Annam.⁴⁴

These military defeats were also accompanied by worrying political developments. The anti-communist Vietnamese Government led by Prime Minister Tran Van Huu remained unable to gain a popular following and Franco-Vietnamese relations had recently taken a turn for the worse. A wealthy landowner, French citizen and former governor of South Vietnam, Huu publicly criticised French interference in Vietnamese internal affairs to reporters in October and

⁴⁰ Telegram 238 from Secretary of State to Saigon, 1 September 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 870.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 868-870.

⁴² On Acheson’s primary focus on Europe, see Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It* (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 1990), p. 362. Even the PSA, formerly a bastion for those who had stressed the importance of supporting Vietnamese independence, had by the time of Melby’s mission become more pro-French in their outlook.

⁴³ Telegram 132 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 17 October 1950, 751g.00/10-1750, Box 3668, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁴⁴ On Blancke’s preparation for an evacuation of the U.S. Consulate in Hanoi, see Telegram 75 from Secretary of State to Hanoi, 24 October 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 909; Telegram 170 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 29 October 1950, 751g.00/10-2950, Box 3668, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. On rumours that France was considering abandoning Tonkin, see Telegram 583 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 18 October 1950, 751g.00/10-1850, Box 3668, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

stressed the need for increasing concessions if his government was to be able to generate greater public support.⁴⁵ Pignon told Heath that Huu's statement had been received very badly in France and that if it were republished in the French press it might strengthen parts of the French National Assembly inclined to pull France out of Indochina.⁴⁶ On the other side, however, Heath observed that French treatment of the Vietnamese was doing little to alleviate the tension. Heath was critical of how Jean Letourneau, the minister in charge of relations with the Associated States, handled himself in meetings with Vietnamese officials during his tour of the country.⁴⁷ The Saigon minister reported to Washington that Letourneau 'was blunt, matter of fact, by no means unfriendly but making no particular effort [to] cultivate friendly feelings for [the] French or to consider Vietnamese sensibilities'.⁴⁸

Despite his concern over the military and political situation, Heath cabled the State Department in early November 1950 insisting, in what he admitted was a 'highly conditioned optimistic appreciation' of the military situation, that it was 'far from hopeless' and that the French could conceivably retake the offensive in the new year and drive the Viet Minh back.⁴⁹ He argued that there are 'several things we can do and there are measures that we may be able to persuade [the] French and Vietnamese to institute which, if implemented urgently and with determination, might solve [the] situation of stalemate fairly rapidly'.⁵⁰ He urged the faster delivery of U.S. aid, support for French reinforcements from areas of their empire where troops were less essential, the development of the VNA and small political concessions to the Vietnamese. Heath also felt that greater effort should be made to publicise the French commitment to eventual Vietnamese independence, although no concrete date should be set. Disappointingly for Vietnamese nationalists, Heath insisted that the moment was not ripe to press the French into further major transfers of power; such an initiative might push the French into abandoning the fight. On 24 October, Letourneau told Heath that 'if [the] Viet[name]s[e] or others continued [to] misunderstand French motives in IC' that 'he would have no hesitancy in

⁴⁵ Telegram 592 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 19 October 1950, 751g.00/10-1950, Box 3668, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁴⁶ Telegram 668 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 26 October 1950, 751g.00/10-2650, Box 3668, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁴⁷ Letourneau had served in a number of governmental posts prior to his appointment to oversee relations with the new states in Indochina in 1949. In 1952, as we will see later, he was appointed high commissioner in Indochina. Christopher Goscha, 'Letourneau, Jean', *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War (1945-1954)*, <<http://indochine.uqam.ca/en/historical-dictionary/811-letourneau-jean-19071986.html>> [accessed 24 May 2018].

⁴⁸ Telegram 755 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 3 November 1950, 751g.00/11-350, Box 3668, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁴⁹ Telegram 734 from Heath to Secretary of State, 1 November 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 914.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

recommending to [the] French Government that French troops be withdrawn to [their] bases and prepared to embark for France'.⁵¹

Nevertheless, Heath was aware of the importance of finding some way to increase the Vietnamese Government's effectiveness. He wrote, 'This in the end is the central problem and the one element the US cannot supply; namely, the will and capacity of the native government to govern'.⁵² In particular, he felt that it was essential that the United States find a way to improve the performance of Bao Dai. Despite Bao Dai's inclination for gambling and hunting, U.S. officials saw the Vietnamese chief of state as the only man capable of drawing the anti-communist elements of the country together. However, Bao Dai's continued absences from Vietnam and inability to fully grasp the powers he had been given frustrated those Americans who came into contact with him. Although Bao Dai hoped to wait for further French concessions that would give his government greater legitimacy, Heath pressed on him the negative effects of his inactivity and how this might harm his government's hopes of obtaining further American aid and international support.⁵³ Heath urged him to visit the war-torn north, to make greater public appearances and hoped that 'frequent American contacts with him may heighten his performance'.⁵⁴ Alongside minor French concessions, Heath supposed this would improve matters.

Though news of the French defeats along RC4 eventually reached the legation, American diplomats were frustrated by the speed at which this information arrived from French officials.⁵⁵ 'Not until the reverses of Route Four were an accomplished fact did the French furnish any representatives of this Legation with a true and current account of the actual state of affairs', Heath complained to the State Department in early October.⁵⁶ Political liaison was equally as poor and all of this after Heath had been promised close French collaboration by Pignon upon his arrival.⁵⁷ Heath called for something to be done to address the problem of Franco-American

⁵¹ Telegram 657 from Heath to Secretary of State, 24 October 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 907.

⁵² Telegram 734 from Heath to Secretary of State, 1 November 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 917.

⁵³ Telegram 220 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 15 August 1950, 751g.00/8-1550, Box 3667, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁵⁴ For suggestions that the United States establish a permanent representative stationed in Dalat to work closely with Bao Dai and improve his performance, see Telegram 933 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 23 November 1950, 751g.00/11-2350, Box 3669, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁵⁵ See Telegram 98 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 26 September 1950, 751g.00/9-2650, Box 3668, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 100 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 27 September 1950, 751g.00/9-2750, Box 3668, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁵⁶ Foreign Service Despatch 245 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Transmittal of a Memorandum of Conversation of French Reverses in Tonkin', 10 October 1950, 751g.00/10-1050, Box 3668, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁵⁷ Telegram 25 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 7 July 1950, 751g.00/7-750, Box 3667, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

liaison in Indochina. The State Department duly forwarded his requests on to the U.S. Embassy in Paris to take directly to leading French officials.

However, improving defective Franco-American liaison was just the beginning for Heath and others in the legation. Frustrated by the autumn defeats, and realising that the Korean War and the MDAP report would most likely result in increased U.S. aid to Indochina, Heath pressed for increased American influence in the country.⁵⁸ While he suggested that France must continue to bear the major burden and have the greatest voice in Indochina matters, he felt that U.S. 'influence must also be felt not only through the gravitational pull of our aid program but in actual participation in certain controls and in accelerating certain French concessions'.⁵⁹ He pressed for the United States to take up a greater role in war planning, the training and organisation of the VNA, the fiscal planning of the Vietnamese government, propaganda, political warfare and Vietnamese internal affairs. 'Nowhere else in the world', Heath suggested in November, 'have we been willing to spend the sums and make [the] effort now required [in] I[ndo-]C[hina] without substantial and continuing opportunities to influence [the] directions and course of [the] national enterprise we are supplementing'.⁶⁰ In a call for the legation to assume powers beyond those of a normal diplomatic mission, Heath called for the development of a 'middle ground between consultation involving full US responsibility and routine diplomatic contacts'.⁶¹

Although most U.S. officials were keen to have a greater say in the Indochina struggle, Heath's cables received a mixed response. Bruce agreed with the desirability of increasing Franco-American liaison for the purpose of keeping the United States informed, but was wary of Heath's bolder suggestions about establishing a direct advisory role for the American diplomatic mission in Indochina. He reported to the State Department that 'any US effort to act in [an] advisory capacity [...] without [the] accompanying responsibility and [the] authority to ensure [the] acceptance of US advice, would probably be productive of friction rather than cooperation'.⁶² The State Department agreed. In their messages to Paris they urged the embassy to take the matter of improved military and political liaison to French leaders but made no

⁵⁸ However, one memorandum suggests that Heath's calls for greater influence for the U.S. mission in Indochina were driven by Edmund Gullion, Heath's deputy in the legation. As we shall see later, Gullion felt that the U.S. should be much more pro-active in pressurising the French to grant greater concessions to the Vietnamese. For an indication that Gullion was the driving force behind at least one of Heath's cables in this period, see Memorandum by Bray, 'Kibitzing in Indochina', 2 November 1950, lot 57 D472, Indochina, 1949-1950, Box 1, Records Relating to the Mutual Security Assistance Program (Far East), 1949-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁵⁹ Telegram 265 from Heath to Secretary of State, 23 August 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 865.

⁶⁰ Telegram 869 from Heath to Secretary of State, 15 November 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 922.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Telegram 2356 from Paris to Secretary of State, 30 October 1950, 751g.00/10-3050, Box 3668, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

mention of Heath's other suggestions.⁶³ The French Foreign Office's reply to American suggestions was lukewarm.⁶⁴ Although they seemed open to discussing the idea of improving Franco-American liaison, they ultimately proved resistant to initiating any formal changes.⁶⁵ In early December, the newly appointed high commissioner in Indochina, General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, made similarly ambiguous promises about addressing the issue as he prepared to depart for his new post.⁶⁶

De Lattre and the Quiet Americans

For Heath, the necessity of creating a 'middle ground' position for the U.S. legation quickly subsided. De Lattre's arrival in Indochina on 19 December 1950 heralded the beginning of a new period of optimism for the U.S. minister about French chances in Indochina. De Lattre had enjoyed a stellar military career. He impressed as a young soldier in the trenches of World War I and led the First French Army as it marched successfully across the Rhine and Danube in World War II. Dramatic, flamboyant and inspirational, the general was just the type of military leader that U.S. officials had been hoping for in Indochina.⁶⁷ As his plane touched down in Saigon, he appeared at the top of the stairs and carefully pulled on a pair of white gloves. 'The symbolism was not lost on anybody [...]. He had come there to clean up this mess', one American diplomat recalled.⁶⁸ And for a time, de Lattre did just that. He began by successfully reviving sagging French military morale and confidence after the RC4 defeats. He cancelled the order to evacuate women and children from Hanoi and tirelessly visited his troops in the field. Reports from U.S. officials in Hanoi indicated that de Lattre had created a renewed optimism about the war.⁶⁹ The general also successfully gathered reinforcements and obtained extra military material from the United States, including napalm.⁷⁰ In discussions with Heath, de Lattre appeared optimistic, predicting that the French would win a victory within two years if China did not

⁶³ Telegram 2561 from Department of State to Paris, 30 October 1950, 751g.00/10-3050, Box 3668, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁶⁴ The French initially seemed open to the American proposal to improve liaison. See Telegram 2858 from Paris to Secretary of State, 20 November 1950, 751g.00/11-2050, Box 3669, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁶⁵ Telegram 3498 from Paris to Secretary of State, 18 December 1950, 751g.00/12-1850, Box 3669, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁶⁶ Telegram 3218 from Bruce to Secretary of State, 6 December 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 942.

⁶⁷ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 261-262.

⁶⁸ Oral History Interview with Edmund Gullion, in Maurer, p. 65.

⁶⁹ For de Lattre's improvement of French civil and military morale, see Telegram 281 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 27 December 1950, 751g.00/12-2750, Box 3669, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 308 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 3 January 1951, 751g.00/1-351, Box 3669, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁷⁰ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 266-267.

intervene.⁷¹ This prediction aligned with Heath's earlier assessments of French chances in Indochina.

It was not long before de Lattre would have to back up his claims. In January 1951, General Vo Nguyen Giap, the Viet Minh military commander, launched another offensive, targeting Vinh Yen as his starting point for an assault on the Red River Delta and Hanoi.⁷² Viet Minh forces were repelled by de Lattre's mobilisation of large numbers of troops from other parts of Indochina and the heaviest aerial bombardment of the Franco-Viet Minh War.⁷³ Following his victory, de Lattre soaked up the praise. Popular opinion among those in Indochina was, as Blancke reported, that 'Hanoi would be [a] goner by now if De Lattre had not replaced Carpentier who [had] fought [a] colonial war from Saigon'.⁷⁴ Two more attempts by Giap to break into the delta at Mao Khe and Dong Trieu in March, and in the southeast along the Day River in May, were similarly repulsed. Viet Minh momentum had been temporarily halted.

De Lattre's arrival in Indochina coincided with the further transfer of powers to the Vietnamese government. Talks at Pau in southern France, which had been ongoing since June 1950, culminated in November 1950 and by early 1951 the transfer of foreign trade, customs, finances and other services to the Vietnamese was well under way. In his speeches, de Lattre stressed that Vietnam was now free and that he had come to help protect its freedom. Aware that France could not continue to bear its military burden, he set out to accelerate the development of the VNA, a project that had so far received only cursory support from French officials, and urged the Vietnamese people to join the anti-communist effort.⁷⁵ Heath was impressed by such moves. He described the Pau Accords as having 'established [a] new high water mark [in] I[ndo-]C[hina's] progress toward independence' and in early February reported that the situation appeared much brighter now than it had been three months ago. Although Chinese intervention remained a threat and the political situation gloomy, de Lattre, U.S. aid and the Pau Conference had had a salutary effect on the situation, the minister argued.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Telegram 1123 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 23 December 1950, 751g.00/12-2350, Box 3669, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁷² A former history teacher, Giap had been a member of the Indochina Communist Party since 1940. He held a number of positions within the DRV before his appointment as the government's supreme military commander in 1948. For more, see Christopher Goscha, 'Vo Nguyen Giap', *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War (1945-1954)*, <<http://indochine.uqam.ca/en/component/content/article/1563-vo-nguyen-giap-vn-1911.html>> [accessed 24 May 2018].

⁷³ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 268-271.

⁷⁴ Telegram 366 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 23 January 1951, 751g.00/1-2351, Box 3669, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁷⁵ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 275-276.

⁷⁶ Telegram 1157 from Heath to Secretary of State, 1 January 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 333; Minutes of the 13th Meeting of the Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee, 7 February 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, pp. 376-377.

Other officials within the American diplomatic mission in Indochina were more sceptical about recent developments.⁷⁷ De Lattre's military successes in the delta were heartening, Edmund Gullion, Heath's deputy in the legation, argued during the minister's absence in Washington for consultations, but it would be a mistake 'to view these victories as turning points in [the] Indochinese struggle'.⁷⁸ He reasoned that de Lattre's forces at Vinh Yen had enjoyed the benefit of non-duplicative factors; fine weather conditions had allowed the French to make use of their air superiority and Giap made the error of accepting battle in broad daylight in terrain favourable to the French. Additionally, Gullion reminded the State Department that the extension of further powers to the Vietnamese in the Pau Conference had not yet made Vietnam's independence comparable to South Africa or Canada's free association with Great Britain; France continued to direct military matters and hold great influence in internal Vietnamese politics.⁷⁹ Services transferred to the Vietnamese at Pau were placed under the authorisation of agencies comprised of Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian and French representatives. With these agencies only able to make decisions by unanimous consent, France could veto those proposals it did not like.⁸⁰

A Princeton graduate and Foreign Service Officer who bore the nickname 'Flash' from the popular American comic book character Flash Gordon, Gullion had arrived in Saigon as chargé d'affaires in December 1949 convinced of the need to support the French.⁸¹ His earlier postings had taken him to Marseille, Salonika and Helsinki.⁸² However, a few months in he had become persuaded that this policy was flawed and that the United States should be doing more to develop Vietnamese independence.⁸³ Although he felt that considerable damage had already been done by France's inability to grant further autonomy to the Vietnamese government, he believed that the situation could be salvaged if U.S. officials could persuade France to cede further control and develop an independent Vietnamese army. 'I thought we were right on the cusp of the crisis, at a point where we could still pull it off', he later recalled.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Similar struggles between diplomats over the focus of U.S. policy were occurring in American missions in other parts of the French Empire. See Oral History Interview with Christian A. Chapman, 3 March 1990, Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, *Frontline Diplomacy*, <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004cha06/2004cha06.pdf>> [accessed 26 March 2018].

⁷⁸ Telegram 1390 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 9 February 1951, 751g.00/2-951, Box 3669, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁷⁹ Telegram 1327 from Saigon to Secretary of State, [Section 3 of 3], 28 January 1951, 751g.00/1-2851, Box 3669, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁸⁰ Spector, pp. 133-134.

⁸¹ Author's Interview with William J. Cunningham, 21 August 2012.

⁸² Wolfgang Saxon, 'Edmund Asbury Gullion, 85, Wide-Ranging Career Envoy', *NYT*, 31 March 1998, <<http://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/31/world/edmund-asbury-gullion-85-wide-ranging-career-envoy.html>> [accessed 13 January, 2018].

⁸³ Topping, p. 152; Oral History Interview with Edmund Gullion, in Maurer, p. 63.

⁸⁴ Oral History Interview with Edmund Gullion, in Maurer, p. 64.

To anti-communist Vietnamese in the government and those still sitting on the fence – who doubted France’s commitment to Vietnamese independence, complained of French interference in their affairs and hoped for U.S. intervention with the French – Gullion’s views must have been encouraging. His reports offered a stark contrast to Heath’s. While the minister lamented the lack of a Vietnamese Winston Churchill to inspire anti-communist nationalists to join the fight against the Viet Minh, Gullion doubted that able nationalist leaders would associate themselves with a Vietnamese government with such limited power and so closely associated with French colonial control.⁸⁵ Gullion also questioned the likelihood of a French victory within two years, as de Lattre confidently predicted and Heath seemed to believe, and urged policymakers to employ American aid as a lever to pressure the French into making further political concessions.⁸⁶ The French would not pack up and leave as some feared, Gullion argued, as great economic motives and other privileges remained for France in Vietnam.⁸⁷

However, Gullion was reliant on Heath’s good will in relaying his reports to Washington. The minister, who felt American interests lay with closer support of the French, often refused to do so and even limited Gullion’s access to cables arriving from the State Department.⁸⁸ Restricted in this way, Gullion grasped the opportunity to put his side of the story over to the State Department during Heath’s absences from Saigon. As Kempton B. Jenkins, an American diplomat who briefly visited Indochina in 1951, recalls, ‘the minute Heath would go away on vacation, or left to go home, Gullion started firing off policy telegrams questioning the wisdom of where we were headed’.⁸⁹ His cables, however, found few willing ears in Washington.⁹⁰ As William Gibson in the PSA Office commented when Gullion left Saigon and came into the Department for his debrief in autumn 1952, ‘I continue to have the utmost respect for his

⁸⁵ Minutes of the 13th Meeting of the Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee, 7 February 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 377; Telegram 1302 from Gullion to Secretary of State, 24 January 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 361.

⁸⁶ For Gullion’s doubts about de Lattre’s military prediction, see Telegram 763 from Gullion to Secretary of State, 4 October 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 526-528. For Gullion’s feeling that U.S. aid should be used as a lever with the French, see Telegram 852 from Gullion to Secretary of State, 16 October 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, pp. 534-538.

⁸⁷ Telegram 837 from Gullion to Secretary of State, 15 October 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, pp. 532-533.

⁸⁸ Topping, p. 154.

⁸⁹ Oral History Interview with Kempton B. Jenkins, 23 February 1995, Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, *Frontline Diplomacy*, <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004jen01/2004jen01.pdf>> [accessed 26 March 2018].

⁹⁰ There were Americans within the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy in Washington who pressed for the United States to take a tougher position with the French and urge them to make concessions. However, they tended to be in more peripheral positions and, therefore, were less able to influence policy. Andrew J. Rotter, *The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 213.

judgment even though we disagree more than I had expected'.⁹¹ Heavily dominated by the European Bureau, the State Department, as they had done after the Melby mission, tended to side with Heath.⁹² Cold War imperatives demanded that the French military effort be prioritised.⁹³

Gullion's opportunity to influence Washington policymakers was also limited by his more junior status. As deputy, he did not enjoy the same opportunities to attend talks in Washington and meet with leading policymakers as Heath.⁹⁴ The minister travelled back to Washington three times during his first two years in Indochina. All three occasions corresponded with important Franco-American summits and enabled him to better grasp the feeling in Washington and to maintain his own influence.⁹⁵ He participated in key meetings on Indochina, introduced leading French and Indochinese figures to the American bureaucracy and spoke privately with policymakers on U.S. policy in Southeast Asia.⁹⁶ Heath's reporting remained in accord with the policy favoured in Washington during his first two years in Saigon and his telegraphic advice was regularly praised by those in the PSA office.⁹⁷

Gullion did press the matter on the minister during legation meetings and with influential Americans visiting Indochina.⁹⁸ As Gullion recalled, 'In briefings, of course, I could say what I thought. To his credit, Heath didn't interfere with that. If prominent people came through, I spoke freely'.⁹⁹ Among those that Gullion spoke to was Congressman John F. Kennedy. The future president arrived in Indochina in October 1951 as part of a seven week tour of the Middle East and Asia designed to polish his foreign policy credentials in anticipation for a run at the Senate.

⁹¹ Gibson to Heath, 23 September 1952, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1950-1952, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

⁹² See Oral History Interview with Edmund Gullion, in Maurer, p. 63; p. 65.

⁹³ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 267.

⁹⁴ For the importance of such visits in maintaining an envoy's influence with their home government, see John W. Young, *David Bruce and Diplomatic Practice: An American Ambassador in London, 1961-69* (New York; London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 48.

⁹⁵ Heath returned to Washington for Prime Minister Rene Pleven's visit in January-February 1951, de Lattre's visit in September 1951 and Letourneau's visit in June 1952.

⁹⁶ Heath met with, for example, Secretary of State Dean Acheson on numerous occasions: prior to his departure to Saigon on 9 June 1950; in a meeting with David Bruce, Jessup, Rusk and Bonbright on 29 January 1951; on 4 September 1951 and then 6 September 1951 with a delegation of Cambodian officials; and then in a Franco-American discussion on 16 June 1952. Appointment Books File, 1949-1957, Box 46, Dean G. Acheson Papers, HSTL.

⁹⁷ For example, see Lacy to Heath, 15 January 1952, Documents from TS/EO Folder Maintained in Ambassador's Office, 1951-1953, Box 74, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, General Records, 1936-1963, RG 84, USNA.

⁹⁸ For an example of the type of discussions that occurred between Heath and Gullion in legation meetings, see Robert Shaplen, *A Forest of Tigers* (New York: Knopf, 1956). According to some U.S. officials, *A Forest of Tigers* provides a fairly accurate account of the dispute between Heath and Gullion over the direction of U.S. policy in Vietnam. See Oral History Interview with Kempton B. Jenkins, 23 February 1995, Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, Frontline Diplomacy, <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004jen01/2004jen01.pdf>> [accessed 26 March 2018].

⁹⁹ Oral History Interview with Edmund Gullion, in Maurer, p. 66.

The two men already knew each other, having spoken intermittently since 1946 when Gullion, then working for Acheson in the State Department, helped Kennedy with a speech on U.S. foreign policy.¹⁰⁰ In his meeting with Kennedy, Gullion stressed the need for the United States to provide greater support to Vietnamese nationalism. Kennedy listened carefully to Gullion and found that several other Americans he spoke to in Indochina thought similarly. When he returned home, Kennedy told Congress that America was doing too little to support the nationalist aspirations of the Vietnamese people and had instead aligned itself with a crumbling French empire.¹⁰¹ De Lattre was enraged. He wrote to Heath, 'I would never have expected that an American representative whom I had received in my home with special regard and to whom I have had every facility in Indochina given, should display so grossly his complete absence of appreciation and his total miscomprehension of the situation'.¹⁰² No doubt de Lattre's mood would have worsened had he known Gullion's influence. Such visits gave Gullion a means to challenge the focus of U.S. policy.

In Indochina, the vast majority of the U.S. diplomatic mission appeared to share Gullion's views and some were outwardly critical of French policies.¹⁰³ As Jim Crane, a USIS official who arrived in Vietnam in 1951, recalled, 'All of us, certainly including me, were full of the Four Freedoms in these days [...]. We used to grouse all the time and mumble at meetings. Any time the French policy would be mentioned, we'd mutter, "Fat chance" or "They don't mean it" or "They're just supporting the *colons*"'.¹⁰⁴ Robert Blum, the head of STEM, the agency which provided economic and technical aid directly to the Vietnamese, was one of the most outspoken critics of French obstructionism in Vietnam and Gullion's chief ally. A former Yale professor of international relations and OSS official, Blum had worked on the Marshall Plan in France and for the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) in China prior to his posting to

¹⁰⁰ For further information on Gullion's relationship with John F. Kennedy prior to his 1951 visit, see Oral History Interview with Edmund Gullion I, 17 July 1964, Washington D.C., Oral History Project, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

¹⁰¹ Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume 2, 1939-1955* (New York: Viking, 1994), p. 422.

¹⁰² De Lattre quoted in Gautier to Heath, 6 December 1951, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1950-1952, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰³ Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution*, p. 86; Oral History Interview with Edmund Gullion, in Maurer, p. 66; Blum to Griffin, 26 May 1951, Folder 5, Box 54, Series I, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. However, it is important to note that Heath was not alone in his views in Indochina. Other influential Americans in the diplomatic mission shared his view about the situation and felt U.S. policy correct in its prioritisation on keeping the French fighting. Lee Brady, head of USIS, was a renowned Francophile and William Leonhart, second secretary and counselor in the legation, felt that France should not be pushed to concede further powers. For Leonhart's views, see Memorandum from Leonhart to Lacy, 'Response to Request for Additional Measures which might Affect the Indochinese Situation Favorably and U.S. Action in the Premises', 1 April 1952, lot 58 D266, Box 1, 1950-56; Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs: Office of Southeast Asian Affairs; Subject Files, RG 59, USNA; for Brady, see Oral History Interview with Jim Crane, in Maurer, p. 60.

¹⁰⁴ Oral History Interview with Jim Crane, in Maurer, pp. 59-60.

Vietnam.¹⁰⁵ Like Gullion, he urged the need for greater support of Vietnamese independence and criticised the State Department for its reluctance to take up a more forceful position with the French. He told William Foster of the ECA in April 1951, ‘Many of us out here have felt that the United States should have attempted much more actively than it has to promote stable government and effective independence, even if this meant more political intervention with both the French and the Vietnamese’.¹⁰⁶ Blum, too, believed that greater American pressure would not force a French retreat from Indochina.¹⁰⁷

To some U.S. officials in the diplomatic mission during this period, the solution to Indochina’s political problems lay in the promotion and strengthening of a Third Force.¹⁰⁸ The theory went that only a strong Vietnamese nationalist unaffiliated and untainted with either French colonial rule or communism could hope to provide a viable alternative to Ho Chi Minh and build a popular anti-communist government. To readers of Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American*, the concept of a Third Force may be familiar. In fact, much of Greene’s famous Indochina novel, including the concept of a Third Force, was drawn directly from the novelist’s trips to Vietnam during the early 1950s.¹⁰⁹ The inspiration for Greene’s idealistic Quiet American, Alden Pyle, scholars seem to concur, was likely a composite of American officials he met, with Leo Hochstetter of STEM as the chief inspiration.¹¹⁰

While U.S. officials retrospectively denied that American diplomats were actively building a Third Force in this period, evidence suggests that several Americans in Vietnam did exhibit interest in a number of Third Force figures.¹¹¹ Representatives from the country’s various politico-religious groups requested aid from the U.S. legation and American diplomats journeyed into the countryside to view many of their operations first-hand.¹¹² Jean Leroy’s UMDC was one

¹⁰⁵ Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 76; Shaplen, *Lost Revolution*, p. 86. The ECA was established in 1948 to administer economic assistance and financial aid to Europe as part of the Marshall Plan. The agency also worked in Asia, establishing an office in Vietnam in 1950. The office that implemented ECA policies in Vietnam was STEM. ‘The Economic Cooperation Authority’, <<https://www.marshallfoundation.org/marshall/the-marshall-plan/history-marshall-plan/economic-cooperation-authority/>> [accessed 25 May 2018].

¹⁰⁶ Blum to Foster, 20 April 1951, Folder 54, Box 54, Series I, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Oral History Interview with Jim Crane, in Maurer, p. 60.

¹⁰⁹ Graham Greene, *Ways of Escape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), pp. 164-165.

¹¹⁰ Ruane, p. 434. For a detailed discussion of the real life inspirations behind Greene’s characters in *The Quiet American*, see Sherry, Chapters 24, 26, 27, 28 and 29.

¹¹¹ Gullion recalled, ‘I wouldn’t say that there were lots of alternatives to Ho. And it wasn’t enough for us to find one, it had to be someone believable’, in Oral History Interview with Edmund Gullion, in Maurer, p. 64.

¹¹² See, for example, the Hoa Hao, in Foreign Service Despatch 62 from Saigon to Department of State, ‘Transmittal of Memorandum of Conversation of the Hoa Hao Sect’, 4 August 1950, 751g.00/8-450, Box 3667, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; and the Cao Dai, in Foreign Service Despatch 677 from Saigon to

group that drew admiring glances from U.S. officials. Impressed at the group's progress in pacifying swathes of territory in Ben Tre Province, Gullion noted in one cable that the UMDC's 'local rehabilitation action and self-defense program' are 'of a type which could easily be supported by U.S. aid'.¹¹³ The legation also exhibited interest in Catholic groups in the north and carefully listened to the requests of Bishop Pham Ngoc Chi, apostolic vicar for Bui Chu in the northern province of Nam Dinh, when he came asking for assistance with medical care in September 1950. Hochstetter, who sat in the meeting and spoke of his great interest in the Catholic community in Nam Dinh, said he would look into it and received a list of useful contacts for his visit to the north.¹¹⁴

Hochstetter and other Americans also exhibited interest in the Cao Dai, a heterodox religious group established in 1919 that combined teachings from 'Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism with beliefs and practices borrowed from Catholicism and European Spiritism'.¹¹⁵ The Cao Dai also boasted their own military. Colonel Trinh Minh Thé, the real life inspiration for the Third Force leader of the same name in Greene's novel, was the Cao Dai official whom attracted most attention. In June 1951, Thé gathered 2,500 troops from the Cao Dai army and retreated to the Cambodian border in protest against the Franco-Vietnamese government. There he pledged to fight both the French and the Viet Minh. Although, as numerous scholars have noted, there is insufficient evidence to explicitly link U.S. officials in Vietnam with Thé, American officials did visit the Tay Ninh area where he was based and Hochstetter revealed to Greene that Thé was his preferred candidate for a Third Force.¹¹⁶ Greene himself, as well as British and French officials in Vietnam, believed it likely that U.S. agencies in Indochina were in covert support of Thé during this period. After a huge explosion on Saigon's streets in January 1952, which Thé took responsibility for, these suspicions grew. Hubert Graves, the head of the British Legation in Saigon, felt that the plastic bombs employed were too ingenious to have been made by Thé; John Cloake, working in the political section of the British legation, recalled that the entire CIA team

Department of State, 'Views of the Cao Dai Political Delegate of Current Vietnamese Conditions', 28 May 1951, 751g.00/5-2851, Box 3670, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹¹³ Foreign Service Despatch 184 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Catholic Military Action and Organization in South Vietnam and Conditions in Villages Under This Movement's Control', 13 May 1950, 751g.00/5-1350, Box 3667, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹¹⁴ Foreign Service Despatch 202 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Transmittal of Memorandum of Conversation with Bishop Pham Ngoc Chi', 28 September 1950, 751g.00/9-2850, Box 3668, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹¹⁵ Miller, p. 91.

¹¹⁶ For U.S. officials denying the existence of an American alliance with Colonel Thé in this period, see Sherry, p. 434. However, American officials did engage directly with Thé between 1954 and 1955, see Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 306-307. On U.S. officials visiting Tay Ninh, see Oral History Interview with Scott Cohen, 21 June 1990, Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, Frontline Diplomacy, <<https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004coh02/2004coh02.pdf>> [accessed 26 March 2018]. On Hochstetter revealing to Greene his interest in Thé, see Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 299.

in Saigon were suspiciously replaced following the incident; while Greene's memoir refers to the arrest of an American consul caught transporting plastic bombs into Saigon.¹¹⁷

What is clearer, however, is that the U.S. legation was in contact with Vietnamese nationalists associated with the Viet Minh. In late December 1950, representatives of the National Liberation Group, whom five hundred Viet Minh delegates had been working with, approached the legation requesting their help in facilitating a switch in allegiance to Bao Dai's government. Claiming to be strongly anti-communist and having been forced to collaborate with the Viet Minh to avoid annihilation, the National Liberation Group reportedly had 5,000 armed men. Previous attempts to rally to the anti-communist side had failed largely due to French clumsiness and a failure to accept their terms, their representatives suggested, and this time they desired that the French not be told until a plan had fully matured. Concerned about proceeding without French and Vietnamese government knowledge, Heath nevertheless concluded that it is 'possible [that] our intervention can secure rallies when French and Viet[name]se [intervention] may not'.¹¹⁸ Keen to avoid legation association, he gave the go ahead for CIA agents to continue to stay in contact with the group.¹¹⁹ Although it is unclear if this group rallied to the anti-communist government, a year later U.S. involvement with the group was ongoing.¹²⁰

'The Sacrificial Offering for which the Gods are Clamoring'

It is perhaps unsurprising that given American interest in such groups, and the attitudes of men like Gullion and Blum, that Franco-American relations in Indochina began to take a turn for the worse in 1951. De Lattre's arrival as high commissioner exacerbated the situation. The general was a firm believer in the importance of the French empire, prone to explosive outbursts of anger, deeply suspicious about American activities and famed for his desire to dominate. Blum suggested, 'I think it fair to say that he objects to us [STEM] principally because we are one of the important elements in the local situation that escapes his control'.¹²¹ De Lattre's military

¹¹⁷ On Grave's suspicions, see Ruane, pp. 442-444. John Cloake's recollection is from Author's Interview with John Cloake, 21 February 2014. Greene's story of an American getting caught with plastic bombs can be found in Greene, *Ways of Escape*, p. 164.

¹¹⁸ Telegram 1148 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 29 December 1950, 751g.00/12-2950, Box 3669, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹¹⁹ Heath to Boyce, 20 January 1951, lot 54 D190, Indo-China, 1948-1951, Box 7, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

¹²⁰ Telegram 1641 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 18 February 1952, 751g.00/2-1852, Box 3671, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 1642 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 18 February 1952, 751g.00/2-1852, Box 3671, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Heath to Lacy, 15 March 1951, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1950-1952, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA; Lacy to Heath, 1 May 1951, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1950-1952, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

¹²¹ Blum to Foster, 18 May 1951, Folder 5, Box 54, Series I, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

victories hardened his attitude towards American intervention. As Heath reported, the general's victories only emboldened his 'determination [...] that the evolution of Fr[anco]-Viet[name]se relations will be worked out exclusively between France and Vietnam with the least possible intervention of any fo[reig]n – read American – influence'.¹²² Declining health – de Lattre would be diagnosed with cancer in October – served to inflame his irritation at U.S. activities further.¹²³

No American agency working in Indochina escaped French condemnation. However, STEM under Blum's leadership attracted the most criticism. This was primarily due to a bilateral economic aid agreement that allowed it to work directly with the Vietnamese and French fears that STEM officials utilised their broad directive to undermine French rule.¹²⁴ Lucien Bodard, a French journalist who worked in Indochina throughout the period, reflected such fears. He wrote, 'They travelled all through Indochina telling the crowds, "The French are your exploiters, but the Americans are your friends"'.¹²⁵ The publicity given to STEM projects particularly irritated the French. Announcements that STEM had provided the first water pump and the first tractor, a member of the French high commission complained, only served to highlight the deficiencies of the French contribution in Indochina. While Lee Brady, the head of USIS, sensitively checked the content of his publications with the French prior to their release, the official noted, he could not say the same for STEM.¹²⁶ De Lattre was also personally critical of Blum, a man the Tonkinese affectionately referred to as 'President Blum'.¹²⁷ The general described him as 'the most dangerous man in Indochina' and left his name off a long list of American officials to whom he expressed thanks to for their cooperation in May 1951.¹²⁸

Faced with increasing French suspicion and frustration with his mission, Heath tried his utmost to reassure de Lattre that the United States had no intention of supplanting the French and were focused on assisting the development of the independence of the Associated States within the French Union. However, the general's suspicions remained. In fact, de Lattre's outbursts increased in frequency throughout spring 1951 and in private he accused Heath of attempting to cover up American intervention. The general reportedly said to one of his subordinates that "Heath was a dupe, presenting an honest face while all sorts of machinations were transpiring

¹²² Telegram 1984 from Heath to Secretary of State, 15 May 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 419.

¹²³ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 281.

¹²⁴ On initial French concern over the bilateral economic agreement between the United States and Bao Dai's government, see Telegram Ecato 495 from Bissell to ECA Mission in France, 6 May 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, pp. 809-812; on STEM's better access to the population, see Telegram Unnumbered from ECA Saigon to Secretary of State, 12 July 1951, Folder 54, Box 5, Series I, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹²⁵ Lucien Bodard, *The Quicksand War: Prelude to Vietnam* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 226.

¹²⁶ Telegram 2218 from Heath to Secretary of State, 14 June 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, pp. 425-426.

¹²⁷ Heath to Lacy, 19 August 1950, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1950-1952, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

¹²⁸ Topping, p. 153; Telegram 5509 from Bruce to Secretary of State, 18 March 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 405.

behind our backs””.¹²⁹ On occasion, de Lattre’s feelings spilled out in public. When Heath inquired if the general would consider providing housing for newly arrived MAAG officials, de Lattre barked at Heath, ““Yours is a rich country, why don’t you build houses. Or get rid of some of your ECA men and your American missionaries, then we c[ou]ld house MAAG””.¹³⁰

This harangue had an effect on Heath. A few days later the minister began considering bold moves to reduce Franco-American tension in Vietnam.¹³¹ Following the incident, Blum reported that Heath ‘had asked the principal economic officer of the legation to submit to him recommendations on how STEM’s program and method of operation might be altered so as to cause the French less annoyance’.¹³² It appeared that Heath had identified STEM’s operation as the ““sacrificial offering for which the gods are clamoring””, as Blum described it, in improving Franco-American relations.¹³³ Despite defending Blum’s management of STEM and suggesting that French accusations about its operation and Americans more generally were off the mark, Heath’s concern over maintaining cordial Franco-American relations and his belief in the importance of ensuring that nothing impaired the French military effort pushed him into action. In a 14 June cable to the State Department, he argued that French objections regarding STEM’s operation should ‘receive at this time a more sympathetic hearing than might be the case in other less troubled parts of the world’.¹³⁴

At the end of June, Heath elaborated further in a lengthy review of U.S. policy a year on from his arrival in Indochina. While the situation remained grave and the decisive battle for Indochina was yet to be fought, the minister displayed optimism that French concessions at Pau, de Lattre’s military successes and the development of the VNA had improved the situation considerably over the past year. Furthermore, Heath was convinced that de Lattre had now embarked upon a course to perfect Vietnamese independence and that continued progress would require ‘strict and unswerving adherence’ to the policy of supplementing and not supplanting the French that he had originally been sent to administer.¹³⁵ To ensure this, the minister was convinced of the need for a more consultative approach in the administration of STEM and in the

¹²⁹ Telegram 1567 from Heath to Secretary of State, 8 March 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 390.

¹³⁰ Telegram 1984 from Heath to Secretary of State, 15 May 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 419.

¹³¹ One of the more radical ideas came from the legation’s Frederick Bartlett, who in a memorandum to Heath suggested that the United States become outright economic partners with the French in Indochina. See Memorandum from Bartlett to Heath, ‘Review of US-French Relations in Indochina with Special Reference to Economic Aid Program’, 17 May 1951, 500 – Economic Matters General, Box 20, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

¹³² Blum to Foster, 18 May 1951, Folder 5, Box 54, Series I, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹³³ Blum to Foster, 2 July 1951, Folder 54, Box 5, Series I, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹³⁴ Telegram 2218 from Heath to Secretary of State, 14 June 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 428.

¹³⁵ Telegram 1984 from Heath to Secretary of State, 15 May 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 418; Telegram 2355 from Heath to Secretary of State, 29 June 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 433.

manner in which it publicised its work. Such a move, he hoped, would produce more effective Franco-American relations and provide greater opportunities to influence French decisions. He argued that French suggestions on STEM activities may not be acted on, but ‘they will be sought in advance, and there will be unremitting and sympathetic understanding of [the] Fr[ench] position’.¹³⁶ This approach, he surmised, might be described as ‘ungrudging but not uncritical support of the French’.¹³⁷ With minor revisions, the State Department authorised Heath to discuss the matter with de Lattre.

Heath made additional moves to appease French concerns. After promising de Lattre that he would endeavour to ensure that his staff would recognise France’s rightful position in Indochina given their sacrifices, Heath informed Washington that he ‘will make it clear that they [his staff] must not listen or give encouragement to improper criticism of Fr[ench] sacrifices and intentions and that violations will be regarded as insubordination’.¹³⁸ Howard Simpson recalled Heath telling him on his second day that the French were fighting the good fight against communism and ‘it was particularly important I understood policy and didn’t stray from the official line’.¹³⁹ When U.S. officials flouted such instructions, Heath gave them a stern warning. Jim Crane’s decision to head out into the country and speak to a Vietnamese official known to be critical of French rule gained him a stern reprimand from the minister and Heath warned his staff against promising any aid to Third Force figures like Colonel Thé.¹⁴⁰

Heath’s recommendations about STEM drew a sharp response from Blum. The STEM chief argued to ECA officials in Washington that strengthening Vietnamese nationalism, which Heath deemed subservient to support of the French military effort, remained no less important to the success of U.S. policy in Indochina and that, if anything, the United States had been overly sensitive to French concerns in its efforts to build up Bao Dai’s government.¹⁴¹ He wrote:

I think that the argument might well be sustained that we should be criticized not for having done so much in direct support of the Vietnamese but for having done so little. On balance, it is

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 437.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 439.

¹³⁸ Telegram 1605 from Heath to Secretary of State, 11 March 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 393. This suggestion, in particular, drew concern from Wade Bingham in the State Department Office for Non-European Affairs, who feared it would place U.S. personnel in Vietnam ‘in the position of “Hear No Evil” Monkey’. Memorandum by Bingham to Rusk, ‘Saigon’s No. 2355 of June 29, 1951’, 12 July 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 448.

¹³⁹ Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁰ For Heath’s reprimand of Crane, see Oral History Interview with Jim Crane, in Maurer, pp. 60-61; for his warning about supporting Thé, see Sherry, p. 405.

¹⁴¹ As Edward Miller has noted, the debate between Heath and Blum was not just a disagreement about tactics and techniques in Indochina but also part of a broader debate within the American foreign policy bureaucracy about development and social change in the Third World. Miller, *Misalliance*, pp. 54-77.

probable that the US is looked upon today in Indochina more as “a supporter of colonialism” than as “a friend of the new nations”.¹⁴²

While Blum agreed that the U.S. mission should seek to alleviate Franco-American tension where possible, he questioned the wisdom of modifying STEM’s operation to include increased consultation with the French. Blum believed that it would only create bad feeling with the French when the United States did not alter its programs in accordance with their wishes and that any alteration to STEM’s operation along the lines Heath had suggested would ensure that ‘the effort being put in [by STEM] w[ou]ld no longer be justified’.¹⁴³ Blum asserted that the impact of American economic aid had already been limited by dual American support of the French military effort and French involvement in STEM planning would do little to improve American anti-colonial credibility or STEM’s chances of convincing Vietnamese nationalists that their best hopes of independence lay with the anti-communist effort.¹⁴⁴ Frank, open, but not apologetic, discussions with the French on the matter were needed instead.

Despite their disagreement, Heath had initially defended Blum for being proper in his actions with the French.¹⁴⁵ However, a more thorough investigation of STEM’s activities in July 1951 revealed to Heath that STEM officials had been operating at variance with State Department policy. STEM’s operation, he wrote on 20 July, had failed ‘to create confidence between [the] US and Fr[ance] in I[ndo-]C[hina]’.¹⁴⁶ Identifying the prime U.S. objective in Indochina as ensuring the country did not fall into communist hands, Heath argued that for the moment this meant prioritising the French military effort. Heath believed that ‘French fatigue, pessimism, and recrimination [...] are today the greatest threat to the success of our policy in Indochina’.¹⁴⁷ The minister felt particularly strongly on this issue given his fear that the opening of negotiations to end the war in Korea would encourage those elements in France sympathetic to exploring a negotiated peace in Indochina. He wrote, ‘I can think of no more influential tool for these appeasers than [a] situation in which they c[ou]ld claim that [the] US either has no real faith in or is actively opposed to [the] Fr[ench] Union [...]. Now is [the] time above all where all our divergencies, to [the] extent possible, sh[ou]ld be minimised’.¹⁴⁸

Many STEM officials failed to act with the requisite consideration of French sensibilities in Indochina. Coming from non-diplomatic backgrounds – doctors, engineers and other technical

¹⁴² Telegram Unnumbered from ECA Saigon to Secretary of State, 12 July 1951, Folder 54, Box 5, Series I, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹⁴³ Telegram Toeca 841 from Blum to Foster, 12 July 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, pp. 450-451.

¹⁴⁴ Blum to Greene, 3 November 1950, Folder 53, Box 5, Series I, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹⁴⁵ Telegram 2218 from Heath to Secretary of State, 14 June 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 428.

¹⁴⁶ Telegram Unnumbered from Heath to Secretary of State, 20 July 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 458.

¹⁴⁷ Heath to Lacy, 29 November 1951, 751g.00/11-2951, Box 3671, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁴⁸ Telegram Unnumbered from Heath to Secretary of State, 20 July 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 459.

staff – STEM officials lacked the basic diplomatic training that would have enabled them to better navigate Indochina’s delicate diplomatic situation. As Wilson Flake, who went to Indochina to investigate legation-STEM relations in 1951, revealed of ECA staff sent to Asia, ‘a minority have had training or experience in American foreign relations and international politics, though all will to some extent serve as political representatives and ambassadors of this country abroad’.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, in one letter back to Washington, Blum revealed that he had to send home four officials because they were not suited for work in Vietnam. ‘Each one of these cases means loss of time, bad staff relations, personal bitterness, and sometimes trouble with the Vietnamese or French’, he reflected.¹⁵⁰

As he had done with Gullion, Heath tried to outmanoeuvre Blum by restricting his access to the flow of cable traffic coming into and out of the legation. Not receiving copies of the legation’s political and economic reports that he had been promised, Blum travelled to the office to examine the cables in person. There he found the file containing the record of legation correspondence suspiciously almost always in use and that many of the most important documents – for example, Heath’s 29 June telegram – had been removed. Blum also discovered that many of his own cables had not been made available to legation staff. Blum wrote to the ECA office in Washington to complain about ‘a deliberate policy of screening and censorship’.¹⁵¹

Blum, too, became increasingly critical of the minister over the spring and summer of 1951, informing the ECA that ‘Minister Heath’s policies here have been generally criticized as being weak, vacillating, and not a forthright expression of America’s interest in this area’.¹⁵² Blum felt that Heath had exaggerated the severity of the Franco-American problem in Indochina and was unnecessarily undermining STEM’s operation. As he reflected in October 1951, ‘it was only because of the emasculating and undermining influences on the American side that normal, routine difficulties were made to look so big’.¹⁵³ Certainly, Blum suggested, de Lattre and other French officials had expressed irritation at STEM’s activities, but there had been no official French complaints and STEM’s work had continued unimpeded.¹⁵⁴ Blum proposed that Heath had been heavily and unfavourably influenced by de Lattre. The general had overwhelmed the

¹⁴⁹ Memorandum by Flake, 31 October 1951, lot 54 D190, Assistance – General – 1950-51, Box 1, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁵⁰ Blum to Griffin, 26 May 1951, Folder 5, Box 54, Series I, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹⁵¹ Blum to Griffin, 1 August 1951, Folder 54, Box 5, Series I, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹⁵² Blum to Foster, 18 May 1951, Folder 5, Box 54, Series I, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹⁵³ Blum to Griffin, 4 October 1951, Folder 54, Box 5, Series I, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹⁵⁴ Telegram Unnumbered from ECA Saigon to Secretary of State, 12 July 1951, Folder 54, Box 5, Series I, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

minister, Blum argued, creating ‘an inclination to comply with de Lattre’s point of view and scrupulously avoid offending the French’.¹⁵⁵

Other observers agreed that de Lattre’s forceful personality had made an impression on Heath, as he did on most Americans with whom he came into contact.¹⁵⁶ Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Livingston Merchant was ‘left with the impression that De Lattre has completely captured Heath’s confidence’, while Robert Shaplen, an American journalist working in Vietnam, later recalled that Heath had fallen ‘completely under the General’s spell’.¹⁵⁷ However, these characterisations are a little strong. Although Heath did place importance on what de Lattre told him and had great faith in the general’s ability to win the war, he demonstrated during his time in Indochina that he was not averse to acting in ways French officials disliked. He initially defended American officials against de Lattre’s accusations, moving only to appease the general when matters threatened to get out of hand; had pushed for increased American influence in Indochina in late 1950; and gave the go ahead for covert U.S. support of nationalist groups associated with the Viet Minh without liaising with de Lattre. Heath was quite successful in shrouding his role in covert US operations that would have aggravated the French general, with British officials in Vietnam convinced by Heath’s assurances ‘that there is not a word of truth in the allegation that United States agents are operating against French Union interests’.¹⁵⁸

Heath’s difference of opinion with Blum and Gullion over the focus of U.S. policy in Indochina may have had something to do with the generational gap between them.¹⁵⁹ Already into his fifties by the time he reached Saigon, Heath was an old school style diplomat who had gained his experience during, as one historian put it, ‘the sleepy, seat-of-the pants diplomacy that

¹⁵⁵ Blum to Foster, 18 May 1951, Folder 5, Box 54, Series I, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹⁵⁶ As Gullion recalled of de Lattre: ‘He could influence me against my better judgment even though I often felt that he didn’t really understand the Vietnamese problem’. Gullion quoted in Shaplen, *Lost Revolution*, p. 80.

¹⁵⁷ Memorandum from Merchant to Rusk, 27 July 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 464; Shaplen, *Lost Revolution*, p. 86.

¹⁵⁸ Graves to Wallinger, 1 March 1952, FO 371/101054, TNA.

¹⁵⁹ This generational gap was identified by, among other things, the way that the U.S. mission dressed during Heath’s presence in Saigon compared with when he was absent from Vietnam on leave. Rarely seen without a necktie, Heath insisted that staff wear suits, shirts and ties during business hours. When he left for Washington, the mission followed Gullion’s lead in dressing more like a French businessman in Indochina, with the formal attire quickly ditched for short-sleeve shirts and shorts. When Heath returned, the mission would switch back. Author’s Interview with William J. Cunningham, 21 August 2012. For other examples of how generational differences impacted the approach of key individuals towards Vietnam, see Fredrik Logevall, ‘Vietnam and the Question of What Might Have Been’, in *Kennedy: The New Frontier Revisited*, ed. by Mark J. White (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998), pp. 19-62.

prevailed in the age before the American Imperium'.¹⁶⁰ Known for lacking extensive knowledge of internal politics and reluctant to meddle in the affairs of their host country, Heath's generation largely prepared their reports from the confines of the European-American diplomatic community and utilised European contacts for much of their information.¹⁶¹ Heath looked to European sources for the most part. As Hosley Handyside, who later served under Heath in Lebanon, suggested about his attitude to diplomacy, 'If they didn't speak French or English they weren't worth talking to because they couldn't possibly be doing anything important in terms of what was important to a foreign diplomat'.¹⁶² Heath was more comfortable with French colonial officials, and, among the Americans in Vietnam, one of the least adjusted to the atmosphere of Southeast Asian revolutionary nationalism. He frequently employed the ethnocentric terms 'demented', 'emotional' and 'naïve' to describe Vietnamese nationalists who displayed attitudes and took actions that he deemed unhelpful to U.S. Cold War goals.¹⁶³

While ethnocentric preconceptions also underlay the thinking of younger Foreign Service Officers in the U.S. mission (as shown in chapter 2), there were some key generational differences between the minister and Gullion and Blum. As Bodard put it, Gullion and Blum were members 'of the new generation, full of go, full of angry indignation'.¹⁶⁴ Many had begun their diplomatic careers just as the United States was moving towards global leadership and approached their roles with a sense of idealism and more of an understanding of the crucial importance of nationalism in the Third World. They were therefore more inclined to intervene in Franco-Vietnamese affairs and, as children of Rooseveltian anti-colonialism, more open to Vietnamese complaints about the French. Gullion felt that Heath put his views down to a lack of seniority.¹⁶⁵ Christian Chapman observed a similar divergence in opinion between the older and younger diplomats in another French colony, Morocco. On the issue of indigenous independence for the Moroccan people, he reflected, 'the junior felt more strongly than the senior ones'.¹⁶⁶ Less

¹⁶⁰ Todd S. Purdum, 'Foreword', in John Paton Davies, *China Hand: An Autobiography* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. viii.

¹⁶¹ Gurman, p. 433; Oral History Interview with William D. Wolle, 6 March 1991, Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, Frontline Diplomacy, <<https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004wol03/2004wol03.pdf>> [accessed 26 March 2018].

¹⁶² Oral History Interview with Hosley G. Handyside, 19 April 1993, Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, Frontline Diplomacy, <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004han01/2004han01.pdf>> [accessed 26 March 2018].

¹⁶³ Author's Interview with William J. Cunningham, 21 August 2012. On Heath's strongly ethnocentric attitude towards the Vietnamese, see Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 76. For a specific example, see Telegram 228 from Heath to Secretary of State, 16 August 1950, 400 – MDAP for Indochina (July-August), Box 16, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

¹⁶⁴ Bodard, p. 223.

¹⁶⁵ Oral History Interview with Edmund Gullion, in Maurer, p. 66.

¹⁶⁶ Oral History Interview with Christian A. Chapman, 3 March 1990, Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, Frontline Diplomacy, <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004cha06/2004cha06.pdf>> [accessed 26 March 2018].

burdened by the official responsibilities Heath had to endure as dean of the diplomatic corps, Gullion and Blum also enjoyed greater freedom to travel around the country and sample the dissenting views of Vietnamese nationalists. It is not surprising that they came to contradictory conclusions in Vietnam.

The conflict between Heath and Blum attracted high level attention in Washington. On 27 July, Merchant delivered a memo to Rusk indicating that while Heath must bear a large share of the blame for his failure to brief American personnel well enough, the minister was likely correct in his conclusion that STEM staff had not adequately taken French sensibilities into mind. Merchant in the end sided more with Heath.¹⁶⁷ Merchant stressed the importance of the VNA, as the minister had, and 'that the French should be freely consulted and fully informed' regarding STEM's activities.¹⁶⁸

Blum departed Indochina in October 1951. In February 1952, arrangements were made to increase Franco-STEM liaison.¹⁶⁹ As David Williamson arrived to replace Blum as chief of STEM, rumours circulated that de Lattre and Heath were behind Blum's recall. A leaked Sûreté report accredited Blum's departure to Heath and Hubert Graves revealed to the British Foreign Office that both de Lattre and the State Department would not be sorry to see Blum go.¹⁷⁰ Numerous scholars have suggested that de Lattre forcibly attained Blum's removal and/or that the Truman administration recalled Blum to appease the general's objections.¹⁷¹ However, as STEM press releases correctly detailed and Blum's private papers reveal, Blum's departure had been long planned, he had already stayed on much longer than originally intended, and it was his decision to leave.¹⁷² In a 6 July 1950, letter to William Foster in the ECA office in Washington, Blum revealed that his initial appointment was supposed to be only temporary and that he had reluctantly agreed to stay on in Indochina until the summer of 1951.¹⁷³ The primary reason for

¹⁶⁷ There had been long running differences of opinion since the inception of the American aid programme in Vietnam between the Department of State and the ECA over the focus of American policy. For example, see Lacy to Rusk, 22 August 1950, lot 54 D190, Indochina Relations with ECA 1950-51, Box 7, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA; Cleveland to Rusk, 21 August 1950, lot 54 D190, Indochina Relations with ECA 1950-51, Box 7, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁶⁸ Memorandum from Merchant to Rusk, 27 July 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 464.

¹⁶⁹ Memorandum for Department of State and Mutual Security Agency, 13 February 1952, 500 – STEM General, Box 21, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

¹⁷⁰ Telegram 232 from Saigon to Department of State, 30 October 1951, 500 – STEM General, Box 21, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA; Graves to Morrison, 12 October 1951, FO 959/118, TNA; Memorandum by Graves, 15 September 1951, FO 959/118, TNA.

¹⁷¹ LePage and Tenenbaum, p. 27; Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 43; and Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 77.

¹⁷² STEM Press Release, 20 September 1951, FO 959/118, TNA.

¹⁷³ Blum to Foster, 6 July 1950, Folder 54, Box 5, Series, 1, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University; Memorandum from Saigon to Department of State, 'French Opinion Regarding Resignation of Mr. Robert Blum, Chief of STEM in Indochina', 30 October 1951, 500 STEM-General,

Blum's departure was in fact his disillusionment with an American policy dictated by the State Department and implemented by Heath. He told Foster in April 1951 that the 'more important [reason] is that I have reluctantly concluded that although our work in Indochina can continue to be of limited usefulness, it cannot develop all the importance it should have, largely because of weaknesses in our own United States policy'.¹⁷⁴ Heath's handling of U.S. policy – in particular, his attempt to do what he could to appease French concerns about U.S. interventionism – expedited Blum's departure.

'A Snowball has Started to Form'

Despite Heath's efforts to appease French concerns about the U.S. aid mission, French war weariness continued to increase during the latter part of 1951 and into 1952 and previously peripheral views questioning the war began to find more mainstream support in France. Although Gullion had earlier stressed the continuing economic motives that would he felt would sustain France's commitment in Vietnam, Indochina had long ceased to be an asset to the French economy and the continuation of the war diverted crucial manpower and funds away from European defence.¹⁷⁵ The statements of influential Frenchmen increasingly contained veiled references to negotiation, something American officials were desperate to avoid, and leading French officials told their American counterparts that France could no longer fund its military commitment in both Indochina and Europe.¹⁷⁶ Asked to evaluate the likelihood of a French withdrawal by the State Department in late December 1951, Bruce concluded that while it was unlikely the French would abandon Indochina in the near future: 'There is almost universal recognition that the metropole's security is adversely affected in an increasing degree by this distant adventure in an area which will never again be an asset to France'.¹⁷⁷ Without promises of further American support, Bruce argued, French public pressure to withdraw would only increase and 'the Fr[ench] will be compelled to reexamine their entire policy in the area'.¹⁷⁸ 'The snowball has started to form', he stressed.¹⁷⁹

Box 21, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

¹⁷⁴ Blum to Foster, 20 April 1951, Folder 5, Box 54, Series I, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹⁷⁵ Cesari, 'The Declining Value of Indochina', pp. 175-195.

¹⁷⁶ On Heath's reaction to Jean Letourneau's references to negotiation, see Heath to Lacy, 29 November 1951, 751g.00/11-2951, Box 3671, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Minutes of the Meeting between the Secretary of State and the Foreign Minister of France, 11 September 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 492.

¹⁷⁷ Telegram 3796 from Bruce to Secretary of State, 26 December 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 574.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 577.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Further military disappointments did not help. In November 1951, de Lattre ordered French troops to take the town of Hoa Binh, an important intersection southwest of Hanoi used by the Viet Minh to take rice supplies north and bring military equipment south. French forces took the town easily enough but by December found themselves engaged in a long and bloody battle with the Viet Minh that culminated in a French evacuation in February 1952.¹⁸⁰ While Heath was quick to refute the idea that Hoa Binh had been a defeat for the French, he nonetheless admitted that the decision to evacuate the town had a damaging psychological effect on the French and Vietnamese fence sitters.¹⁸¹ More discouraging was the increasing threat of China. Reports emerged during the latter part of 1951 that Chinese troops were massing on Vietnam's northern border and that Chinese aid to the Viet Minh had been stepped up.¹⁸²

The death of de Lattre on 11 January 1952 was also a shattering blow and raised further concerns about France's ability to fight on. Heath wrote:

There seems [a] gen[eral] impression that with [the] passing [of] [the] De Lattre period in Franco-Viet[namese] relations, [that] perhaps even [the] entire Mar[ch] 8 experiment, has come to [a] close and [there is] an equally widespread fear that without De Lattre France will not be able or willing [to] summon [the] physical means and moral strength to continue [the] struggle.¹⁸³

The minister must have been personally distraught to hear the news. Despite their altercations, Heath and de Lattre had formed a close bond over the past year and much of the minister's optimism that the French could succeed in Indochina had been based on de Lattre's undoubted military skill. The general appeared to have made a true believer out of Heath. Five days before de Lattre's death, Heath wrote to the State Department suggesting, despite recent setbacks, that only de Lattre could still meet his prediction of a two year military victory for the French.¹⁸⁴ The struggle, however, would have to continue without him. As the war progressed, U.S. officials would frequently lament that 'the French had [...] no more De Lattres'.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 288-289.

¹⁸¹ Telegram 1689 from Heath to Department of State, 29 February 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 46-48. American officials used the term 'fence sitters' to describe those anti-communist nationalists who had yet to support Bao Dai's government.

¹⁸² Duiker, pp. 117-120.

¹⁸³ Telegram 1442 from Heath to Department of State, 17 January 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 19.

¹⁸⁴ Telegram 1331 from Heath to Department of State, 6 January 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 12. Heath was not the only U.S. official to suggest that the chances of French success relied heavily on de Lattre's leadership. J. Lawton Collins, chief of staff of the U.S. Army and later Heath's replacement in Saigon, felt similarly after he visited Indochina in late October 1951. Collins reported back to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 'No visitor to Indo-China can fail to be impressed with the fact that this is largely a General de Lattre show [...]. If anything should happen to him, there could well be a collapse in Indo-China'. Memorandum by Collins to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 'Visits to Yugoslavia and Other MDAP Countries', 13 November 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 545.

¹⁸⁵ Makins to Foreign Office, 8 February 1954, FO 371/112047, TNA.

The precarious military situation was compounded by a continued lack of political progress. Huu's government had failed to generate mass support among the population, Franco-Vietnamese tension was again on the rise, the VNA was nowhere near strong enough to take over from the French, and Third Force figures continued to operate independently from the three Associated States governments. Political discord culminated in Huu's dismissal as prime minister and his replacement by Nguyen Van Tam in the early summer of 1952. Tam was an avowed anti-communist and had a strong record of combatting the Viet Minh. In 1940 he had successfully halted a Communist-led peasant uprising in his home district of Cai Lay and, as chief of the Vietnamese Sûreté in Saigon, had crushed the principal Viet Minh cells in the city. His anticommunism came at a price, however; Tam had lost two sons and a finger to the Viet Minh.¹⁸⁶ Despite his impressive anti-communist credentials, his appointment received a poor reception in Vietnam, particularly in the north of the country. Reports from the Hanoi consulate indicated that Tam would not be able to rally popular support and worse that he might alienate 'many who might have been won over'.¹⁸⁷ Tam certainly lacked nationalist credentials, as did the majority of those he nominated to cabinet positions, and his French citizenship limited his appeal further. 'Best we can hope for from [the] Tam gov[ernmen]t', the new American consul in Hanoi, Paul Sturm, reported, 'is that it not too seriously harm [the] war effort'.¹⁸⁸

However, despite these unfavourable developments, Heath retained a sense of optimism. He told the State Department in January 1952 that while recent events had been disheartening, overall progress in Indochina over the past five years had been more encouraging. He wrote:

Anyone who [had] left here 5 years ago and came back today w[oul]d be heartened at what he sees: More order and security in towns, [an] active commercial life, busy ports, new and self conscious Viet[namese] Gov[ernmen]t workers and dep[ar]t[ment]s, masses [of] new Amer[ican] mil[itary] equip[ment] and Marshall Plan works and [the] uniform of [the] new Viet[namese] army.¹⁸⁹

He and his colleagues in the legation were also happy to observe the appointment of several liberal leaning officials to the French high commission: Raymond Offroy as diplomatic counsellor, Claude Cheysson as his assistant, and Raymond Janot as director of the civil cabinet. These younger officers indicated a 'desire to revise French policy even while [the] French insist[ed] on [the] necessity of maintaining [the] rigid form of [the] March eight accords' and to

¹⁸⁶ Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 44.

¹⁸⁷ Telegram 823 from Sturm to Department of State, 10 June 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 178.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 179

¹⁸⁹ Telegram 1331 from Heath to Department of State, 6 January 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 10. This sentiment was shared by Robert Hoey in the PSA office, who in a memorandum to Bill Lacy described progress in Indochina in similar terms. Memorandum from Hoey to Lacy, 'Indochinese Policy', 7 February 1952, lot 58 D266, Box 5, 1950-56; Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs: Office of Southeast Asian Affairs; Subject Files, RG 59, USNA.

consider allowing ‘nationalist elements with anti-French records [to] figure in a new Viet[namese] Gov[ernment]’.¹⁹⁰ Gullion, buoyed by such appointments, described this as ‘a new swing in French policy, the first really perceptible one since Cao Bang and Korea precipitated the French decision to fold up at Pau and to create a Vietnamese Army’.¹⁹¹ On the military side there appeared some bright spots too. Heath was told by General François de Linares that pacification operations in northern Vietnam were successfully reducing Viet Minh infiltration and reports from Hoa Binh indicating that Viet Minh forces had largely been made up by young and inexperienced fighters suggested that communist losses were beginning to catch up with them.¹⁹² When a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) predicted a ‘gradual deterioration of the Franco-Vietnamese military position’ throughout the middle of 1952, Heath cabled Washington with a more positive assessment of his own.¹⁹³ He argued that it was his opinion and that of the majority of qualified American observers in Indochina that ‘the Franco-Viet[namese] forces will maintain and possibly slightly improve their present position against the V[iet]M[inh]’ over the next year.¹⁹⁴

Progress out of this difficult situation, Heath believed, meant continued dedication to the policy he had been sent to implement. In a 12 May report to the State Department, Heath argued that Jean Letourneau’s arrival as high commissioner provided a fresh starting point to improve the dismal political situation. The high commission should be encouraged along the more liberal line it was seemingly pursuing, prompted to dispel rumours that France was seeking a negotiated settlement with the Viet Minh and urged to publicise a series of statements indicating a French desire to evolve the Franco-Vietnamese relationship. ‘[The] French position w[ou]ld seem to have moved far enough so that such a declaration w[ou]ld catch up with [the] facts’, Heath noted.¹⁹⁵ No definitive date of a French departure should be indicated, he suggested, but he felt that perhaps France should announce its desire to renegotiate the French Union concept when the conflict was over, hand over the Norodom Palace (the headquarters of the French colonial regime in Saigon) and rebrand its high commission in Indochina. Major French concessions, however, were again notably absent in the minister’s recommendations.

¹⁹⁰ Telegram 2216 from Heath to Department of State, 10 May 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 131; Telegram 2224 from Heath to Department of State, 12 May 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 136.

¹⁹¹ Gullion to Getz, 1 July 1952, lot 58 D266, Box 2, 1950-56; Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs: Office of Southeast Asian Affairs; Subject Files, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁹² Telegram 2099 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 26 April 1952, 751g.00/4-2652, Box 3672, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 705 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 16 April 1952, 751g.00/4-1650, Box 3672, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁹³ National Intelligence Estimate, NIE 35/1, ‘Probable Developments in Indochina through Mid-1952’, 3 March 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 54.

¹⁹⁴ Telegram 1948 from Heath to Department of State, 5 April 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 99.

¹⁹⁵ Telegram 2224 from Heath to Secretary of State, 12 May 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 137.

Heath's reporting was informed by and informing opinion in the State Department during a period in which the Department was leading a full scale review of U.S. policy. The new assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern affairs, John Allison, concurred with Heath that U.S. policy should continue as it has before, with priority given to ensuring that the French fight on.¹⁹⁶ Other departments disagreed. The secretaries of the three branches of the military criticised a 27 March draft paper written by the State Department because its recommendations offered 'little more than an expectation of preserving the status quo'.¹⁹⁷ Essential to any chance of success, they argued, was the reduction of French influence in Indochina, beginning with an 'unequivocal declaration of their intent to withdraw from Indochina at the expiration of a specified period'.¹⁹⁸ Only then would it be possible to generate greater political enthusiasm in Vietnam for Bao Dai's government, they argued. However, Acheson, Allison and other influential figures, in line with Heath's recommendations, refused to push the French harder. The result was that NSC 124, the end-product of the review, continued, as Duiker notes, to stress 'the dual approach that had characterised U.S. Indochina policy since 1950 – providing aid to the French while pressing Paris to move steadily toward granting greater autonomy to the new governments in Indochina'.¹⁹⁹

This chapter reveals that Heath played a central role in ensuring the continued primacy of the French effort in American policy and in U.S. efforts to preserve a French commitment in Vietnam during his first two years in office. It shows that Heath's previous experiences, his instructions and approach to diplomacy all played a role in his tendency to give greater preference to supporting the French. He briefed his staff carefully on U.S. priorities, rebuffed the advances of Third Force figures requesting direct U.S. support, limited the ability of those who disagreed with him to reorient the focus of U.S. policy, and appeased French concerns about the U.S. aid programme when they threatened to damage Franco-American relations and undermine U.S. efforts to keep France fighting in Indochina. Placing great faith in what French officials told him, he remained optimistic that the current policy he had been sent to implement could be successful and restricted his attempts to appease Vietnamese interests to recommendations for largely ceremonial handovers of French power. His attempt to secure middle-ground relations for

¹⁹⁶ Memorandum by Allison to Secretary of State, 'Comments on British Memorandum of 15 March 1952 Concerning Indochina (for use in conversations with British Ambassador)', 25 March 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 77-80.

¹⁹⁷ Memorandum by the Secretaries of the Army, Navy and Air Force to Secretary of Defense, 'Draft State Department Paper on Indochina dates 27 March 1952', 8 April 1952, in Lovett to Secretary of State, 1 May 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 117. For the State Department report, see Paper Prepared by the Department of State, 'Draft – Indochina Section of NSC Paper', *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 82-89.

¹⁹⁸ Memorandum by the Secretaries of the Army, Navy and Air Force to Secretary of Defense, 8 April 1952, in Lovett to Secretary of State, 1 May 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 118.

¹⁹⁹ Duiker, p. 125.

the United States in Vietnam and his covert support for operations to bring about defections from the Viet Minh also reveals that he was not merely a French stooge; rather, he felt that prioritising the French military effort offered the best chance of success for the United States.

By the middle of 1952, however, while the French kept fighting, the war was no closer to being won. France was becoming increasingly war weary, American influence had seen no significant rise and limited French concessions to the Vietnamese had not done enough to convince fence sitters to come over to the Bao Dai government. In their memoirs, both Dean Rusk and John Allison reflected that the United States should have placed more pressure on the French to grant further concessions to the Vietnamese during this period.²⁰⁰ It is difficult to say if the French would have continued to fight or if this could have produced a viable anti-communist Vietnamese government. What is clearer is that by 1952 the stress of U.S. policy remained on ensuring that the French continued to fight on, and that Donald Heath had played an important role in shoring up that policy.

²⁰⁰ Rusk, pp. 362-364; John Allison, *Ambassador from the Prairie or Allison Wonderland* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), pp. 188-194.

Chapter 4 – ‘France is Fighting the Good Fight’: Donald Heath and Sustaining the French in Indochina, June 1952-December 1953

In mid-June 1952, Jean Letourneau, the new French high commissioner, arrived in Washington for a two day visit to discuss Indochina. Alongside the promise of greater American aid to the former French colony (U.S. officials vowed to provide an extra \$150 million for the 1953 financial year), Washington took further steps to strengthen the U.S. commitment in Indochina by elevating the U.S. Legation in Saigon to a fully-fledged embassy. Heath, present at the Letourneau talks, was promoted to ambassador, and it was agreed with the French and Vietnamese that a Vietnamese embassy would be established in Washington.¹ On 25 June, the Saigon post received confirmation of its new status.² For Heath, the elevation had been a long time coming. As early as December 1950 he had urged Washington to upgrade the mission to embassy status, arguing it would provide an additional demonstration of American determination to see the job through in Southeast Asia and allow himself to talk through the more authoritative voice of an ambassador.³ While State Department officials at the time did not share his thinking, a year-and-a-half later he had finally got his wish.

As Heath returned to Indochina, the Truman administration had another important decision to make regarding the diplomatic post in Saigon. With Heath soon due for reassignment – he had served the usual diplomatic term of two years at a hardship post – they discussed the idea of replacing him. Among the candidates they had in mind was Douglas MacArthur II, a career diplomat and the nephew and namesake of the former commander of UN forces in Korea. However, in the autumn of 1952 it was decided that Heath would stay on in Saigon for the foreseeable future. The Truman administration had been keen on appointing MacArthur but decided against it after speaking to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the supreme commander in NATO.⁴ MacArthur was working as Eisenhower’s advisor on international affairs at the time and the general deemed him too important to the work of NATO to be sent to Saigon. With Ike on the verge of resigning his post to run for the presidency and General Matthew Ridgway set to replace

¹ Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 44.

² Cross-Reference Sheet, Memorandum by Bruce to Truman, 13 June 1952, (Cambodia-Laos/Vietnam), 203F, Box 913, Official File, White House Central Files, Harry S. Truman Papers, HSTL; ‘Donald Read Heath’, Office of the Historian, State Department, <<https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/heath-donald-read>> [accessed 29 November 2017].

³ Telegram 1141 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 28 December 1950, 751g.00/12-2850, Box 3669, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁴ White House Dictatum by Secretary of State, Item No. 2: MacArthur to Indochina, 24 April 1952, 751g.00/4-2452, Box 3672, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

him in NATO, Eisenhower thought it essential that MacArthur be there to help Ridgway, whom Ike believed inexperienced in European matters, during his first few months in office. Acheson heeded the general's guidance. By the time MacArthur returned to the United States from NATO in November 1952, Eisenhower had won the election and appeared to have different designs on MacArthur's future. At a meeting in New York, Ike decided that MacArthur would best serve his new administration in Washington and he told his secretary-of-state-elect John Foster Dulles 'to void the Vietnam assignment and have Doug in the department for a while'.⁵ MacArthur was appointed counselor in the State Department and the Eisenhower administration extended Heath's stay in Indochina further.⁶

This chapter examines Heath's efforts in Indochina from the Saigon post's rise to embassy status in mid-1952 to the end of Eisenhower's first year in office. During this period, the American priority in Indochina remained much the same as it had been during Heath's first two years in Vietnam: keeping France in the fight and on the offensive. The challenges Heath faced in implementing this policy on the ground were great. He was confronted with increasing opposition to the war in France, the arrival of greater numbers of American visitors to Vietnam, critical American press coverage of the conflict, Indochinese nationalists who showed little appreciation for the Cold War interests motivating American policy, and outbursts from frustrated members of his own staff. Focusing on Heath's management of these challenges, this chapter argues that he was quite successful in limiting the damage on France's ability to fight on and in preserving a pro-French lean to U.S. policy. However, it also stresses that while his actions contributed to the continuation of the French military effort in Vietnam, he was unable to get French forces on the offensive and his efforts continued to damage the equally important task of building up a strong, anti-communist Vietnamese government. Furthermore, in his attempt to keep France fighting at all costs, Heath did not pause to consider the long-term ramifications of the policy he was implementing. By the end of 1953, he had encouraged Washington to persist with a policy that left the United States more committed than ever before to the struggle to prevent a communist victory in Indochina.

Tam and French War Weariness

⁵ Oral History Interview with Douglas MacArthur II, 15 December 1986, Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, *Frontline Diplomacy*, <<https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004mac03/2004mac03.pdf>> [accessed 16 March 2018].

⁶ Immediate Release, James C. Hagerty, 7 July 1953, OF 8-F Heath Ambassadors and Ministers, Heath, Hon. Donald R, Box 136, Official File, White House Central Files, DDE Papers, DDEL. Heath received confirmation that he would stay on in Saigon in February 1953, see Memorandum from Willis to Adams, 2 July 1953, Box 136, White House Central Files, Official File, 1953-1961, DDE Papers, DDEL.

Following Letourneau's visit to the United States, Heath returned to Vietnam. One of his major concerns in the summer of 1952 was the new Vietnamese government led by Nguyen Van Tam. While Heath's subordinates in Indochina bickered over Tam's chances of success, the ambassador was hopeful that the new prime minister might be able to make some progress.⁷ Heath reported in August that 'Tam is a man of action, having produced a labor code, a start in the agrarian reform, shortly a consultative assembly and last, by no means least, a budget'.⁸ However, the ambassador believed that Tam's close association with the French would make it difficult for him to build popular support for his government.⁹ He also doubted that Tam would be able to maintain a pace with his reforms that would be able to 'satisfy [the] notoriously critical Vietnamese'.¹⁰

Despite doubts over Tam's ability to be able to develop a popular following, Heath continued to believe that major French political concessions were not the solution to Indochina's woes. French war weariness rose during the latter half of 1952, with a number of respected politicians in the French National Assembly joining those opposed to the war in promoting a negotiated peace. Letourneau felt that the decision of Edgar Faure, an influential member of the French Radical Party and former prime minister, to join the opposition indicated the movement's increasing potency.¹¹ To American officials virtually across the board, however, negotiations were to be avoided at all costs, or at least until France could secure a favourable military position in the conflict. They believed that negotiating from a position of weakness would give the Viet Minh the upper-hand in securing a settlement and inevitably lead to an eventual communist takeover of Vietnam.¹²

Military setbacks in Indochina made negotiations more palatable in France. On 17 October, the French lost Nghia Lo, an important defensive post northwest of Hanoi. Its fall, and the subsequent loss of other French posts in the area, represented a serious blow to the war effort.¹³ Despite the quick capture of Phu Doan and Phu Yen Binh – where the French seized huge stocks of Viet Minh weaponry and ammunition – the French attempt to regain the initiative, Operation Lorraine, failed to entice Giap's forces into a major battle, and the 30,000 men and

⁷ For the differences of opinion between American diplomats in Indochina over Tam's chances of success, see Telegram 823 from Sturm to Department of State, 10 June 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 178; Telegram 2532 from Gullion to Department of State, 15 June 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 188-189.

⁸ Heath to Bonsal, 6 August 1952, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1950-1952, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

⁹ Telegram 215 from Heath to Department of State, 26 July 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 224.

¹⁰ Telegram 304 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 5 August 1952, 751g.00/8-552, Box 3672, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹¹ Telegram 941 from Heath to Department of State, 6 November 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 275.

¹² Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 316.

¹³ Spector, p. 157.

huge numbers of artillery, tanks and planes employed were soon called back as the French supply line became too long.¹⁴

Given these indications of weakening French resolve, it was unsurprising that Heath remained reluctant to push the French harder on the issue of Vietnamese independence. In November, Heath maintained that ‘the primary objective was to keep the French fighting in Indochina and that in the present circumstances the United States could not risk provoking the French into abandonment of their military effort in Indochina by pressing for further concessions to nationalist elements’.¹⁵ Allison in the State Department’s Far Eastern Bureau agreed, as did the director of the PSA office Philip Bonsal, that France’s military effort should be prioritised.¹⁶ In line with U.S. policy as directed by the Department, Heath urged embassy officials meeting with Vietnamese nationalists to refrain from indicating American support for their agendas. They did as directed, refusing the appeals of nationalist leaders to pressure the French on concessions and rejecting their requests for direct American military aid for their independent armies.¹⁷ The attitude of these Vietnamese nationalists, many of whom continued to remain aloof from Bao Dai’s government, greatly frustrated the ambassador. Appearing to Heath as naively unaware of the dangers of communism, the reality of which he himself had experienced in Bulgaria, he described them as ‘a lunatic fringe’ whose ‘concern regarding the ascendancy of a communist regime tends to be overshadowed by their irrational emotional antipathy to and distrust of the Fr[ench]’.¹⁸ He also resented the attempts of these nationalists to play the Americans off against the French in their pursuit of greater independence, describing it as ‘characteristically byzantine’ in fashion.¹⁹

¹⁴ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 321-324; Spector, p. 159.

¹⁵ Minutes of Country Team Meeting, 25 November 1952, 500 – Country Team Planning, Box 21, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

¹⁶ Memorandum by Allison to Matthews, ‘Discussion of the Indochina Problem by a French-United States Working Group’, 29 December 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 333.

¹⁷ For Vietnamese attempts to get American diplomats to intervene with the French, see Memorandum of Conversation between Alfred Wellborn and Tran Van Tuyen, 4 December 1952, in Foreign Service Despatch 207 from Saigon to Department of State, ‘Views of Tran Van Tuyen on Current Political Developments’, 11 December 1952, 751g.00/12-1152, Box 3673, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. For the refusal of American diplomats to fund nationalist groups directly, see Edmund Gullion’s meeting with the commander of Cao Dai forces Nguyen Van Thanh in Telegram 2518 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 13 June 1952, 751g.00/06-1352, Box 3672, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; and for American refusals to get involved in directly funding Vietnamese military operations, see Telegram 404 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 23 December 1952, 751g.00/12-2352, Box 3673, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁸ Telegram 713 from Heath to Secretary of State, 3 October 1952, 320 – Associated States-France, Box 9, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

¹⁹ Heath to Sturm, 9 March 1953, lot 58 D207, Hanoi Correspondence, 1952-1954, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

‘Misinformed Traveling Prophets’

Another important result of Letourneau’s June trip to Washington was that it raised the profile of Indochina in the United States, drawing throngs of inquisitive congressmen, diplomats and journalists to the country to check on how U.S. dollars were being invested and one of the Cold War’s key battles was progressing.²⁰ While these visits gave the embassy an opportunity to impart its own views on prominent officials closer to the reins of power in Washington, diplomats in Vietnam were also keenly aware of the danger of visiting Americans saying something that might unsettle Franco-American relations and encourage France to abandon the struggle. Relations between the two Western powers had cooled somewhat in 1952; however, tensions continued to bubble under the surface. French officials remained jealous of the technical support programme of the United States and rumours of American diplomats making anti-French comments persisted.²¹ French antipathy occasionally manifested itself in ugly incidents. In June 1952, an embassy attaché found two men from the French Foreign Legion loitering around his car. As the American shouted to disperse the men and moved towards them, they ‘ripped the [American] flag from its staff, tore the staff from its fastening, then fled’.²²

Despite thorough embassy briefings, visiting Americans often displayed a lack of appreciation for the delicacy of diplomacy in Indochina. After Justice William O. Douglas painted a dark and pessimistic picture of the situation in Indochina to journalists in Saigon, Heath was forced to inform the French high commission that Douglas was here on ‘a private trip’ and ‘his views on fo[reig]n affairs were highly personal and highly independent’.²³ Sometimes damage was caused by the lack of knowledge of Indochina in the United States. On 12 October, the *Charles E. Dent* steamship, the 200th American ship carrying MDAP aid to Indochina, entered Saigon with the Vietnamese flag flying. No sooner had the boat entered the harbour than the ship’s crew were ordered by French naval authorities to lower the flag. The flag they had picked up en route in the Philippines was not that of the State of Vietnam but the DRV. Embarrassed by the incident, Heath requested that the company the ship had purchased the flag

²⁰ Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 41; Bonsal to Sprouse, 26 June 1952, lot 58 D207, Paris Correspondence 1951-55, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

²¹ For continued accusations about U.S. diplomats making anti-French statements, see Memorandum by Heath, ‘Anti-American rumors in certain French circles’, 6 October 1952, 320 – France-US, Box 9, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA; Graves to Tahourdin, 5 September 1952, FO 371/101062, TNA. For continuing French jealousies regarding the American economic aid programme, see Meeting, Office of Ambassador Heath, Saigon, 23 October 1952, lot 57 D472, Indochina 1952, Box 2, Records Relating to the Mutual Security Assistance Program (Far East), 1949-1954, RG 59, USNA. For continued suspicions regarding the American pursuit of a Third Force in Vietnam, see Graves to Murray, 3 July 1952, FO 371/101062, TNA.

²² Memorandum by Korn to Heath, ‘Desecration of the American Flag’, 5 June 1952, 360.2 Flag. Seal. National Anthem, Box 70, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, General Records, 1936-1963, RG 84, USNA.

²³ Telegram 533 from Heath to Department of State, 6 September 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 249.

from be informed of their error and enclosed in his report to Washington a sketch of the correct Vietnamese flag for display in Saigon.²⁴ Such incidents did little to aid the embassy's efforts to maintain healthy Franco-American relations.

One of the most important American visitors to Indochina in the autumn of 1952 was the U.S. ambassador to India, Chester Bowles. Bowles's two-and-a-half week trip around Southeast Asia in August 1952 was part of an American effort to gain greater Asian support for Bao Dai's government.²⁵ Although thirty-three countries had recognised the Associated States by the time of the New Delhi envoy's arrival, only two of them were Asian (Thailand and South Korea).²⁶ Greater Asian recognition, particularly from independent governments like India, would give the Indochinese states greater international legitimacy and challenge Viet Minh claims about the puppet status of the Associated States. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's prime minister, had proved resistant to Western overtures to recognise the Associated States, doubting the reality of the independence France had given the Indochinese. It was hoped that Bowles's visit would provide him with the necessary information to press Nehru for recognition again.²⁷

If any American was able to influence the Indian prime minister, it was Chester Bowles. From his arrival in India in 1951, Bowles developed a strong relationship with Nehru, a figure who frustrated other Americans like Dean Acheson.²⁸ Bowles went to great lengths to ingratiate himself with his host government: he sent his children to an Indian school, his wife learned Hindi and he frequently invited Indians into his home.²⁹ Bowles's views on Asia also differed greatly from the vast majority of American diplomats. Bowles stressed the importance of the Third World over Europe and the need for the United States to 'recognize the potency of nationalism and accept the preferences of many Third World governments, such as Nehru's, for independent,

²⁴ Foreign Service Despatch 140 from Heath to Department of State, 'U.S. Merchant Ship Shows Communist Vietminh Flag on Arrival off Saigon', 13 October 1952, 360.2 – Flag. Seal. National Anthem, Box 70, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, General Records, 1936-1963, RG 84, USNA.

²⁵ Foreign Service Despatch 316 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Transmission of Indochina Chronology, August – December 1952', 10 February 1953, 751g.00/2-1053, Box 3673, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²⁶ For a full list of those thirty-three nations that had recognised the Associated States of Indochina by the autumn of 1952, see Hoey to Heath, 26 September 1952, 360 – Government Recognition, Box 14, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

²⁷ As Heath wrote to Bowles after his trip: 'I believe your tour of Southeast Asia will be of value in conducting United States-Indian relations in that you are now enabled to explain the over-all view, the "Big picture," to the New Delhi officials'. Heath to Bowles, 29 September 1952, 320 – Associated States-France, Box 9, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

²⁸ On Dean Acheson's poor relationship with Nehru, see Robert J. McMahon, *Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 56. For Bowles's closeness to Nehru, see Howard B. Schaffer, *Chester Bowles: New Dealer in the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 59.

²⁹ Andrew J. Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947-1964* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 278.

nonaligned foreign policies'.³⁰ While Nehru's mind would not easily be changed, the prime minister expressed interest in Bowles's trip.³¹

On the surface, Bowles's visit appeared to go well. He described his trip as effective in enabling him 'to get together a great deal of background information that will be of very great value to me in New Delhi in dealing with the Indian government' and noted that some progress was being made in Indochina.³² In return, Heath happily reported the positive impact that Bowles, an old friend of his, had made.³³ However, these niceties hid a fundamental disagreement between the two men over the focus of U.S. policy in Indochina. Bowles's trip around Southeast Asia served, in fact, only to confirm his belief that the United States should be doing more to support Asian nationalism. As he wrote to the director of the South Asian Office (SOA) of the State Department, Donald Kennedy, after his return, 'I am more than ever convinced that we can never really stabilize this part of the world unless we can ally ourselves with the progressive forces and really stand close to the people and for the kind of future which they are striving'.³⁴ This was particular true in Indochina, where numerous Frenchmen told him that they were fighting merely to maintain French commercial interests and that the indigenous people would likely remain aloof from the Vietnamese government unless a statement of future French concessions was forthcoming.³⁵ The solution, Bowles felt, was for the United States to be tougher with the French. He argued:

We have to be a lot firmer on this whole situation. The American people are never going to go on helping the French beat the Viet Minh simply to restore French colonialism in Indochina; and as long as the French refuse to make a clearcut statement as to their future intentions, the war against the Viet Minh is bound to remain more or less of a stalemate.³⁶

Indian support, he also reflected, would be unlikely unless France could be persuaded to demonstrate a greater commitment to Vietnamese independence.

Heath was quick to register his disagreement with Bowles's analysis of the situation and the path the United States should take. In particular, he was 'disturbed' by the New Delhi envoy's comments to the press that the 'foreign powers are still in control of Indochina' and by his suggestion that the United States pressurise the French to make a clear-cut stand regarding a final

³⁰ Schaffer, *Chester Bowles*, p. 4.

³¹ Telegram 703 from Bowles to Department of State, 19 August 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954. Africa and South Asia*, Volume XI, Part 2, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952-54), p. 1664.

³² Bowles to Heath, 10 September 1952, 320 – Associated States-France, Box 9, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

³³ Heath to Bowles, 29 September 1952, 320 – Associated States-France, Box 9, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

³⁴ Bowles to Kennedy, 10 September 1952, in Hoey to Heath, 30 September 1952, 320 – Associated States-France, Box 9, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

withdrawal.³⁷ In a long and passionate letter to Bowles in late September, Heath argued that France continued to hold only limited powers, which only debatably affected sovereignty and bothered Vietnamese nationalists little, and that the Associated States were in fact already full independent nations. Heath asserted that while a clear-cut statement from France regarding their future intentions on Indochina would, as Bowles suggested, ‘vastly increase their [the Bao Dai government’s] support from a country such as India’, such a move would fail to induce radical Vietnamese nationalists off the fence and serve to unsettle what support there remained in France for the war.³⁸ He wrote, ‘a renunciatory declaration now might be the determining factor in a decision to cease her [France’s] back-breaking expenditure to preserve an area from which, once the war were won, no financial return could be expected’.³⁹ Heath’s intervention did little to change Bowles’s view, however. Bowles continued to argue strongly for a firmer U.S. stance in Indochina to senior Washington officials, stressing to Acheson in late October that the ‘situation needs to be sharpened’ by making a clear cut statement on future French intentions.⁴⁰

Other Americans were similarly exasperated by the slow pace of French concessions and the State Department’s refusal to press America’s European ally more forcefully. Like Bowles, Theodore Tannenwald, a high ranking figure in the Mutual Security Agency (MSA), observed a French reluctance to provide greater autonomy to the Vietnamese during a visit to Indochina in mid-October.⁴¹ Tannenwald believed that Heath was part of the problem. He described the ambassador as ‘in complete and absolute control’ and ‘pursuing the policy of doing nothing that might in anyway upset the French’.⁴² Charlton Ogburn in the State Department’s Far Eastern Bureau, long a critic of the pro-French approach adopted in Indochina, was also critical of the ambassador, taking issue with Heath’s characterisation of the Associated States as independent entities. ‘That is not true, and Ambassador Heath must know it is not true’, Ogburn wrote to

³⁷ Heath to Bowles, 29 September 1952, 320 – Associated States-France, Box 9, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

³⁸ Bowles to Heath, 10 September 1952, 320 – Associated States-France, Box 9, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

³⁹ Heath to Bowles, 29 September 1952, 320 – Associated States-France, Box 9, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

⁴⁰ Bowles to Acheson [Extract], undated, in Hoey to Heath, 27 October 1952, 320 – Associated States-France, Box 9, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

⁴¹ The MSA superseded the Economic Cooperation Agency (ECA) in 1951, taking on military aid responsibilities alongside its supervision of economic assistance projects.

⁴² Tannenwald to Paul, 29 October 1952, Chronological File, 1952 (Folder 1), Box 3, Theodore Tannenwald, Jr. Papers, HSTL.

Allison.⁴³ He argued, 'It may be sound policy for us to act publicly as if it were true but that is quite different from asserting it among ourselves under a confidential classification'.⁴⁴

However, Heath remained unmoved. At a tense, early morning breakfast, the ambassador rebuffed Tannenwald's attempts to get him to adopt a firmer stance towards the French and he refused to let Bowles's letter to Acheson go unchallenged.⁴⁵ 'I disagree most thoroughly with the Ambassador's analysis of and recommendations on the situation in the Associated States', Heath wrote to Hoey in the PSA office.⁴⁶ Bowles had only spent thirty-six hours in Vietnam and no time in Laos or Cambodia, Heath noted, and 'I can only assume that the Ambassador's "informants" on Vietnam are Indian armchair strategists, Indians who are almost by definition opposed to things French'.⁴⁷ Once again waving away Bowles's suggested *démarche* to the French, he detailed that the primary interest of the United States in Indochina 'is to maintain France as our firm ally, and more specifically, as our ally stemming the Communist tide in Indochina'.⁴⁸ He hoped that 'the Department will continue to keep its eye fixed on our true objective and will not let itself be swayed by enthusiastic but misinformed traveling prophets'.⁴⁹

The Department did just that. Hoey reported that the PSA office were in accord with Heath's views and that 'the people in SOA are well aware of Bowles's lack of knowledge of the difficult problems which he is so free to comment on'.⁵⁰ It was not difficult for Washington officials to wave away Bowles's suggestions. For one, Bowles had only spent thirty-six hours in Indochina and therefore his impressions were, as he himself admitted, most likely 'superficial' and 'probably incorrect'.⁵¹ More broadly, Bowles's views simply did not fit with the prevailing thinking regarding Indochina and Asia in Washington.⁵² Although Acheson recognised Bowles's success in building effective relations with Nehru, he thought his New Delhi representative 'a

⁴³ Ogburn's comments are contained in the footnotes of Telegram 1264 from Heath to Department of State, 22 December 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 329

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Oral History Interview with Theodore Tannenwald, Jr., 14 July 1969, Interviewed by Jerry N. Hess, Internet Copy, HSTL, <<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/tannen.htm>> [accessed 19 March 2018].

⁴⁶ Heath to Hoey, 14 November 1952, 320 – Associated States-France, Box 9, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Hoey to Heath, 1 December 1952, lot 58 D266, Vietnam – 1952, Box 5, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs: Office of Southeast Asian Affairs; Subject Files, RG 59, USNA.

⁵¹ Bowles to Heath, 10 September 1952, 320 – Associated States-France, Box 9, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

⁵² Richard P. Dauer, *A North-South Mind in an East-West World: Chester Bowles and the Making of United States Cold War Foreign Policy, 1951-1969* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), p. 6.

pest' and believed Bowles' closeness to the Indian leader had distorted his view of global affairs.⁵³

Heath, on the other hand, was implementing policy according to State Department directives and his influence with Washington remained strong. After a visit to Indochina in October, Bonsal hailed Heath's performance. 'One of the pleasant things in talking about Indochina is to tell people what a fine job I think you have done and how very high your position is with all concerned both Asians and French as well as with your own staff', he wrote to the ambassador.⁵⁴ Others in the PSA office felt similarly. 'So much of your recent reporting has been of particular service to us that I beg you to permit me to say again that you continue to surpass your own previously set high standards', William Gibson told Heath in September.⁵⁵ So impressed was Gibson with one of Heath's recent cables, that he 'suggested that it be repeated to all our key posts in the world for general guidance. The suggestion was approved in the front office with enthusiasm'.⁵⁶

However, Bowles's views on the situation in Indochina were in fact not too far at odds with the thinking of Heath, Acheson and other more pro-French leaning American officials; they also believed that further French concessions were necessary in Indochina. In early 1953, Heath outlined his approach to the issue: 'With regard to the French, we should use our influence toward bringing about better working relations between them and the Viet[namese], not (r[e]p[ea]t not) hesitating to urge on them concessions to the Viet[namese] when these seem justified and advantageous to [the] over-all war effort'.⁵⁷ This was where the views of Heath and Bowles departed. Heath believed that the United States could push for concessions, but it must pick its moments to do so carefully and with due consideration of America's global responsibilities. Where Bowles was prepared to risk a French backlash in order to give the Bao Dai government a better chance of success, Heath, attuned closely to the delicate domestic situation in France, feared the damaging effect that strong American pressure on the issue of independence would have on France's ability to keep fighting in Vietnam and on French support in Europe. Reflecting this thinking, Heath confessed, despite his earlier assertion, that the Associated States were not in fact independent entities. Revealing the major difference between himself and Bowles, Heath wrote that they were as 'autonomous as the hard realities of the power

⁵³ Robert L. Beisner, *Dean Acheson: Life in the Cold War* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 507; p. 508.

⁵⁴ Bonsal to Heath, 5 November 1952, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1950-1952, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

⁵⁵ Gibson to Heath, 29 September 1952, lot 58 D207, Paris Correspondence 1951-55, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Telegram 1419 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 19 January 1953, 751g.00/1-1953, Box 3673, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

situation will permit'. 'We cannot go around blithely and romantically conferring on all peoples every final shred of sovereignty without regard for the consequences', he concluded.⁵⁸

Despite Bowles's effort, the short-term necessity of keeping a reluctant ally in a vital effort to prevent communist expansion held sway in U.S. policymaking circles. Heath's reporting helped to shore this policy up. As long as U.S. policy continued to prioritise the French effort and Indochinese independence remained limited, securing much needed Vietnamese and postcolonial support for Bao Dai's government would prove challenging. Vietnamese nationalist groups remained unconvinced by the French-associated Tam government and threatened to stay aloof unless further French concessions were forthcoming.⁵⁹ Furthermore, American efforts to exhort Bao Dai into vigorous action continued to have little effect. In late November, Heath reported his sincere disappointment that Bao Dai continued to exhibit an 'unwillingness to come to grips with [the] difficult responsibilities of war time chief of state'.⁶⁰ Nehru, and other Asian leaders, also refused to budge on the issue of recognising the Associated States.⁶¹

Getting France Back on the Offensive

During the latter half of 1952, Heath also directed considerable attention to trying to get France on the offensive. U.S. officials were alarmed by the defeatist attitude of French leaders and by the defensive tactics being employed in Vietnam. Letourneau's suggestion that a military victory was impossible because of the likelihood of a Chinese Communist intervention if Viet Minh forces began taking heavy losses, in particular, raised eyebrows among senior officials in the Truman administration.⁶² To Heath, continued military stalemate had negative effects far beyond the military situation. He believed it would 'foster listlessness in [the] Vietnam Gov[ernment] and army, [...] continue [the] burden on [the] US and Fr[ench] indefinitely, and set

⁵⁸ Heath to Hoey, 14 November 1952, 320 – Associated States-France, Box 9, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963, RG 84, USNA.

⁵⁹ Stressing the need for 'a further step forward [...] in Franco-Vietnamese relations' to improve the internal situation in Vietnam, Dai Viet official Phan Huy Quát informed Wharton Hubbard in the Hanoi Consulate that his group were 'prepared to wait further' before pledging their support to the Tam government. Telegram 267 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 11 November 1952, 751g.00/11-1152, Box 3673, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁶⁰ Telegram 1112 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 30 November 1952, 751g.00/11-3053, Box 3673, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁶¹ By the end of 1953, those Asian nations who had themselves gained independence from colonial rule continued to refuse to recognise the Bao Dai government and France's war against communism. See Special Estimate 52 – Probable Consequences in Non-Communist Asia of Certain Possible Developments in Indochina Before Mid-1954, 16 November 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 865-874.

⁶² U.S. Summary Minutes of Meeting between Representatives of the U.S. and France at the Department of State, 16 June 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 190-191.

[the] stage for [an] ignominious and fateful negotiation with [the] V[iet]M[inh]'.⁶³ Heath hoped that if France could regain the military initiative in the conflict, French calls for negotiation might recede and the political situation in Vietnam would receive an important boost.

As a result, Heath pushed hard for the resources that the French high command deemed necessary to pursue offensive operations. When commander-in-chief, Raoul Salan, who had replaced de Lattre in early 1952, informed the ambassador that he was struggling to round up the transport planes necessary for such operations, Heath pressured Washington to provide the planes and the maintenance crews needed to accompany them.⁶⁴ Calling for the same urgency which motivated the Berlin and Korean airlifts, Heath argued that a failure to act with speed would condemn 'Franco-Viet forces [...] to [a] costly and dangerous near stalemate in I[ndo-]C[hina] for months to come – if not longer'.⁶⁵ Despite encountering some resistance from the Pentagon and James Dunn, who had replaced Bruce as the U.S. ambassador in Paris in 1952, Heath succeeded in securing the resources that Salan had requested.⁶⁶ The Pentagon agreed to supply twenty-one C-47s on loan until February and the French air force pledged twenty-nine transport planes on a similar temporary basis. In late September, Salan called on Heath to 'express his appreciation of [the] action[s] of [the] US Gov[ernmen]t, MAAG and [the] Emb[assy] in expediting [the] delivery of addit[ional] planes to permit more massive parachute operations' and his subsequent optimism about forthcoming operations.⁶⁷

Despite Heath's efforts, by February 1953, the date intended for their return, the transport planes had yet to be employed offensively. Fighting at Nghia Lo, a typhoon which swept through Vietnam and the Viet Minh attack on the French strongpoint at Na San in November 1952 meant that their sole use was in defensive reactions to Viet Minh attacks.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Heath's efforts to get Washington to press Paris to send more troops to Vietnam received little consideration

⁶³ Telegram 220 from Heath to Secretary of State, 27 July 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 227.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* Salan was an opium smoking military officer who spent much of his military career in Indochina. He worked in Laos and the Central Highlands during the interwar years and commanded French forces in northern Vietnam in the late 1940s. De Lattre had appointed Salan his deputy in 1950, with Salan succeeding his protégé in 1952. Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 319-320.

⁶⁵ Telegram 382 from Heath to Department of State, 15 August 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 241.

⁶⁶ Dunn held reservations over pressing the French to provide transport aircraft that the United States had itself refused to give France during meetings in the summer. He was also concerned at the implications of assigning American maintenance crews to Vietnam without checking with the French Foreign Office first. Telegram 649 from Dunn to Department of States, 30 July 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 230-231; Telegram 3347 from Dunn to Department of State, 8 December 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 312-313. On the initial Pentagon refusal to supply the planes, see Telegram 241 from Acting Secretary of State to Saigon, 1 August 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 232.

⁶⁷ Telegram 632 from Heath to Secretary of State, 20 September 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 255.

⁶⁸ Telegram 1566 from Heath to Department, 6 February 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 387.

because of fears that it would generate French resentment and reopen the debate over whether France should continue to fight in Indochina.⁶⁹

Another factor inhibiting Heath's efforts to get France to intensify their war effort was American determination to bring West Germany into plans for Cold War defence in Europe. The European Defence Community (EDC), a plan to create a multi-national army including West German soldiers, seemed the most likely route. U.S. officials urged France to ratify the EDC treaty – signed by West Germany, France, Italy and the Benelux countries in 1952 – in their National Assembly. Fearful of the prospect of a remilitarised Germany, French officials were concerned that greater commitment in Indochina would mean that they could not keep pace with the raising of German forces in Europe.⁷⁰ The linkage of the two facts was not lost on American officials, including Heath.⁷¹ In late November, the ambassador stressed that the European-Indochina dilemma 'must be resolved in the interest of a global defense and strategy against the Communist Central Command'.⁷² However, no resolution seemed to be forthcoming, with U.S. officials committed to both victory in Indochina and French ratification of the EDC. The 'Saigon-Paris-Bonn chain reaction', as journalist Joseph Alsop called it, would continue to plague U.S. efforts to get France to reinforce their military effort in Southeast Asia under the new American administration.⁷³

Eisenhower in Office

On 4 November 1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower won the presidency in a landslide victory over the Democratic nominee Adlai Stevenson. Two weeks later, Eisenhower and his close staff met with Truman and his leading cabinet officials to discuss the pressing foreign policy issues that would confront the new administration. After discussing the Korean War, the Iranian oil crisis and European defence, talk turned to Southeast Asia. 'We have been concerned for a long time about the course of action in Indochina', Acheson told the group.⁷⁴ He informed them that the French lacked aggressiveness in their military operations, that Indochinese nationalists

⁶⁹ Memorandum by Byington to Bonsal, 'Discussion of Indochina by French-US Working Group', 12 January 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 350.

⁷⁰ U.S. Minutes of Tripartite Foreign Ministers Meeting with France and the U.K., 'Indochina', 28 May 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 159.

⁷¹ Joseph Alsop, 'Matter of Fact: Threat to NATO', *Washington Post*, 14 November 1952, p. 27.

⁷² Telegram 1107 from Heath to Secretary of State, 29 November 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 305.

⁷³ Joseph Alsop, 'Matter of Fact: Threat to NATO', *Washington Post*, 14 November 1952, p. 27.

⁷⁴ Memorandum of Meeting between President Truman and General Eisenhower, 18 November 1952, Memorandum of Conversation Series, Dean G. Acheson Papers, HSTL, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/achesonmemos/view.php?pagenumber=7&documentid=71-3_34&pagination=&documentVersion=both&documentYear=1952> [accessed 19 May 2018].

remained distant from the anti-Viet Minh effort, and that there was a strong body of opinion in France that regarded the conflict as a lost cause that was damaging to the possibility of French-German equality in European defence. Indochina, Acheson concluded, is ‘an urgent matter upon which the new Administration must be prepared to act’.⁷⁵ The president-elect seemed to heed these words. In a December meeting with his top aides aboard the USS *Helena*, Eisenhower stressed the importance of the conflict in Indochina.⁷⁶ Two months later, John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower’s secretary of state, described the Franco-Viet Minh War as ‘probably the top priority in foreign policy’ for the new administration.⁷⁷ Ike and Dulles, like Truman and Acheson, deemed Indochina essential to Western security and, despite understanding the importance of further concessions to the Vietnamese, continued to place greater preference on the continuation of a French military effort.⁷⁸ The new administration also shared the desire of their predecessors to secure French cooperation for the EDC.

In the early stages of Eisenhower’s presidency there was some optimism among leading figures that France, with the help of the United States, could turn the situation around in Indochina. Dulles believed that the Radical Party politician René Mayer, who became French prime minister in January 1953, ‘espoused the same ideas as we had regarding the EDC and Indochina’ and should therefore be treated as ‘in our corner’.⁷⁹ Yet the secretary realised that time was running out. He described the Mayer government as the last real opportunity to make progress on these issues. ‘If we could not do that with Mayer’, he noted, ‘it was doubtful it could be done at all in the predictable future and grave consequences would result’.⁸⁰ With Mayer, Letourneau and Georges Bidault, the French foreign minister, set to travel to Washington for a series of meetings that would include discussions on Indochina, it was agreed by those present at a high level meeting at the end of March that the United States would increase its aid to the French in Indochina ‘if there was a [military] plan that promised real success’.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 341.

⁷⁷ Memorandum of Conversation by Dulles, 24 March 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 419.

⁷⁸ As Eisenhower said at a National Security Council Meeting in May: ‘if the French really desired to cut the best figure before the world, the obvious course to pursue was first to defeat Vietminh forces and then magnanimously to offer independence to the Associated States’. Memorandum of Discussion at the 143rd Meeting of the National Security Council, 6 May 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 548.

⁷⁹ Memorandum of Conversation with Eisenhower, Dulles, Humphrey, Wilson, and Stassen, 24 March 1953, Meeting with the President 1953, Box 1, White House Memoranda Series, John Foster Dulles Papers (hereafter JFD Papers), DDEL.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid. Bidault had been intimately connected with the Franco-Viet Minh War since its inception in 1945, taking a lead role in policy towards Indochina during his terms as president, prime minister, defence minister and foreign minister in the French government. If the later American War was ‘McNamara’s war’ or ‘Johnson’s war’, the Franco-Viet Minh War was ‘Bidault’s war’. Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 353.

As the American most experienced and intimately involved in Indochina affairs, Heath would play an important role in these talks. His suggestion in mid-January that he and the new chief of MAAG, General Thomas J. H. Trapnell, be present as consultants for Mayer's visit received support from Washington and his reports helped prepare the State Department for the influential French visitors.⁸² Prior to leaving for Washington, Heath argued that there remained no easy solution to the Indochina problem and that no 'conference or study group can "pull such a rabbit out of a hat" at this time'.⁸³ Heath's hope of future success rested on strengthening the French military effort and the VNA. He argued that pressing France for concessions to the Associated States should be avoided due to the delicacy of the French domestic situation.⁸⁴ Heath, in particular, placed great stress on increasing the size of the VNA by another 40,000, arguing that the United States should supply the funding if the French could not find the money. He believed that such an American commitment would entitle the United States to examine detailed French offensive plans, a guarantee that such operations would be carried out aggressively and assurances that France had no intention of negotiating a way out of the conflict. The ambassador, it seems, retained hopes of using American aid to establish the middle ground diplomatic position for his mission that he had pressed for in late 1950. He was also optimistic that such an increase in the VNA, coupled with some risk-taking and aggressive leadership, might enable Franco-Vietnamese forces to break the back of the Viet Minh resistance within six to eight months of the 1953/1954 campaign season.⁸⁵ On 17 March, Heath departed for Washington.

When Franco-American discussions got underway in late March it quickly became apparent that the two nations had different objectives in Vietnam. While the Americans hoped for a French military plan that would provide a template for winning the war, the French delegation underlined that their goal was simply to obtain a position of strength in the conflict from which they could negotiate. Eisenhower's threat that the United States would not provide further aid unless a plan aimed at victory was forthcoming, however, forced Mayer to cobble together an offensive military plan on the spot. The Letourneau Plan, as it became known, set out to establish new Vietnamese battalions of six-hundred men to take on pacification duties in central and southern Vietnam, freeing up the main French forces for offensive operations in Tonkin. The plan

⁸² Telegram 1419 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 19 January 1953, 751g.00/1-1953, Box 3673, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁸³ Telegram 1469 from Heath to Department of State, 25 January 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 359.

⁸⁴ Telegram 1779 from Heath to Department of State, 12 March 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 403.

⁸⁵ Heath to Bonsal, 24 January 1953, 751g.00/1-2453, Box 3673, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. On Heath encountering pessimistic views from French military leaders about the chances of Franco-Vietnamese forces being able to make significant dents in the Viet Minh's strength, see Telegram 1511 from Heath to Department of State, 29 January 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 371; Telegram 1725 from Heath to Department of State, 4 March 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 397-398.

optimistically set out that Franco-Vietnamese forces would destroy the major Viet Minh units in 1955. Eisenhower informed Mayer that he would study the plan before pledging further aid.⁸⁶

Following the conclusion of the meetings, Heath was set to enjoy a period of leave. He was badly in need of a rest, having pressed the State Department for a break since autumn 1952. 'I've had no leave except for a few patches of three or four days since 1947 when I got in three and half weeks rise in two instalments', he wrote to Bonsal in August 1952.⁸⁷ Although the Department were aware of the taxing nature of his post and appeared eager to help, the absence of a deputy in Saigon stalled their giving the go ahead; Gullion had departed in 1952. The appointment of Robert M. McClintock, a gregarious and flamboyant career diplomat in his forties, as deputy chief of mission in early 1953 removed this barrier. McClintock had earned an international reputation as a fearsome debater as a student and aced the Foreign Service entrance exam. Prior to his appointment to Saigon, McClintock had served in Central America, South America, the Caribbean, Europe and North Africa. He was fluent in French and had some experience of Asia, having worked as a vice-consul in Kobe, Japan in the 1930s. A talented sailor, he frequently conducted diplomatic business with his Irish setter at his side and prided himself on dictating telegrams in their final form. He divided opinion, however. As Russell Jack Smith, a former CIA official and close friend of McClintock's recalled, 'He could be a charming silken courtier or an arrogant martinet. In this latter role he infuriated and alienated a number of people, including my fellow CIA officers, but I saw very little of this side'.⁸⁸ With McClintock in place, Heath was set for his leave.⁸⁹

However, events got in the way. Just as his leave was about to begin, the Viet Minh launched a piercing invasion of Laos, quickly cutting their way through the country and threatening the royal capital of Luang Prabang. While Giap's forces withdrew in early May (his intention had been simply to scatter French forces and prepare an infrastructure for later moves in the country), the ease of the Viet Minh advance left U.S. officials concerned.⁹⁰ Foremost among them was the president. The invasion undermined Ike's confidence in an eventual French military victory in Indochina, convincing him that further French concessions to the Vietnamese and an

⁸⁶ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 342-344; Statler, *Replacing France*, pp. 61-63.

⁸⁷ Heath to Bonsal, 6 August 1952, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1950-1952, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

⁸⁸ Colonel Robert D. Heintz Jr., 'Bob McClintock was a "Dandy" Diplomat', *Sarasota Journal*, 15 November 1976, 25:150, p. 6-A; 'Stanford Men Pass Foreign Service Tests: Robert McClintock Makes Highest Score Ever to be Recorded', *The Stanford Daily*, 1 December 1931, 80:42, p. 1; Author's Interview with William J. Cunningham, 21 August 2012; Russell Jack Smith, *The Unknown CIA: My Three Decades with the Agency* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1989), p. 64.

⁸⁹ In a letter to Frank Nash, the assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, McClintock revealed that 'the Department rushed me out here to remain in charge of the Embassy while the Ambassador was back in the States'. McClintock to Nash, 10 April 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 481.

⁹⁰ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 345.

assertive French commander were needed immediately.⁹¹ The shock of the Laos incursion was accompanied by growing political unrest in Cambodia. Disappointed at the lack of support from both Paris and Washington for his requests for further independence, the Cambodian monarch, Norodom Sihanouk, vented his frustration in an interview with the *New York Times* on 18 April. Sihanouk indicated that if further concessions were not forthcoming then he could not assure France of Cambodia's continuing loyalty in the war.⁹²

With such dramatic events unfolding in his diocese, and at the request of the Far Eastern Bureau, Heath decided to forego his leave, diving straight back into meetings in Washington.⁹³ He attended discussions in the State Department over the possibility of taking the Viet Minh invasion of Laos to the UN – a move that many Americans, including Heath, thought would have a valuable effect on Indochinese nationalists but that the French were little interested in – and assisted those in the Far Eastern Bureau furiously trying to calm Franco-Cambodian relations.⁹⁴ A day after the *New York Times* article broke, Heath met with Hoey and Bonsal to formulate a plan to reduce the damage. They concluded that Sihanouk should speak to the press again, and this time stress that much progress towards independence had already been made and that France was actively studying the concessions he had requested. Despite U.S. pressure, including stressing the negative impact of his statement on American public opinion and aid, Sihanouk refused to make any statement of the sort that the Americans desired.⁹⁵ Although Heath hoped that the American intervention with Sihanouk would yet have a mollifying effect, he believed that the increasing severity of the situation now necessitated further French political concessions. Heath told Dulles that France would now have to initiate some of the changes Sihanouk demanded and pressed the secretary that 'our influence must be exerted to that end'.⁹⁶ The

⁹¹ Memorandum of Discussion at the 141st Meeting of the National Security Council, 28 April 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 519.

⁹² Michael James, 'King, Here, Warns Cambodia May Rise: Norodom Says Indo-China Unit May Turn to Reds if French Reject Independence Plea', *NYT*, 19 April 1953, p. 1; p. 13. Sihanouk had inherited the Cambodian throne in 1941. He initially embraced French colonial rule as a means to defend his nation from Thai and Vietnamese aggressors and advocating a slow transfer of independence to Cambodia. He abandoned this position in 1952 after pressure for more rapid change in Cambodia grew. William J. Rust, *Eisenhower and Cambodia: Diplomacy, Covert Action, and the Origins of the Second Indochina War* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), pp. 6-16.

⁹³ Memorandum by Heath to Dulles, 'Current Situation in Indochina', 28 April 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 525. State Department happiness with McClintock's performance in Saigon was an important factor in allowing Heath to stay on longer in Washington, see Bonsal to McClintock, 14 May 1953, Box 74, Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, General Records, 1936-1963, RG 84, USNA.

⁹⁴ Memorandum by Baker, 'Reported Invasion of Laos by Vietminh Forces', 15 April 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 468-470; Memorandum by Heath to Dulles, 'Current Situation in Indochina', 28 April 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 524.

⁹⁵ Memorandum by Bonsal to Robertson, 'Interview with King of Cambodia Printed in the *New York Times* April 19', 22 April 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 488-490.

⁹⁶ Memorandum by Heath to Dulles, 'Current Situation in Indochina', 28 April 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 525.

ambassador saw Cambodia's continuance in the French Union as central to U.S. hopes of sustaining a French war effort in Indochina. 'This [the] French would hardly wish to do should [the] Cambodian King withdraw [Cambodia] from all [their] obligations toward France', Heath asserted.⁹⁷

Underway at the same time was a full American military review of the Letourneau Plan. There were widespread reservations in the United States over the plan. A review by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) expressed concern at the plan's lack of aggression, failure to recognise the importance of cutting off Viet Minh supply lines and limited emphasis on giving the Vietnamese greater military responsibility. The JCS concluded that 'as much pressure as is feasible should be placed on France' to obtain a commitment to address these issues.⁹⁸ Heath sat in on some of the high-level discussions surrounding the Letourneau Plan and sought to contextualise the plan with what he considered was possible in Indochina given his experience there. The ambassador stressed that while the insistence of the JCS for a plan promising more rapid progress was human, that it revealed 'unfamiliarity with the French and Vietnamese forces, as they are and with the actual battle and climatic difficulties they face in Indochina'.⁹⁹ Yet he too was far from certain that the plan would bring success.¹⁰⁰ But with no de Lattre type figure who could obtain the type of fast-paced progress that was called for, Heath argued that the United States had to support the Letourneau Plan and provide the finances France had requested.

Last Chance Saloon

The supposed 'last hope' for a successful pursuit of U.S. goals in Indochina and Europe, as Dulles had earlier described the Mayer administration, did not last long. On 21 May 1953, Mayer's government fell. Pierre Mendès France, a member of the Radical Party and a long-time critic of the war in Indochina, was one of those who sought parliamentary approval for a government. After telling the National Assembly that France should submit a plan for ending the war to the Americans and British, Mendès France's appointment went to a vote. He was thirteen votes short. Instead, Joseph Laniel was appointed as prime minister. Paul Reynaud, an influential member of the Democratic Republic Alliance who was appointed to Laniel's cabinet to handle Indochina matters, informed C. Douglas Dillon, who took over from Dunn as the American

⁹⁷ Telegram 28 from Heath to Department of State, 3 July 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 633.

⁹⁸ Memorandum by Joint Chiefs of Staff to Wilson, 'Proposed French Strategic Plan for the Successful Conclusion of the War in Indochina', 21 April 1953, in Halaby to Secretary of State, 24 April 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 495.

⁹⁹ Substance of Discussions of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting at the Pentagon, 24 April 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 497; Memorandum by Heath to Dulles, 'Current Situation in Indochina', 28 April 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 522.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

ambassador in Paris in 1953, that the Laniel government truly represented the absolute last chance for the 'US and free world to turn [the] Indochina situation around'.¹⁰¹ The Frenchman told Dillon that if Laniel's government fell it would likely be replaced by a Mendès France administration which would move ahead with plans for a French departure from Southeast Asia.¹⁰²

A series of French decisions in the middle of 1953 gave some reason for optimism for U.S. officials. French leaders addressed two of the things that Eisenhower felt was missing in Indochina: a new military leader and a French statement outlining further steps towards Indochinese independence. Jean Letourneau was replaced as high commissioner by Maurice Dejean, a career diplomat more sympathetic to Vietnamese desires for independence, and Raoul Salan by General Henri Navarre, a commander with considerable expertise in pacification operations.¹⁰³ Navarre was bullish from the start, promising offensive operations and certain victory. The successful French seizure of sizeable stores of Viet Minh weaponry at Lang Son in mid-July seemed a good indicator that he intended to follow through on his word.¹⁰⁴ Then on 3 July came a declaration from Laniel, promising negotiations on the transfer of further powers to the Associated States governments and a choice over whether to remain in the French Union.¹⁰⁵ The French also now seemed more receptive to U.S. military advice, accepting a proposal to send an American military mission led by General John W. O'Daniel to Indochina to evaluate and work on the Letourneau Plan.¹⁰⁶

Despite Mendès France's defeat, pressure for a negotiated peace in France continued to build in mid-1953, and now included influential segments of the French media and the National Assembly. 'It is no longer [the] case of [the] fairly isolated voice of Mendès-France advancing his withdrawal theory', Dillon reported in late May.¹⁰⁷ Laniel's cabinet was divided over whether or not France should abandon Indochina so that it could focus on Europe, and the new prime minister announced in his investiture speech that he would do all he could to bring an end to the war.¹⁰⁸ The Soviet peace offensive following Joseph Stalin's death in March and the armistice in Korea increased the responsiveness of French politicians to the idea of negotiations in Indochina.

¹⁰¹ Telegram 30 from Dillon to Department of State, 2 July 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 632.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 354.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 354-355.

¹⁰⁵ The 3 July declaration was translated in Telegram 52 from Paris to Secretary of State, 3 July 1953, 751g.00/7-353, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰⁶ Spector, pp. 173-174.

¹⁰⁷ Telegram 6082 from Dillon to Department of State, 23 May 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 579.

¹⁰⁸ Foreign Service Despatch 2999 from Paris to Department of State, 'Laniel Investiture Speech – Indochina', 29 June 1953, 751g.00/6-2953, Box 3674, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. For the French cabinet's division on the issue of Indochina v Europe, see Telegram 146 from Achilles to Department of State, 10 July, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 653; Statler, *Replacing France*, pp. 54-56; Cesari, 'The Declining Value of Indochina', p. 190.

The prospect of peace in Korea, Defence Minister Rene Pleven told U.S. officials, 'made longing for [an] Indochina armistice almost uncontrollable' in France.¹⁰⁹ Why, French officials asked quite understandably, could the United States negotiate its way out of an Asian war against communism when American officials insisted France could not do the same in Indochina? U.S. officials continued to stress the need for France to secure a more favourable military position with which to negotiate from.¹¹⁰

However, to Dillon, the pressure to withdraw had not yet 'reached dangerous proportions'.¹¹¹ He, and other Americans, believed that U.S. actions and support could help postpone a French departure.¹¹² Dillon wrote, 'There is no doubt that US aid is an essential element in [the] continuation of [the] French effort in I[ndo-]C[hina] and any indication we [can] give of [our] support for [the] French position plays [a] part in encouraging [the] French to continue [the] fight'.¹¹³ Dillon argued that the United States should supply further aid, support the newly appointed civil and military French leaders, and press for offensive operations. If some hope of victory in Indochina could be re-established, calls to withdraw would soon recede, he believed. Others stressed the importance of ensuring that Indochinese nationalists did nothing which might expedite a French withdrawal.¹¹⁴ While the governor of North Vietnam, Nguyen Huu Tri, doubted the U.S. ability to keep France in the fight, the promise of \$400 million in American aid followed by an additional \$385 million in September demonstrated that the United States would try nonetheless.¹¹⁵

'Indochina, All But Lost'

With great importance placed on ensuring that U.S. activities were directed towards the maintenance of the French military effort, Heath was horrified on returning to Vietnam from Washington in the summer to discover that his own staff were doing their utmost to undermine that very policy. The visit of David Douglas Duncan, a photojournalist famed for his work in Korea, to write an article for the influential *Life* magazine, provided the platform for two

¹⁰⁹ Telegram 106 from Achilles to Department of State, 8 July 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 643.

¹¹⁰ Memorandum by Bonsal to Johnson, 'Alternatives in Indochina', 9 September 1953, 751g.00/9-953, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹¹¹ Telegram 6097 from Dillon to Department of State, 23 May 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 581.

¹¹² Memorandum by Knight to Merchant, 'Possible French Decision to Withdraw from Indochina', 1 May 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 534-535; Memorandum by Bonsal to Knight, 'Possible French Decision to Withdraw from Indochina', 2 May 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 537-538.

¹¹³ Telegram 6082 from Dillon to Department of State, 23 May 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 580.

¹¹⁴ Telegram 84 from Secretary of State to Saigon, 13 July 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 674.

¹¹⁵ Telegram 836 from Sturm to Department of State, 18 June 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 613; William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part 1: 1945-1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 135.

American aid workers to vent their frustrations with the U.S. assistance programme in Indochina. According to the article, which made the front page of the 3 August edition of *Life* under the heading 'Indochina, All But Lost', Dr Malcolm Gaar, a professor of agriculture at Louisiana State University seconded to the MSA, and Herman Holiday, the officer in charge of relief and rehabilitation programmes for the MSA in Vietnam, were ashamed of U.S. efforts, critical of French colonial intervention in Indochinese affairs and disappointed at U.S. support of an unpopular Vietnamese government.¹¹⁶ Alongside extensive quotes from the two officials, Duncan included images of abandoned French command posts during the middle of the day and assertions from Vietnamese officials insistent on their desire for further independence.¹¹⁷ The French were outraged. Bidault threatened 'to have the magazine pulled from Parisian store shelves'; *Paris Match*, a weekly French magazine, criticised the article as representative of 'the "short-sightedness" of the United States policy of "anti-colonialism"', whilst the French Foreign Office said 'that France's battle against the Communist-led Vietminh in Indo-China had been defamed and her soldiers slandered'.¹¹⁸ Heath feared that the article would have serious consequences. He felt it 'would not help our policy to keep [the] French fighting here in good spirit' and 'might aid [the] mounting French opposition [in] Paris calling for [a] French withdrawal from Indochina'.¹¹⁹ Washington policymakers felt similarly.¹²⁰

More troubling news reached the ambassador. In researching his damaging article, Duncan had been guided around the country by the Saigon embassy's press officer, Howard Simpson. McClintock, perhaps unaware of Duncan's reputation as a risk-taking journalist with an aversion to toeing the editorial line, had instructed Simpson to show Duncan the truth about the war. Simpson did as he was told.¹²¹ Heath was furious and set about managing the situation. Initially intent on sending Simpson home for his part in the incident, Heath ultimately decided to let Simpson stay.¹²² Gaar and Holiday, however, had more to answer for. Washington asked the embassy to confirm what they had told Duncan and requested that Heath 'instruct [his] staff to limit [their] discussions with reporters to [the] activities for which [they are] directly responsible' and to air any policy opinions they held through official channels.¹²³ After a brief investigation,

¹¹⁶ David Douglas Duncan, 'Americans Speak From Indochina', *Life*, 3 August 1953, pp. 88-91.

¹¹⁷ David Douglas Duncan, 'Indochina, All But Lost', *Life*, 3 August 1953, pp. 73-91.

¹¹⁸ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 362-363; Foreign Service Despatch 614 from Paris to Department of State, 'Paris-Match's Reply to Life's August 3 Report in Indochina', 24 August 1953, 751g.00/8-2453, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; 'Life Article Denounced', *NYT*, 5 August 1953, p. 3.

¹¹⁹ Telegram 121 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 18 July 1953, 751g.00/7-1853, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²⁰ Memorandum from Jackson to Cutler, 11 August 1953, OF 181-C Indo-China, Box 716, Official File, White House Central Files, DDE Papers, DDEL.

¹²¹ Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, pp. 83-85.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹²³ Telegram MUSTO 102 from Hayes to Saigon, 31 July 1953, 'Special Papers', Box 6, James Hendrick Papers, HSTL.

Heath was convinced that Holiday was innocent and had been misquoted. He was less sure about Gaar.¹²⁴ The ambassador wrote:

Gaar has admitted saying harmful, extremely unfair, and in some cases ridiculous things. These were products of Gaar's ignorance of [the] concept [of] routine loyalty to [the] organization which is paying one's salary [...] and of straying or being led into commenting on subjects manifestly outside his competence.¹²⁵

To James Hendrick, who had arrived as special representative of the MSA in northern Vietnam in early 1953, Gaar's disloyalty was symptomatic of that of the MSA in Indochina more generally. Reflecting later on his time in Vietnam, Hendrick recalled that several 'of the officers in the division were taken from business or professional life, or taken from retirement, and thus not part of the Foreign Service or Civil Service. They would handle their jobs as private individuals' and not as 'members of a team'.¹²⁶ Gaar's tour, however, came to its natural end in early September, pre-empting any need for Heath to dismiss him.¹²⁷

Despite Gaar's transgression, Heath's investigation led him to conclude that the U.S. mission in Indochina remained committed to the policy of support behind the French.¹²⁸ Certainly, there was some natural impatience with the French and occasional criticism over the colonial attitude prevalent among some French officials, but most of the blame for the article, Heath believed, lay with the irresponsible reporting of Duncan and *Life's* decision to publish the piece. Duncan's article, the ambassador noted, was 'not only poor – I am forced even to say slanted – journalism'.¹²⁹ He felt that Duncan had arrived 'with a preconceived idea of the Indo-China situation' and merely 'proceeded to tailor facts to fit his prejudice, to distort reality into chimera'.¹³⁰ In a series of letters, Heath vented his frustration to Henry Luce, the editor-in-chief of Time-Life. He attacked Duncan's errors in his analysis and stressed the damage that had been done. Heath told Luce that the worst effect could be felt on the American taxpayer, 'who might be influenced by this unfair, biased piece of writing against supporting an effort so patently

¹²⁴ Holiday to McReynolds, 6 August 1953, in Heath to Bonsal, 12 August 1953, 751g.00/8-1253, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²⁵ Telegram 421 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 9 September 1953, 751g.00/9-953, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²⁶ Note from the Donor of the Papers [James P. Hendrick] explaining the content of the 'Hanoi: Special Papers', September 1978, 'Special Papers', Mission to North Vietnam, Mutual Security Administration, Box 6, James P. Hendrick Papers, HSTL.

¹²⁷ Telegram 421 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 9 September 1953, 751g.00/9-953, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²⁸ Telegram 404 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 5 September 1953, 751g.00/9-553, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²⁹ Heath to Luce, 12 August 1953, in Heath to Bonsal, 12 August 1953, 751g.00/8-1253, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

crucial for the entire free world'.¹³¹ Aware of *Life*'s influence on the middlebrow of American public opinion, the ambassador hoped that Luce would sanction another article in the near future to help repair the harmful effects of Duncan's sensationalist piece.¹³²

Luce was devastated to discover the Duncan article had been published.¹³³ If Luce had been present in his editorial office, the article would most likely never have found its way to print. Luce had been one of the strongest supporters of the war in the American press. Following the U.S. government's decision to support France in 1950, Luce's influential publications heralded the importance of the French war, displayed relative optimism about French chances, and placed French commanders on their iconic cover pages. Circumstance had it that Luce was visiting his wife, the U.S. ambassador to Italy, Claire Luce, in Rome. In his absence, senior editor Sidney James had given Duncan's piece the green light.¹³⁴ The editor-in-chief, dealing with Heath's letter as well as similar complaints from French officials, placed Duncan on the inactive list and expressed interest in publishing a more positive article on Indochina.¹³⁵ Figures in the State Department felt that Heath's 12 August letter to Luce could be the answer and pushed for its publication.¹³⁶ On 11 September, Heath heard confirmation that Luce intended to publish a shortened version of his letter in *Life*.¹³⁷

Heath's letter, published as 'France is Fighting the Good Fight', appeared alongside another more optimistic article on Indochina in the 21 September edition of *Life* and described Duncan's article as a 'depressive picture' that misrepresented the truth.¹³⁸ Arguing that France

¹³¹ Ibid. This came at a time when Eisenhower was seeking the approval of Congress for the provision of a further \$400 million for the French war effort, a move that many influential senators held concerns about and the U.S. public showed little appetite for. Gibbons, pp. 129-135.

¹³² Heath to Luce, 12 August 1953, in Heath to Bonsal, 12 August 1953, 751g.00/8-1253, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. On the influence of Time Inc. publications, see Robert E. Herzstein, *Henry R. Luce, Time, and the American Crusade in Asia* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. xiii.

¹³³ For Luce's support for the French effort in Indochina, see Telegram 1220 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 17 December 1952, 751g.00/12-1753, Box 3673, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 212-213. For Luce's reaction to the Duncan article's publication, see Telegram 391 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 3 September 1953, 751g.00/9-353, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹³⁴ Herzstein, p. 183.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 184; Telegram 391 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 3 September 1953, 751g.00/9-353, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹³⁶ Telegram 291 from Department of State to Saigon, 22 August 1953, 751g.00/8-2253, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹³⁷ Telegram 420 from Department of State to Saigon, 11 September 1953, 751g.00/9-1153, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹³⁸ Donald R. Heath, 'France is Fighting the Good Fight', *Life*, 21 September 1953, p. 62. A few days later, news came that Heath's letter would receive even greater circulation. The State Department informed him that it would be reprinted 'as [a] paid newspaper advertisement by [the] International Latex Corporation "as public service"' and that it had 'appeared locally [in the] Washington Post [on] September 23 and presumably [in] many other newspapers'. Telegram 497 from Department of State to Saigon, 24 September 1953, 751g.00/9-2453, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

was fighting for the free world against communism in Indochina, Heath argued that Franco-Indochinese relations were improving, particularly after the 3 July declaration, and expressed confidence in ultimate success in Indochina. 'Given the will to win, the additional troops sought by Navarre, and continued financial support of the U.S., final victory, I am convinced is possible', he wrote.¹³⁹ Luce congratulated the ambassador. 'Thanks to your cooperation a spirit and hopeful effort has been restored', he told Heath after the article's publication.¹⁴⁰ The State Department were also impressed. Bonsal wrote to Heath, 'I think by your reaction to the Duncan article you have performed a valuable service indeed. Your instinct in the matter has proved much sounder than mine which was to brush off the Duncan approach to a serious matter in what is after all a medium of mass entertainment'.¹⁴¹

It was not the first time that Heath had intervened with the press to smooth Franco-American relations. Press management had formed an integral part of the Saigon embassy's efforts to sustain the French war effort since 1950. French officials were deeply sensitive to the reports published in the American press, complaining frequently about what they perceived as inaccuracies or excessive pessimism in influential publications like the *New York Times* and *Life*. French perceptions of the official U.S. position on Indochina were often coloured by American news reports, some of which were reprinted in French newspapers. U.S. officials feared that the press could undermine French military morale, damage Franco-American relations, and weaken domestic support in France for the war.¹⁴² Knowing that the continuance and success of the French war effort relied on congressional support for the government's aid package to Indochina, U.S. officials worried that critical American press coverage of the war might cause Congress to question the value of U.S. aid.¹⁴³

The U.S. government's anxiety about the press's ability to undermine its policy in Indochina reflected broader concerns about the press's influence and loyalty during the 1950s. Journalists attracted the intermittent attention of Senator Joseph McCarthy and others during the Red Scare. Policymakers deemed the press an important target for communist infiltration because, as one Senate investigation noted, of their 'access [to] sensitive information and because they influenced public opinion'.¹⁴⁴ In this respect, U.S. officials questioned the loyalty of

¹³⁹ Donald R. Heath, 'France is Fighting the Good Fight', *Life*, 21 September 1953, p. 62.

¹⁴⁰ Telegram 461 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 16 September 1953, 751g.00/9-1653, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁴¹ Bonsal to Heath, 25 September 1953, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1953, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁴² Telegram 609 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 24 April 1951, 751g.00/4-2451, Box 3670, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 39.

¹⁴³ U.S. Summary of Minutes of a Meeting between Representatives of the United States and France at the Department of State, 16 June 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 192.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Edward Alwood, *Dark Days in the Newsroom: McCarthyism Aimed at the Press* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2007), p. 1.

American correspondents who had reported on the Chinese Civil War during the 1940s. Adjudged to have undermined Chiang Kai-shek with their pessimistic coverage, several journalists lost their jobs.¹⁴⁵ Such concerns clearly affected the thinking of U.S. officials with regard to Indochina. A group of leading policymakers pondered in one meeting ‘whether [the] Communists were responsible for the lurid despatches from Indochina’, while Gullion warned a former China correspondent sent to cover Vietnam against undermining the French war effort with the same defeatist reporting that he felt had blighted the anti-communist effort in China.¹⁴⁶

For the most part, however, American press reports from Indochina posed few problems for the U.S. government. Journalists viewed the Franco-Viet Minh War largely through the same Cold War prism as U.S. officials and were generally in accord with their government’s decision to support France’s war.¹⁴⁷ In fact, powerful voices in the American media had pressed hard for the United States to aid France in Indochina.¹⁴⁸ The visit of Robert Aura Smith, a *New York Times* editor who met with French authorities in Vietnam in December 1951, reveals his newspaper’s active efforts to assist the French.¹⁴⁹ ‘What can my paper do to help you in the fight you are so courageously waging?’, Smith asked Georges Gautier of the French high commission.¹⁵⁰ After Gautier stressed the need for Smith’s newspaper to highlight the importance of France’s war to the global struggle against communism, Smith answered, ‘We have been trying to do that all along’.¹⁵¹ Moreover, journalistic culture in the 1950s placed a premium on official sources, giving both French and U.S. officials considerable scope to shape coverage.¹⁵²

The restrictions that French officials placed on press coverage in Indochina and the lack of resources the media devoted to the story increased the likelihood of favourable reporting of the war in the American press. The French carefully screened all outgoing journalistic dispatches, censoring those parts they deemed damaging to their war effort, and restricted reporters’ access to the front. Given Indochina’s relatively low importance in the United States, newspapers also invested limited funds in covering the war, confining their correspondents to sporadic and short-

¹⁴⁵ Stephen MacKinnon and Oris Friesen, *China Reporting: An Oral History of American Journalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), p. ix; Peter Rand, *China Hands: The Adventures and Ordeals of the American Journalists Who Joined Forces with the Great Chinese Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), pp. 311-315.

¹⁴⁶ Memorandum of Discussion at the 178th Meeting of the National Security Council, 30 December 1953, Box 5, NSC Series, Ann Whitman File (hereafter AW File), DDE Papers, DDEL; Topping, p. 126.

¹⁴⁷ Wyatt, p. 60.

¹⁴⁸ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 212-213; Herzstein, pp. 142-143.

¹⁴⁹ Marilyn Young, “‘The Same Struggle for Liberty’”, p. 209; Campomenosi, p. 97.

¹⁵⁰ Despatch 279 from U.S. Legation Saigon to Department of State, ‘Interview Between Acting French High Commissioner Gautier and Robert Aura Smith of New York “Times”’, 3 December 1951, 751g.00/12-251, Box 3671, CF 1950–1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 12.

term visits that made it difficult for them to build up the contacts and knowledge base to challenge the official version of events more consistently. The nature of these restrictions meant that American correspondents often accepted, or were forced to accept, the self-serving and optimistic image of the war put forward by the French.¹⁵³

Despite the severe restrictions under which American correspondents worked, damaging articles like Duncan's still slipped through. Journalists circumvented French censors by sending stories back on a tape in the mail or by filing their story after departing the country, and censors occasionally missed critical stories because of their poor English.¹⁵⁴ Reporters, too, watched the movements of official French military photographers to predict where the next offensive might take place and gained authorisation to accompany French troops from commanders in the field rather than senior leaders more prone to saying no.¹⁵⁵

The ability of journalists to bypass the restrictions would not have mattered had they all been supportive of the U.S. decision to aid France. As it was, some reporters found cause to criticise French military tactics, draw attention to the persistence of French colonial rule, and highlight the weakness of the French-supported anti-communist Vietnamese government. Harold Isaacs of *Newsweek* raised concerns about the harmful long-term effects of supporting France on U.S. prestige in Asia, while Seymour Topping of the Associated Press doubted the possibility of a French military victory after they lost control of the frontier with China in late 1950.¹⁵⁶ Conversations with Vietnamese officials, French soldiers, and lower level U.S. representatives often gave correspondents, as it did Duncan, cause to doubt the official version fed to them by French authorities. When journalists were able to employ the views of these official sources, editors tended, as Steven Casey notes, 'to stand by correspondents who produced such copy, even in the face of intense criticism from officials and generals'.¹⁵⁷

Given French and American sensitivity to the reporting of the American press, Heath had intervened on several occasions prior to the appearance of Duncan's article. When de Lattre complained about the critical press coverage that he and the French war effort was receiving in the United States in early 1951, Heath's recommendation that a journalist write a more favourable piece was received warmly by the State Department and the resulting article had a salutary effect on the general's mood.¹⁵⁸ Heath also moved quickly to correct American

¹⁵³ Wyatt, pp. 56–58.

¹⁵⁴ Thomas Bass, *The Spy Who Loved Us: The Vietnam War and Pham Xuan An's Dangerous Game* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009), p. 55.

¹⁵⁵ Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 51; Sherry, p. 395.

¹⁵⁶ Memorandum of Conversation between Ogburn and Isaacs, 'United States Policy in Indochina', 17 April 1950, lot 54 D190, U.S. Policy Papers of Indochina, Box 9, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA; Topping, p. 126; p. 155.

¹⁵⁷ Casey, p. 15.

¹⁵⁸ For de Lattre's complaints about American press coverage and Heath's suggestion to write a more favourable piece, see Telegram 1235 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 14 January 1951, 751g.00/1-1451,

journalists on what he perceived were inaccuracies in their writing, and grasped media opportunities to promote the war's importance and the inevitability of eventual victory during visits to France and the United States.¹⁵⁹ At a Paris press conference in June 1952, Heath "declared that he had no doubt that, with the aid of France, Vietnam w[ou]ld one day master the civil war".¹⁶⁰ "The French and Vietnamese armies", he said, "occupy more favourable positions in Vietnam than they did a year ago. The armed forces of this country have made great progress and are continuing to develop".¹⁶¹ The embassy would be forced to tackle press issues again in 1954.

'Emotional, Irresponsible Nationalism'

The aspirations and actions of Indochinese nationalists also posed a continued threat to the embassy's attempts to keep France fighting in Indochina. Having successfully resisted U.S. attempts to modify his stance regarding independence in the spring, Sihanouk drew the consternation of U.S. officials again in the autumn of 1953.¹⁶² Although a preliminary agreement on further transfers of power had been agreed between Sihanouk and the French in early May, the Cambodian leader quickly deemed it inappropriate, particularly after the French devaluation of

Box 3669, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; and for the Department's positive response, see Telegram 897 from Secretary of State to Saigon, 16 January 1951, 751g.00/1-1451, Box 3669, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. The article that de Lattre took particular exception to was: Hanson Baldwin, 'The Crisis in Indo-China: French Reforms are Termed Inadequate to Meet Increasing Communist Danger', *NYT*, 5 January 1951, p. 4. A month later, an extremely positive article on de Lattre by Tillman Durdin, a journalist that Dean Rusk suggested the U.S. government might contact to put together a piece, appeared in *The New York Times*: Tillman Durdin, 'Fighter on a Mission: The Tough Dynamism of Gen. de Lattre de Tassigny, France's New Commander in Indo-China is Producing Dramatic Results', *NYT*, 18 February 1951, p. 152. For the positive effect that Durdin's article and Heath's intervention had on de Lattre's mood, see Telegram 616 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 28 April 1951, 751g.00/4-2851, Box 3670, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁵⁹ On Heath correcting American journalists, see Telegram 1264 from Heath to Department of State, 22 December 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 329; Telegram 474 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 18 September 1953, 751g.00/9-1853, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. On Heath's promotion of the war's importance in the United States, see Statement by Donald Heath, 'Indochinese Resistance to Communist Domination', 4 February 1951, No. 606, Vol. XXIV, 1 January-25 June 1951, *The Department of State Bulletin*, p. 262. Heath also delivered the statement on NBC's *Battle Report – Washington* on 4 February 1951.

¹⁶⁰ Telegram 2474 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 9 June 1952, 751g.00/6-953, Box 3672, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² The derision that Norodom Sihanouk's Campaign for Independence received in 1953 from Heath was in sharp contrast to the ambassador's response to his leadership in 1952. Indeed, Heath held up the Cambodian monarch as an example of what Bao Dai could achieve if he put his mind to it. For Heath's use of Sihanouk's example with Bao Dai, see Telegram 1028 from Heath to Department of State, 18 November 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 284-287.

the piastre, the currency in Indochina, undermined recently concluded Franco-Cambodian agreements on the economy.¹⁶³ Relations between Sihanouk and the French remained seriously strained throughout the summer – some feared the worse after Sihanouk went into exile and both sides mobilised their forces in Phnom Penh – with the 3 July declaration doing little to satisfy Cambodian demands for full independence.¹⁶⁴ Although negotiations continued and Heath urged French officials to meet Sihanouk's demands with some concessions, the king continued to stay on the offensive.¹⁶⁵ On 10 September, the Cambodian prime minister, Penn Nouth, published a statement, signed by Sihanouk, announcing amnesty for the Viet Minh and the Khmer Issarak (an anti-French and anti-colonial front, some of whom were communists) in Cambodia if they abandoned their efforts and joined the national community before 1 October. 'Although we are not Communist', the statement read, 'we have no reason to take sides against communism as long as it does not come to impose itself by force upon our people'.¹⁶⁶ Promising free elections when peace was established, the statement also stressed that Cambodia had no right to interfere in the fight against the Viet Minh in Laos or Vietnam.

Heath was greatly concerned by the statement, arguing to Washington that the declaration now publicly placed 'Cambodia in [the] ranks of neutralists'.¹⁶⁷ The ambassador seized upon a suggestion by Dejean to make U.S. opinion on the matter clear to Penn Nouth, who he arranged to meet on 14 September with the visiting Senate majority leader, William Knowland. At the meeting Knowland threatened the withdrawal of U.S. aid if Cambodia refused to cooperate in the fight against communism and Heath stressed the threat to Cambodia if Viet Minh advances in Laos went unchecked.¹⁶⁸ Bonsal praised the ambassador's intervention. He wrote to Heath, 'Congratulations on the results of your last visit to Phnom Penh; the restoration of reason in Cambodia, if it takes place, will in large measure be due to you'.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ Kenton Clymer, *The United States and Cambodia, 1870-1969: From Curiosity to Confrontation* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 31. While aware of the negative impact it would have on Franco-Associated State relations, the U.S. diplomatic mission in Vietnam, nevertheless, supported devaluation. Heath felt that it would benefit the French economy and enable the United States to get better value for money for the aid it was providing in Indochina. Telegram 1747 from Heath to Department of State, 8 March 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 398-400.

¹⁶⁴ For the Cambodian reaction to the 3 July declaration, see Memorandum of Conversation by Hoey and Getz, 'Current Situation in Cambodia', 6 July 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 638-639.

¹⁶⁵ On Heath urging French officials to grant some concessions to Cambodia, see Telegram 196 from Heath to Department of State, 30 July 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 705.

¹⁶⁶ Telegram 438 from Heath to Department of State, 12 September 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, in footnotes of p. 798.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Telegram 458 from Heath to Department of State, 15 September 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 802-806.

¹⁶⁹ Bonsal to Heath, 19 October 1953, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1953, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

In Vietnam too, anti-communist nationalists had seemingly had enough of French interference in their affairs and their failure to follow through on promises for greater independence. The devaluation of the piastre ignited the situation.¹⁷⁰ To numerous Vietnamese nationalists, France's failure to consult with the Vietnamese government on devaluation was just another shining example of the fallacy of their independence.¹⁷¹ The 3 July declaration did little to counteract this feeling. In fact, the Vietnamese ambassador to Washington, Tran Van Kha, noted that the declaration simply convinced nationalists to push harder. He said:

Although [an] improvement [in the] Vietnamese attitude toward[s the] French might be expected as [a] result [of the] French declaration[, the] reaction had, in fact, been [the] opposite. [The] Vietnamese feeling was that [the] July 3 statement resulted from French weakness, that [the] "French were on [the] run" and [that] now was the time to push them out of [their] privileged position as fast as possible.¹⁷²

Bao Dai and Tam did, however, accept the 3 July invitation to send a negotiating team to France to iron out the final details of independence.

In preparation for these negotiations with France, Vietnamese leaders met to discuss who would take part in the discussions. In early September and taking advantage of Tam's absence in France, Pham Cong Tac, an influential Cao Dai leader, led a revolt from the meeting and announced an unofficial Congress for National Union and Peace to discuss Vietnam's political future. Delegates from various politico-religious groups attended the meeting and endorsed a statement that denounced Bao Dai's policy of a gradual transfer of independence to the Vietnamese.¹⁷³ Bao Dai responded by creating an official National Congress to prepare for negotiations with France. Tam appeared confident that he would be able to control the Congress and ensure it did nothing to undermine Franco-Vietnamese relations.¹⁷⁴

As it turned out, Tam was unable to prevent nationalist frustrations with the French bursting to the surface. On 16 October, the National Congress passed a resolution asserting a desire to leave the French Union.¹⁷⁵ The resolution caused uproar among French leaders. Bidault told Secretary Dulles that unless the situation could be quickly rectified that 'pressure to withdraw from Indochina would become irresistible'.¹⁷⁶ Those opposed to French involvement in

¹⁷⁰ The Tam government deemed the action as a 'flagrant violation [of the] Franco-Viet accords which [is] calculated [to] deal [a] sharp blow to [the] confidence in [the] French'. Telegram 2190 from McClintock to Department of State, 13 May 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 562.

¹⁷¹ Chapman, p. 53.

¹⁷² Telegram 122 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 19 July 1953, 751g.00/7-1953, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁷³ Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 50.

¹⁷⁴ Telegram 432 from Heath to Secretary of State, 11 September 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 795.

¹⁷⁵ Telegram 668 from Heath to Department of State, 16 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 826-827.

¹⁷⁶ Telegram Secto 12 from Dulles to Department of State, 17 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 828.

Indochina seized on the incident as another chance to bring France's continuation in the conflict to a National Assembly debate on 23 October. This was necessary, an article in *Le Monde* noted, because the declaration of the Congress undermined the concept, long argued by French leaders, that the war was a 'question of defending [the] French Union'.¹⁷⁷ The day before the 23 October National Assembly debate, Dulles fearfully informed the National Security Council (NSC) that 'this debate could end in the overthrow of the Laniel government and the consequent ruin of our ambitious plan to bring the war in Indochina to a successful conclusion'.¹⁷⁸

Concerned at the resolution's effects, the State Department cabled Heath asking for his analysis of the situation.¹⁷⁹ Describing the resolution as 'hasty and ill considered', Heath argued that the 'motion appears [...] the product of emotional, irresponsible nationalism'.¹⁸⁰ To the ambassador, nationalists had displayed an 'almost complete unawareness of [the] impact [of the] motion on [the] French and even [on the] US willingness [to] continue [the] fight [of the] Vietnamese and [the] free world's against Communist aggression'.¹⁸¹ However, there was, as historian Jessica Chapman has shown, a domestic logic to the actions of Vietnamese nationalist groups in this period. To many anti-communist Vietnamese, the decision to devalue the piastre signalled that the French departure from Indochina was not far away and that now was the time to demonstrate one's nationalist credentials for life in post-French Indochina.¹⁸² There were also clear domestic imperatives behind the actions of Sihanouk in Cambodia. Sihanouk's pursuit of independence reflected his desire to redirect the nationalist feelings stirred up by his rival Song

¹⁷⁷ Telegram 1533 from Paris to Secretary of State, 19 October 1953, 751g.00/10-1953, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁷⁸ Memorandum of Discussion at the 167th Meeting of the National Security Council, 22 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, in footnotes p. 832.

¹⁷⁹ Telegram 655 from Acting Secretary of State to Saigon, 16 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 827.

¹⁸⁰ Telegram 683 from Heath to Department of State, 18 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 836. Heath, however, initially suspected that the resolution had been the work of the Viet Minh. See Telegram 672 from Heath to Department of State, 17 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 829. While Heath hypothesized about covert Viet Minh involvement, some Frenchmen suspected an American hand in the resolution. In the Pro-Atlantic leftist publication, *Franc Tireur*, Charles Rensac was loathe to dismiss the idea, and Marc Jacquet, the secretary of state in charge of relations with the Associated States, was asked by one Gaullist deputy 'whether he had any evidence that the United States was behind "the recent actions of the Vietnam Congress"'. To Bui Diem, a prominent nationalist who participated in the Congress, there was something to this rumour. He felt that Vietnamese actions had been encouraged by informal contacts with U.S. representatives. 'Although it was true that nothing was said on the record', he recalled in his memoir, 'the pattern of contacts held its own evident meaning'. However, no evidence has emerged which explicitly links American diplomats in Indochina with the resolution. Telegram 1556 from Paris to Secretary of State, 20 October 1953, 751g.00/10-2053, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Memorandum of Conversation by Gibson to Dillon, 21 October 1953, 751g.00/10-2153, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Bui Diem, p. 79.

¹⁸¹ Telegram 683 from Heath to Department of State, 18 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 836.

¹⁸² Chapman, p. 51; p. 58.

Ngoc Thanh behind his own leadership.¹⁸³ American diplomats were not blind to the domestic imperatives behind the actions of Indochinese nationalists; often they understood them quite well. Heath was aware of how Thanh's actions impacted the behaviour of Sihanouk and how France's weakening status influenced what he called the 'rabid nationalism' being seen in Vietnam.¹⁸⁴ Yet while Heath understood these domestic motivations, he could not comprehend why nationalist leaders prioritised these considerations ahead of what he saw as the more dangerous communist threat.

Prioritising the maintenance of the French military effort in Vietnam over the aspirations of Vietnamese nationalists, Heath set about trying to repair the situation. His goals were twofold: in Vietnam, he advised the State Department that U.S. efforts should be directed 'to bringing these people to [the] sober realization of where they stand, dancing on the brink of destruction; and in France', the U.S. should try to urge French officials to 'overlook this present irritant and to keep the national sights on the main stakes at issue'.¹⁸⁵ Heath attempted to do the latter by downplaying the incident with the American media. In response to questions from radio presenter Dwight Cooke on CBS radio's *Dwight Cooke's Guestbook* in December 1953, Heath described the Vietnamese National Congress as 'an emotional flare-up of only a few people' and contended that 'the ever growing majority of intelligent, thinking Vietnamese recognizes the vital role of France'.¹⁸⁶

The main focus of Heath's efforts, though, were directed towards the Vietnamese. Meeting with several key delegates following the adjournment of the Congress, Heath told them that the resolution went too far. Although the United States supported Vietnamese independence, France remained crucial to the success of the U.S. goals in Indochina and Europe and therefore it was critical that nationalists adopted a more moderate tone.¹⁸⁷ Heath urged congressional leaders to enact a resolution 'expressing [a] debt of gratitude of Vietnam to France for its past and present gallant sacrifices in defense [of] Vietnamese independence', and stressed the importance of the French contribution to the defence of Indochinese freedom in a speech on UN day.¹⁸⁸ As Washington pondered the idea of producing a statement of support behind the French, Heath

¹⁸³ On the domestic factors influencing Norodom Sihanouk's pursuit of independence, see Dommen, pp. 210-211; Clymer, p. 31.

¹⁸⁴ Memorandum by Heath to Dulles, 'Current Situation in Indochina', 28 April 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 525; Telegram 736 from Heath to Department of State, 26 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 849.

¹⁸⁵ Telegram 672 from Heath to Department of State, 17 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 830.

¹⁸⁶ Heath to Bonsal, 26 January 1954, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1954, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁸⁷ Bui Diem, pp. 79-80.

¹⁸⁸ Telegram 672 from Heath to Department of State, 17 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 829; Graves to Eden, 'Visit of the Vice-President of the United States to Indo-China from October 30 until November 5, 1953', No. 49, 20 November 1953, FO 474/7, TNA, p. 101.

volunteered to arrange for it to be translated into Vietnamese and circulated to congressional delegates with a copy of his card to make the message clear.¹⁸⁹

Heath's pressure had some effect. On 17 October, the Vietnamese National Congress, partly in response to Heath's intervention, and those of Bao Dai and Dejean, revised its position on French Union membership, altering its statement to say, slightly more provisionally, that the Vietnamese would refuse to 'join the French Union in its present form'.¹⁹⁰ The amendment seemed to have a calming effect in Paris. 'News of [the] amendment [...] received [in] Paris late last night is considered [...] to have cleared [the] atmosphere considerably', Dillon reported.¹⁹¹ Dejean thanked Heath for his help and Buu Loc, Bao Dai's cousin and soon to be the next Vietnamese prime minister, also expressed appreciation for the ambassador's intervention.¹⁹² As Dillon reported, Bui Diem 'took particular pains [to] compliment Ambassadors Heath and De Jean for their role [in] influencing [the] delegates to be moderate. They both had [an] outstanding appreciation of [the] issues involved and [the] "true friendship [of] both Vietnam and France"'.¹⁹³

However, while Heath's intercession with leading Congress delegates contributed to their moderation of the resolution, Vietnamese leaders resisted the ambassador's other suggestions.¹⁹⁴ On the subject of issuing a brief reference of gratitude to France, Phan Huy Quát, the Vietnamese government's defence minister, told the ambassador that realistically 'friendly and grateful references to France in [the] closing speech of [the] Congress [from] President Kim' was all that could be achieved.¹⁹⁵ Likewise, Heath's efforts to pressure Cambodian leaders met with limited success – Sihanouk refused to retract his offer to the Issaraks and the Viet Minh. Heath's inability to force his will on nationalist leaders demonstrates the limits of the embassy's and America's influence in Indochina.

To those Vietnamese nationalists who had placed significant hope in American support for the resolution, Heath's reaction to the National Congress was a grave disappointment. 'There is no question [...] that strong American support for Vietnamese independence would have enhanced the credibility of the nationalists just as it would have undercut France's diehard colonialism', one Vietnamese nationalist noted.¹⁹⁶ Heath's actions created further frustration among nationalists about the lack of support they were receiving from U.S. representatives in Vietnam. According to Robert Blum, who returned to Vietnam in November 1953 to scope out

¹⁸⁹ Telegram 719 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 23 October 1953, 751g.00/10-2353, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. Such a statement was never released.

¹⁹⁰ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 371.

¹⁹¹ Telegram 1517 from Dillon to Department of State, 17 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 833.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Telegram 1593 from Dillon to Department of State, 23 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 844.

¹⁹⁴ Telegram 681 from Heath to Department of State, 18 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 835.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Bui Diem, p. 80.

the possibility of setting up a Committee for a Free Asia (CFA) office in the country, one group of Vietnamese ‘nationalist fence-sitters’ regarded the prospect of a CFA office ‘as a heaven-sent opportunity to get American support for nationalist activity, which they are not getting through American official channels’.¹⁹⁷

Indochinese leaders were also becoming increasingly irritated at American intervention in their domestic affairs. This was particularly true in Cambodia, where Sihanouk reacted sharply to the forceful tactics adopted by Heath and Knowland. In a public statement, the Cambodian leader asked ‘whether it is normal that small countries be condemned to die because they refuse to buy their lives at [a] shameful price of abdication as free people’.¹⁹⁸ To Sturm in Hanoi, alongside observers in Washington like Charlton Ogburn and members of the Psychological Strategy Board, American prestige and popularity among the Indochinese suffered because of the continued U.S. association with French policy and American efforts to block nationalist progress.¹⁹⁹ Sturm wrote in July 1953, ‘It strikes me that by following that course we stand not only an excellent chance of losing the war but also, before that unhappy day, of destroying the illusions regarding us that these people still cherish’.²⁰⁰ Heath was playing a leading role in reshaping Indochinese perceptions of the United States.

Nationalists, however, should not have been surprised by Heath’s actions. His attempt to mediate the tone of the resolution was just the latest demonstration of his and his government’s prioritisation of the French military effort over nationalist aspirations in Indochina. In the short term, at least, Heath’s efforts to tone down nationalist demands seemed to pay dividends. In October, good news emerged from the French National Assembly. Although virtually all the participants at the 23 October debate favoured negotiations, they could not agree over whom that

¹⁹⁷ ‘Viet-Nam’ by Blum, Folder 19, Box 2, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. The CFA was a private organisation established in 1951 and covertly funded and directed by the CIA. The CFA’s mission was to promote the United States in Asia using various media, including Radio Free Asia. It hoped to replicate the success of the National Committee for Free Europe, which had been set up to counter the communist threat in Europe in 1949. Eugene Ford, *Cold War Monks: Buddhism and America’s Secret Strategy in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 35.

¹⁹⁸ Telegram 35 from Montllor to Department of State, 17 September 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 808.

¹⁹⁹ In a memorandum to Walter Robertson, Ogburn argued that American support of France ‘seriously weakens our leadership in Asia, arousing misgivings about both our motives and judgment’. Memorandum by Ogburn to Robertson, ‘Effect in the Far East of French Policy in North Africa’, 21 September 1953, 751g.00/9-2153, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. Officials in the Psychological Strategy Board were equally convinced of the necessity of focusing more on Indochinese independence, and criticised Heath’s dealings with Sihanouk. They were amazed at Heath’s categorisation of full independence as a ‘procedural matter’ and felt that the main priority of the United States in Indochina should be Vietnamese independence. Among those associated with the PSB was Edmund Gullion, Heath’s former deputy in Saigon. Memorandum for Taquey, 22 July 1953, PSB 091. Indo-China (2), Box 12, PSB Central Files, White House Office, National Security Staff Papers, DDEL.

²⁰⁰ Sturm to Bonsal, 21 July 1953, lot 58 D207, Hanoi Correspondence 1952-54, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

should be with and how it would work.²⁰¹ With the stalemate in the French National Assembly, extra American aid arriving and Navarre receiving vital reinforcements from Paris, there was a possibility that things might improve. American officials like Heath and Bonsal hoped, too, that military progress might convince Vietnamese nationalists to be more patient with the French and pledge their support to Bao Dai's government.²⁰²

While Heath's popularity with the Indochinese might have taken a hit, his actions were appreciated by many on the French side. Claude Cheysson, who arrived in 1952 to work as a political advisor to Tam, described Heath as 'wonderful', and Letourneau delivered a heart-felt letter to the ambassador on his departure from Indochina in July 1953. He wrote, 'All what we have been able to do for increasing the American aid to our soldiers, for obtaining more comprehension from American opinion, for the success of the visits of Marshal de Lattre and of myself in the states is for the largest part due to you and I will never forget it'.²⁰³ The American ambassador even received positive coverage in the French press. After attacking those American diplomats who contributed to Duncan's *Life* article, *Le Journal D'Extreme Orient* praised Heath for his clear and loyal dedication to a policy of support and understanding for French efforts in Indochina.²⁰⁴

However, despite these positives, Heath's actions had only helped to stall the seemingly inevitable. Although Laniel resisted orders by French President Vincent Auriol to consult leaders of the Associated States with a view to negotiating with the Viet Minh, it remained highly probable that French leaders would soon agree to negotiations with either the Viet Minh or the Chinese. The appearance of an interview with Ho Chi Minh in the Swedish evening tabloid *Expressen* on 29 November, in which the DRV leader indicated an openness to the possibility of negotiations, seemed to bring France closer to just that. Salan believed, too, that the National Congress's resolution, despite the efforts of Heath and his French colleagues to downplay the incident and repair some of the damage, had a decisive long-term impact on French public opinion.²⁰⁵ Reflecting in July 1954 on the reasons behind increasing public opposition to the

²⁰¹ Telegram 1667 from Dillon to Secretary of State, 28 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 854.

²⁰² Memorandum by Bonsal to Robertson, 'General O'Daniel's visit to Indochina, November 6-15, 1953', 8 December 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 910; Telegram 736 from Heath to Department of State, 26 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 849.

²⁰³ Cheysson to Brady [Extracts], in Memorandum by Brady to Getz, undated, lot 58 D266, Correspondence 1952-54, Box 2, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs: Office of Southeast Asian Affairs; Subject Files, RG 59, USNA; Letourneau to Heath, 13 July 1953, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1953, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

²⁰⁴ Article translated in Telegram 229 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 5 August 1953, 751g.00/8-553, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²⁰⁵ Foreign Service Despatch 1630 from Paris to Department of State, 'French Reaction to Vietminh Peace "Overture"', 22 December 1953, 751g.00/12-2253, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 1002 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 10 December 1953, 751g.00/12-1053, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

Franco-Viet Minh War, Salan argued that the press reports of the National Congress had made 'French people realize how disliked the French were in Indochina' and revealed 'the absence of gratitude for French military sacrifices' in Vietnam.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, among French leaders, including Navarre, there appeared little hope, despite what they told American officials, of significant military victories.²⁰⁷

By the end of 1953, France stood as close as it had ever done to negotiating a way out of its war in Indochina. Donald Heath's efforts, however, played a role in ensuring that France did continue to fight. Heath helped secure further American military equipment and finances for the war effort, his voice was influential in ensuring that U.S. policy continued to stress the preservation of the French military effort, he played a crucial role in easing Franco-American tension during instances which threatened to force a premature French departure from Indochina, and he had some success in moderating the behaviour of Indochinese nationalists. Yet his actions continued to alienate both Indochinese and Asian nationalists, the support of whom was vital in combatting the communists; his success in pressing for the extension of American aid in Indochina committed the United States more deeply to the struggle and did not help France secure the military victories that were needed; and domestic pressure in France to negotiate a way out of the conflict was at an all-time high. 1954 would see the failure of the policy that Heath had long believed in and pursued in Vietnam. In the short term though, he had achieved his goal: the French would continue to hold the line against communism in Indochina. Over the next few months, too, they would make a last ditch effort to take the fight to the Viet Minh.

²⁰⁶ Telegram 178 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 14 July 1954, 751g.00/7-1454, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²⁰⁷ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 357; Gibbons, p. 135; Chapman, p. 51.

Chapter 5 – The Dien Bien Phu Crisis, January-May 1954

On 20 November 1953, French commander Henri Navarre ordered two thousand French paratroopers to jump into the valley of Dien Bien Phu in northwest Vietnam as part of Operation Castor. French troops took the Viet Minh forces stationed there by surprise, inflicting ninety losses and forcing the rest to flee. Once the area was secure, they began to construct a fortified base. By enticing Viet Minh forces to attack a well-fortified French position, Navarre hoped to repeat the French success at Na San in 1952, enhancing the French position at the negotiating table and satisfying American desires for more offensive-minded operations. Giap, although anxious about assaulting a well-defended French position and aware of the huge logistical challenge, accepted battle. With the French only able to supply the fortress by air, Giap believed that Dien Bien Phu offered his army a chance to inflict a punishing defeat on the French, weakening their will to continue the fight.¹ After months of preparations, the climactic battle of the Franco-Viet Minh War began on 13 March 1954.

As news filtered back to Washington about Viet Minh advances and as French politicians moved ever closer to extricating themselves from the draining conflict during the battle, U.S. policymakers contemplated the use of American military force at Dien Bien Phu to prevent the collapse of the French effort in Indochina. This issue dominated discussions at the highest level of government throughout the spring of 1954. Two main options for intervention emerged from U.S. deliberations: Operation Vulture, a unilateral American airstrike; and United Action, a multilateral intervention in cooperation with allies in Europe and Asia that was articulated by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in a speech on 29 March. Eisenhower was ultimately reluctant to employ American force in Indochina without the approval of Congress, who refused to authorise an attack unless the president could gain allied, particularly British, cooperation. Unable to gain the necessary international support, policymakers concluded on 29 April that any decision on intervention would have to await developments at the Geneva Conference, where representatives on both sides of the Cold War divide met to discuss the fate of Indochina. With no American intervention forthcoming, Dien Bien Phu fell on 7 May.²

Although U.S. policymaking during the Dien Bien Phu crisis has attracted considerable scholarly discussion, the major focus of historians has been on officials in Washington, who gave Indochina sustained attention for the first time since 1950 and took the lead role in formulating

¹ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 381-394.

² Statler, *Replacing France*, pp. 86-95.

policy.³ Scholars, too, have rightly pointed to the importance of Congress and America's allies in shaping U.S. policy during the spring of 1954.⁴ Missing in the historical literature on U.S. policy during the Dien Bien Phu crisis, however, is an understanding of the contribution of those Americans stationed in the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. This chapter aims to fill this void.

This chapter highlights the peripheral role that the Saigon embassy played in the Eisenhower administration's consideration of an armed intervention to save the French at Dien Bien Phu, exploring why American diplomats in Vietnam made such a minimal contribution to this key decision. However, the chapter asserts that the embassy nevertheless remained a significant contributor to the formulation and, in particular, implementation of other facets of U.S. policy in Indochina. Embassy staff provided a vital window into events at Dien Bien Phu and elsewhere in Vietnam through their diplomatic reporting, Washington continued to solicit the advice of its men on the spot during this period on political issues, and embassy personnel engaged in a number of important activities designed to sustain and strengthen the Franco-Vietnamese war effort as the fighting went on at Dien Bien Phu.

Heath's Fall from Favour

Americans in Saigon and Hanoi provided Washington with important insights into the latest military developments at Dien Bien Phu and elsewhere in Indochina in early 1954. Reports documented the build-up of French forces in the valley, the movement of Viet Minh troops, and analysed the French chances of success.⁵ The indication was that the fighting at Dien Bien Phu would soon begin. On 14 January, René Cogny, the commander of French forces in northern Vietnam, explained to Sturm that Dien Bien Phu was surrounded on all sides by Viet Minh forces. He told the diplomat that the enemy appeared to be making a logistical effort on a 'scale

³ For example, see Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 426-546; Gareth C. Porter, *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 69-86; George C. Herring, "'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. by Richard H. Immerman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 213-233 (p. 213); George C. Herring and Richard H. Immerman, 'Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu: "The Day We Didn't Go to War" Revisited', *The Journal of American History*, 71 (September 1984), 343-363.

⁴ For an examination of the legislative branch's influence during the crisis, see Gibbons, pp. 149-227. For an example of how America's allies were able to shape the options available to Eisenhower, see Geoffrey Warner, 'Britain and the Crisis of Dien Bien Phu, April 1954: The Failure of United Action', in Kaplan, Artaud, and Rubin, pp. 555-577; James Waite, 'Contesting "the Right Decision": New Zealand, the Commonwealth, and the New Look', *Diplomatic History*, 30 (November 2006), 893-917; Gregory James Pemberton, 'Australia, the United States, and the Indochina Crisis of 1954', *Diplomatic History*, 13 (January 1989), 45-66.

⁵ Howard R. Simpson, *Dien Bien Phu: The Epic Battle America Forgot* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's Inc., 1994), p. 48.

hitherto unknown during [the] seven years of [the] war', and it appeared likely that the Viet Minh were intent on attacking Dien Bien Phu.⁶ American diplomats in Indochina also kept Washington abreast of Operation Atlante, an ambitious offensive launched on 20 January by Navarre aimed at recovering territory along the coast of central Vietnam.⁷ Although Heath reported in early February that Navarre 'was much encouraged by [the] results of [the] "atlante" operation to date', the operation quickly became bogged down in the face of a strong Viet Minh counterattack.⁸ Concurrent with its reporting on the military situation, the embassy handled French requests for additional military aid. At the turn of the year, Heath transmitted Navarre's requests for an extra thirty-five B-26s, temporary American ground crews to maintain three of his squadrons, additional American mechanics if the United States provided the extra B-26s and U.S. pilots to fly twelve C-119s.⁹

Embassy cables in the early part of the year also detailed political developments in Vietnam. On 12 January, Bao Dai replaced Nguyen Van Tam as prime minister with his cousin, Buu Loc.¹⁰ Explaining to Heath that he had lost faith in Tam's government because of the former prime minister's tendency to irritate the French, Bao Dai assured the American that Buu Loc's government could be trusted 'both from the standpoint of loyalty and certainty that it would not make any blunders'.¹¹ No doubt pleased to hear that the new government would enjoy a smoother relationship with the French, Heath was nonetheless concerned 'by [the] lack [of] "professional nationalists" and by the predominance [of] strong personal supporters of Bao Dai' in the new cabinet.¹² The ambassador also noted the continued absence of any figures in the government from the key fence-sitting groups in Vietnam and doubted the new government's ability to win over anti-communist nationalists. However, Heath refused, as he had done when Tam came to power, to write off Buu Loc's administration just yet. Buu Loc, after all, promised to clean up corruption in Vietnam and complete Franco-Vietnamese negotiations on independence, moves

⁶ Telegram 389 from Sturm to Department of State, 15 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 964-965.

⁷ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 421.

⁸ Telegram 1410 from Heath to Department of State, 9 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1027; Bernard B. Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 2002), p. 47.

⁹ Telegram 1151 from Heath to Department of State, 3 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 937-938.

¹⁰ Buu Loc had undertaken a number of important roles in Vietnamese politics prior to his appointment as prime minister. He had worked as Bao Dai's cabinet director in the late 1940s, before going on to serve in the Vietnamese negotiating team for the 8 March accords and as Vietnam's diplomatic representative in Paris. Christopher Goscha, 'Nguyen Phuoc Buu Loc', *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War (1945-1954)*, <<https://indochine.uqam.ca/en/historical-dictionary/1079-nguyn-phc-bu-lc-19141990.html>> [accessed 25 May 2018].

¹¹ Telegram 1265 from Heath to Department of State, 18 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 978.

¹² Telegram 1240 from Heath to Department of State, 13 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 961.

that would improve the government's chances of drawing political support away from the Viet Minh.¹³

Despite Heath's relative optimism, concern about the politico-military situation built in Washington during the early part of the year, with policymakers considering additional measures to bolster the French. Discussions ranged from finding an increased role for the United States in training the VNA, to the possibility of direct military intervention to support the French. On 8 January, the NSC ordered the Defense Department and the CIA to draw up plans for steps 'short of the overt use of U.S. forces in combat, which the United States might take to assist in achieving the success of the "Laniel-Navarre" Plan'.¹⁴ Ike also created two committees to consider what the United States might do to improve the situation and to formulate contingency plans if the French collapsed. The first, a high-level, ad hoc working group contained representatives from the State and Defense departments, the CIA and the NSC. It focused on analysing the situation in Southeast Asia and producing an action plan for the region. The second, a top-secret Special Committee chaired by Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith, was tasked with coming up with a more specific plan on the necessary steps to be taken in Indochina and Southeast Asia. Meeting for the first time on 29 January, the Special Committee considered the French requests that Heath had transmitted from Vietnam. The Committee agreed to send twenty-two B-26s, two hundred uniformed air force mechanics and a number of U.S. civilian pilots hired by the CIA to fly transport missions. A decision on the additional two hundred mechanics and twenty-five B-26s, they deemed, would have to await further assessment.¹⁵ Later that day, Eisenhower authorised the Committee's decisions.¹⁶ In early March, the Committee produced a further report, indicating that if the situation worsened 'the U.S. may wish to consider direct military action in Southeast Asia'.¹⁷

The Saigon embassy found itself largely out of the loop regarding the high-level attention Indochina was receiving. It was not until 22 January that Bonsal in the PSA office was able to relay to Heath 'at least the flavour of what is happening here'.¹⁸ Explaining that he had been unable to keep Heath updated 'because of "circumstances beyond my control"', Bonsal brought

¹³ Telegram 1290 from Heath to Department of State, 22 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 992.

¹⁴ Memorandum of Discussion at the 179th Meeting of the National Security Council, 8 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 954.

¹⁵ Memorandum for the Record, 'Meeting of the President's Special Committee on Indochina, 29 January 1954', 30 January 1954, in *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam, Volume 1*, Gravel Edition (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 445.

¹⁶ Memorandum by Kyes for the Secretary of the Air Force, 29 January 1954, 751g.00/1-2954, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁷ Report by the President's Special Committee on Indochina, 2 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1116.

¹⁸ Bonsal to Heath, 22 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 992.

the ambassador up to speed on the various committees working on Indochina.¹⁹ With many of these meetings reserved for the top echelon of policymakers, Bonsal admitted that his own knowledge was incomplete. Indeed, the PSA director appeared frustrated by the State Department's lack of input into some of the debates. He informed Heath that the decision to appoint General John W. O'Daniel, who had travelled to Indochina intermittently since June 1953 as part of U.S. efforts to buck up the French, to a permanent position in Saigon 'was taken with no advance warning to or consultation of the lower echelons in Defense or State'.²⁰ Similarly, the State Department's contribution to the Defense-CIA paper was limited to 'a little informal work'.²¹ By 12 February, Bonsal, privy to the minutes of the Special Committee meeting held on 29 January and the deliberations of the ad-hoc working group, of which he was a contributor, was able to give Heath some more concrete information on the latest discussions in Washington, forwarding the ambassador a series of documents outlining high-level thinking.²²

Yet Bonsal was less successful in convincing policymakers of the need for these committees to solicit Heath's views. On 25 January, Bonsal wrote a memo to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Walter Robertson, asking to 'what extent and how soon does the recently formed high level committee on Indochina plan to get the views of our Ambassadors in Saigon and Paris regarding various contemplated courses of action?'.²³ When the reply came back negative, Bonsal was forced to tell Heath that he had been 'unsuccessful in putting this across'.²⁴ He remained pessimistic about his ability to convince his superiors of the need to seek Heath's input when work began on a broader Southeast Asia policy paper in Washington in early March. 'I hope that we will be allowed to bring you in on this exercise but I am not too optimistic in view of past experience', he told Heath.²⁵

Nor did the Saigon ambassador have much of an input into the discussions that took place at the Berlin Conference in early 1954. While representatives from the Paris, Vienna, London, Moscow and Berlin diplomatic posts were represented in the U.S. delegation that accompanied Secretary Dulles for his discussions with the foreign ministers of Britain, France

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 993.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. For more on O'Daniel's visits to Indochina during the latter half of 1953, see Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 355-356.

²² Bonsal to Heath, 22 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 993-994; Memorandum from McBride to Bonbright, 'Action of High-Level Committee on Indochina at January 29 Meeting', 2 February 1954, 751g.00/2-254, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Bonsal to Heath, 12 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1041.

²³ Memorandum from Bonsal to Robertson, 'Pending Questions re Indochina', 25 January 1954, 751g.00/1-1854, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²⁴ On Bonsal's lack of success on this front, see Bonsal to Heath, February 12 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1041.

²⁵ Bonsal to Heath, 1 March 1954, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1954, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

and the Soviet Union that began on 25 January, the Saigon embassy enjoyed no such privilege, despite the prominent place that Indochina occupied in the conference's proceedings.²⁶

Washington kept Heath informed of the major developments in the German capital, but they did not seek his advice either in preparation for or during the conference.²⁷ Heath's role was limited to reporting the Vietnamese reaction to the conference's final communiqué, which announced an agreement to add peace discussions on Indochina to those already scheduled to take place on Korea in Geneva in April.²⁸ With Vietnamese officials playing no part in the discussions, Washington obviously decided there was no need to involve the Saigon embassy.

Washington's failure to consult with Heath during the Berlin Conference and on the deliberations of the Special Committee perhaps had something to do with policymakers increasing criticism of his performance in Saigon. Although Vice President Richard Nixon, who visited Indochina in late 1953 as part of a regional tour of Asia, thanked Heath and his staff for their work in supporting his visit, he returned home with serious concerns about the performance of the ambassador.²⁹ Nixon told the NSC that while Heath was 'very capable and efficient', that 'he had been stationed at his post so long that he had inevitably taken on much of the French attitude'.³⁰ Nixon's opinion had likely been influenced by Heath's support for the Vietnamese government's decision not to encourage large crowds for the vice president's visit to Saigon; Tam and Heath feared that it might irritate the French.³¹ Nixon was not alone in his criticism of the ambassador. By mid-February, other senior policymakers began to express similar doubts about Heath's performance in Indochina and to even consider removing him from his post.³²

The administration's loss of confidence in Heath was despite the generally positive reviews he received in a State Department assessment of its ambassadors stationed in Asia in early 1954.³³ Bonsal and Robertson were those tasked with assessing Heath's performance in

²⁶ Conference delegates also met to discuss Germany and Austria. Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 79.

²⁷ Acting Secretary of State to Saigon, 8 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 1022-1023.

²⁸ Heath reported that the 'initial reactions in [the] Vietnamese Government to [the] communiqué from Berlin' ranged from 'deep despair to qualified hope'. Telegram 1517 from Heath to Department of State, 23 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 1069-1070.

²⁹ Telegram 804 from Heath to Department of State, 6 November 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 859.

³⁰ Memorandum of Discussion at the 183rd Meeting of the National Security Council, 4 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 1016-1017.

³¹ Telegram 804 from Heath to Department of State, 6 November 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 858.

³² Memorandum of Discussion at the 184th Meeting of the National Security Council, 11 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1039.

³³ The impetus for such a review came from the Eisenhower administration's increasing concern about the loyalty of its diplomats and the pressure it faced domestically to weed out carryovers from the Truman administration. See Memorandum of Discussion at the 164th Meeting of the National Security Council, 1 October 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954, General: Economic and Political Matters, Volume I, Part 2*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952-1954), pp. 1547-1548; Memorandum of Conversation, 18 January 1954, Subject File (Strictly Confidential) – [P] (1), Box 3, Chiefs of Mission Subseries, Personnel Series, JFD Papers, DDEL; Barry Rubin, *Secrets of State: The State Department and*

Vietnam. Bonsal, a close friend who shared many of the same views on Indochina, gave Heath a sparkling review.³⁴ 'His relations with both the French and the Vietnamese have been excellent and his influence has been constantly exerted successfully toward the achievement of our broad objectives', he wrote of Heath.³⁵ Robertson concurred. Describing Heath as an 'Ambassador of demonstrated ability', he too lauded the relations Heath had formed in Indochina and the way he had handled distinguished visitors.³⁶ 'I personally should prefer to see him remain in his present post through the coming months. If and when he is replaced, he should be given a top ranking job as recognition for his devoted services and capabilities', Robertson recommended to Secretary Dulles.³⁷

Heath's reviewers, however, also found some cause for concern. Robertson noted Heath's occasional tendency to paint 'too optimistic a picture of prospects in Indo-China'.³⁸ There can be no doubt that Heath was one of the most optimistic American observers on Vietnam. Throughout his tenure, he remained largely confident that the American-supplied French forces could secure a military victory and repeatedly objected to assessments to the contrary. In early 1954, he continued to cling to this belief. Admitting that the current military situation was disappointing, Heath's experience in Indochina taught him to take the long view.³⁹ Provided China did not step up its aid, the ambassador believed that the 'strategic advantage is on our side, as Viet Minh forces cannot get much stronger numerically, while our forces are every month increasing in numbers and experience'.⁴⁰ Heath, too, remained supportive of Navarre and believed that the general could yet make good on his plan to inflict a serious defeat on the Viet Minh by 1955. 'Navarre may not have [the] blinding energy and inspirational quality which marked Marshal DeLattre when [the] latter first came to Indochina', the ambassador argued in

the Struggle over U.S. Foreign Policy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 80; Townsend Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles* (London: Deutsch, 1974), pp. 156-157.

³⁴ 'Never has a mission been so well backstopped in the Department as this Embassy has been by you', Heath wrote to Bonsal in late 1953. Heath to Bonsal, 9 December 1953, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1953, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

³⁵ Memorandum from Bonsal to Robertson, 'Evaluation of Ambassadors in PSA Area', 12 March 1954, DDRS, Declassified 26 July 2001.

³⁶ Memorandum from Robertson to Dulles, 'Evaluation of Chiefs of Mission', 12 March 1954, DDRS, Declassified 26 July 2001. For Heath's success in handling important visitors to Vietnam, see Judd to Heath, 22 December 1953, in Heath to Bonsal, 15 January 1954, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1954, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

³⁷ Memorandum from Robertson to Dulles, 'Evaluation of Chiefs of Mission', 12 March 1954, DDRS, Declassified 26 July 2001.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Other embassy officials also stressed the importance of taking the long view. As McClintock noted in 1953, 'Certainly no one could be more impatient than Ambassador Heath, General Trapnell, or myself to see our French and Vietnamese allies get on with terminating hostilities in Indochina with a resounding defeat of the Communists. However, in this strange conflict, haste is made slowly'. McClintock to Nash, 10 April 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 482.

⁴⁰ Telegram 1417 from Heath to Department of State, 10 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1030.

February, 'but he [is] an extremely intelligent, sound, stubborn soldier with [a] plan for victory and [at] the present [there is] no time to change horses in mid stream unless a clearly better steed is available'.⁴¹

Heath's greater optimism was clear to see when it came to the build up to the battle at Dien Bien Phu. Although his cables highlighted some of Navarre's concerns about the fate of the fortress, for the most part Heath raised few doubts about French chances, repeatedly highlighting French officials' desire for a Viet Minh attack and their confidence in eventual victory.⁴² When other members of the embassy, including those who visited the fortress, filed reports questioning the effectiveness of the fortress's defences and the French decision to abandon the high ground, Heath batted them away, moving in one instance to press a member of his embassy 'to stop sending messages questioning the French ability to win the war'.⁴³ Heath's tendency, as well as that of presidential favourite General O'Daniel, to rely on optimistic French statements about Dien Bien Phu contributed to a general lack of urgency in Washington in the lead up to the battle.⁴⁴ On 18 March, following news of the initial Viet Minh successes at Dien Bien Phu, Eisenhower expressed amazement at the confident assurances Navarre had given in the lead up to the battle, assurances which Heath had uncritically beamed back to Washington.⁴⁵ Navarre's optimism with U.S. officials belied his deep private pessimism. In May, Dejean admitted to McClintock that 'on March 15, that is to say only two days after [the] commencement of [the] battle at Dien Bien Phu, Navarre had called him to say that [the] battle would be lost'.⁴⁶ To the British ambassador, Hubert Graves, Dejean was equally guilty in this regard, over-estimating 'the ability of the French Commanders to defend areas or strong points'.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Telegram 1450 from Heath to Department of State, 15 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1048.

⁴² On Heath and other U.S. officials in Indochina highlighting French concerns about mounting enemy strength at Dien Bien Phu, see Telegram 1151 from Heath to Department of State, 3 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 937; Ted Morgan, *Valley of Death: The Tragedy of Dien Bien Phu that Led America into the Vietnam War* (New York: Random House, 2010), p. 234. For those more frequent occasions where Heath detailed French hopes that the Viet Minh would accept battle and their confidence about securing victory, see Telegram 1290 from Heath to Department of State, 22 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 991; Telegram 1307 from Heath to Department of State, 23 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 996; Telegram 1410 from Heath to Department of State, 9 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1026.

⁴³ Spector, p. 189. The contradictory readings of French chances at Dien Bien Phu coming out of the embassy frustrated officials in Washington. See, for example, Joy to Tahourdin, 13 February 1954, FO 371/112047, TNA.

⁴⁴ Spector, p. 189. O'Daniel detailed in one report that the French could 'withstand any kind of attack the Viet Minh are capable of launching'. O'Daniel quoted in Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 443.

⁴⁵ Memorandum of Discussion at the 189th Meeting of the National Security Council, 18 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1133.

⁴⁶ Telegram 2298 from McClintock to Department of State, 9 May 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954. East Asia and Pacific*, Volume XII, Part 2 (hereafter Vol. XII, Part 2), (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952-1954), p. 1520.

⁴⁷ Graves to Eden, 8 June 1954, FO 371/112040, TNA.

Reviewers also expressed concern that Heath was ‘being too “soft” with the French’.⁴⁸ Other senior policymakers agreed. Secretary Dulles felt that ‘Heath had been too long in his position and was too close to the French’.⁴⁹ The ambassador prioritised the maintenance of good relations with France and was sensitive to French idiosyncrasies. He was also nearing four years in Indochina, double the normal two-year limit reserved for a hardship post. Key figures in the administration believed that long terms inhibited good diplomacy. Harold Stassen, the chief of the MSA, was convinced that ‘no individual [should] stay longer than a period of two years’ at this ‘front line operation’, while Secretary Dulles expressed frustration at the limited time it took ‘for Ambassadors to become more interested in the country they were accredited to than in their own’.⁵⁰

Heath’s sensitivity to the French position contrasted with growing support in Washington in early 1954 for the adoption of a more forceful approach with their ally. In this period, policymakers, many of whom viewed the situation in Indochina in more pessimistic terms than Heath, concluded that the only way to improve the declining Franco-Vietnamese military position was for the United States to have a greater say in the conduct of the war.⁵¹ Bonsal informed Heath in late February that policymakers hoped to do this by making ‘the provision to the French of certain items of military hardware which they urgently require contingent upon the adopting by the French of notions, ideas, activities and strategy which we here think should be adopted’.⁵² Bedell Smith argued that the United States was within its rights, having received promises from Bidault that the French would take “‘into account the views expressed by the latter [the United States] with respect to the development and carrying out of the French strategic plans’” after the United States increased its aid in September 1953.⁵³ U.S. involvement in the training of the VNA, the strengthening of which many Americans regarded as the ‘key to victory’

⁴⁸ Bonsal to Robertson, ‘Evaluation of Ambassadors in PSA Area’, 12 March 1954, DDRS, Declassified 26 July 2001.

⁴⁹ Memorandum of Discussion at the 215th Meeting of the National Security Council, 24 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2059.

⁵⁰ Memorandum of Discussion at the 187th Meeting of the National Security Council, 4 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1094; Telephone Conversation with Gen. Smith, 22 December 1953, Telephone Memoranda (Except to and from the White House) November 1, 1953-Dec. 31, 1953 (1), Box 2, Telephone Conversation Series, JFD Papers, DDEL. To the historian Kathryn Statler, there was a general tendency in the Eisenhower administration to prioritise the reporting of new arrivals in Vietnam over those of more experienced officials. Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 83.

⁵¹ Memorandum by Radford to Eisenhower, ‘Discussions with General Ely relative to the situation in Indo-China’, 24 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 1158-1159.

⁵² Bonsal to Heath, 22 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 995. Bonsal was right. In an NSC meeting on 21 January, Ike expressed his support for U.S. exploration ‘of getting a useful *quid-pro-quo* from the French in return for’ U.S. aid. See Memorandum of Discussion at the 181st Meeting of the National Security Council, 21 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 989.

⁵³ Telegram Tedul 38 from Acting Secretary of State to Secretary of State, 10 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1032.

in Vietnam, was an area that policymakers put particular emphasis on, given U.S. expertise in this area and the impact it would have on freeing up French troops for battle.⁵⁴ Despite his feeling that the United States could do a better job, Heath – fearful that such a step would move the French closer to extricating themselves from the conflict – was much more cautious about the United States involving itself in training than many in Washington.⁵⁵ It was telling, therefore, that Ike vocalised his desire to change ambassadors in Saigon following the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Henry Cabot Lodge’s comment that ‘if you get behind them and push [the French] hard enough they will do what is required’.⁵⁶ Heath, the president deemed, was unsuited to such a role.

Who could fulfil such a position? Senior figures agreed that it must be someone ‘less susceptible to French neuroses’, while Eisenhower asserted that ‘somebody “a little on the Machiavellian side”’ was needed in Saigon.⁵⁷ The former U.S. ambassador to France, William Bullitt, was among those considered, but foremost in the president’s mind was General William Donovan, the U.S. ambassador to Thailand. Bedell Smith agreed, revealing in one NSC meeting that ‘it was a pity that we had not sent General Donovan to Indochina rather than to Thailand’.⁵⁸ Head of the OSS during World War II, Donovan would have taken with him some proficiency in French (he was taking lessons), knowledge of the situation in Indochina and an important network of contacts in Vietnam formed during his time as OSS chief.⁵⁹ Donovan, importantly, was also a man of action. ‘Wherever Bill Donovan goes’, the Australian Foreign Minister Richard Casey noted, ‘something starts to happen’.⁶⁰ In this way, Donovan appealed to the administration’s shift to a more activist diplomatic stance in Indochina. While Heath stressed that there was ‘no rabbit which we can pull out of a hat’, Donovan would bring innovative new ideas

⁵⁴ Memorandum by C.D. Jackson, ‘Indo-China and Southeast Asia’, 18 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 981; Memorandum of Discussion at the 179th Meeting of the National Security Council, 8 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 950.

⁵⁵ Telegram 1506 from Heath to Department of State, 22 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1065; Memorandum from Heath to Secretary of State, 26 April 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954, The Geneva Conference*, Volume XVI (hereafter Vol. XVI), (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952-1954), p. 571.

⁵⁶ Memorandum of Discussion at the 184th Meeting of the National Security Council, 11 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1039.

⁵⁷ Memorandum by C.D. Jackson, ‘Indo-China and Southeast Asia’, 18 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 982; Memorandum of Discussion at the 184th Meeting of the National Security Council, 11 February 1954, Box 5, NSC Series, AW File, DDE Papers, DDEL. Thank you to Tim Rives, deputy director at the Eisenhower Presidential Library, and archivist Mary Burtzloff for helping me track this document down.

⁵⁸ Memorandum of Discussion at the 183rd Meeting of the National Security Council, 4 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1016.

⁵⁹ Richard Dunlop, *Donovan, America’s Master Spy* (Chicago, IL: Randy McNally, 1982), p. 498.

⁶⁰ ‘May 1, 1954’, *Australian Foreign Minister: The Diaries of R. G. Casey, 1951-60*, ed. by T. B. Millar (London: Collins, 1972), p. 149.

to the table.⁶¹ However, although Ike raised the prospect 'of transferring Donovan' in February, he would stay put in Thailand.⁶² The post in Bangkok had taken on increased importance under Eisenhower, with the president set on turning Thailand into an anti-communist bulwark.

With considerable emphasis put on increasing the U.S. role in training the VNA, Washington also considered candidates 'more experienced' than Heath in the training of indigenous forces for the Saigon ambassadorship.⁶³ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Arthur W. Radford had been calling for such a change for some time. In May 1953, he had urged Bedell Smith to replace Heath with General James Van Fleet. Van Fleet had been widely praised for his efforts in strengthening the Greek and South Korean armies, with South Korean president Syngman Rhee describing him as the 'Father of the ROK [Republic of Korea] army'.⁶⁴ Given Van Fleet's experience in training indigenous forces, Radford believed the general 'would be listened to by the French Military, the Vietnamese Military, as well as politicians on both sides', and that his appointment would indicate a U.S. determination to build up the VNA.⁶⁵ Although Radford was rebuked at the time, by early 1954 Ike seemed interested in employing Van Fleet in some capacity in Indochina.⁶⁶ However, reports from the British Embassy in Washington indicate that Van Fleet was being considered for the military role eventually taken up by O'Daniel.⁶⁷

Van Fleet was not the only name considered. Deputy Secretary of Defense Roger M. Kyes threw General Erskine's name into the mix.⁶⁸ Heath would have likely shuddered at the thought of Erskine, with whom he had clashed during the general's visit to Vietnam in 1950, replacing him in Indochina. When Erskine put forward his name to oversee a prospective MDAP organisation in Southeast Asia designed to supervise and guide U.S. ambassadors in the implementation of MDAP aid in early 1951, Heath told the State Department that Erskine is

⁶¹ Heath to Bonsal, 9 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1029.

⁶² Memorandum of Discussion at the 184th Meeting of the National Security Council, 11 February 1954, Box 5, NSC Series, AW File, DDE Papers, DDEL.

⁶³ Memorandum by C.D. Jackson, 'Indo-China and Southeast Asia', 18 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 982.

⁶⁴ Syngman Rhee quoted in Nicholas Tarling, *Status and Security in Southeast Asian States* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 113.

⁶⁵ Radford to Smith, 4 May 1953, in Scott to Robertson, 5 August 1953, 751g.00/5-453, Box 3674, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁶⁶ Memorandum by C.D. Jackson, 'Indo-China and Southeast Asia', 18 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 982; Spector, p. 184. Van Fleet was also considered for diplomatic roles in Korea and Thailand at this time, see Telephone Conversation with Gen. Smith, 22 December 1953, Telephone Memoranda (Except to and from the White House) November 1, 1953-Dec. 31, 1953 (1), Box 2, Telephone Conversation Series, JFD Papers, DDEL; Memorandum of Discussion at the 143rd Meeting of the National Security Council, 6 May 1953, Box 4, NSC Series, AW File, DDE Papers, DDEL.

⁶⁷ Joy to Tahourdin, 13 February 1954, FO 371/112047, TNA.

⁶⁸ Memorandum of Discussion at the 184th Meeting of the National Security Council, 11 February 1954, Box 5, NSC Series, AW File, DDE Papers, DDEL.

definitely ‘not the man to exercise any supervisory or coordinating job of [a] MAAG or diplomatic mission in Southeast Asia’.⁶⁹ More broadly, Heath, a career diplomat, believed that the military should leave diplomacy to the diplomats. He asserted, ‘Of course, no such position should be created and no such authority be given to a military man over diplomatic representatives in a situation which is not one of outright war in which America is participating with troops as well as armament’.⁷⁰

‘We Must Work with [the] French Through Existing Channels’

Despite the appetite of top-level policymakers for a more forceful stance with the French, opportunities for the United States to secure a firmer foothold in Vietnam remained constrained by the worsening political situation in France. Support in Paris for the war continued to decline and, although Ike expressed interest in military involvement during the first few months of 1954, the president was anxious to avoid sending U.S. troops into Vietnam. It remained vital, therefore, that the United States do what it could to ensure French forces continued to fight on. Nowhere was this prioritisation clearer than at the Berlin Conference, where John Foster Dulles reluctantly accepted Indochina’s inclusion at Geneva after Bidault made it clear that Laniel’s government would fall, and with it U.S. hopes for French support in Indochina and Europe, if he could not demonstrate progress towards ending the war.⁷¹

The continued necessity of sustaining the French war effort meant that Heath remained useful in Saigon. Concerns about his performance died down during the spring and it was clear that a decision on his future would now have to await the conclusion of the battle at Dien Bien Phu. On 26 February, the State Department gave Heath their backing. He was told that the ‘Department agrees [...] that we must work with [the] French through existing channels. We cannot envisage [the] French acceptance under present circumstances of any overt enlargement [of the] terms of reference within which our assistance [is] being furnished’.⁷² They were right. Although Navarre accepted O’Daniel as the new head of MAAG and agreed to host five U.S. military officials in a liaison capacity in his high command, he made it clear that this was on the ‘understanding that he [O’Daniel] is to have no authoritative participation in the conduct of the

⁶⁹ Heath to Lacy, 3 January 1950 [1951], lot 58 D207, Henry B. Day (Correspondence) (PWB File), Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Memorandum of Discussion at the 186th Meeting of the National Security Council, 26 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1081.

⁷² Telegram 1548 from Secretary of State to Saigon, 26 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1082.

war or in the training of the Vietnamese Army'.⁷³ Appointing Van Fleet, a man renowned for his experience in training indigenous forces, thus appeared out of the question for now.⁷⁴

One of the areas where the State Department requested Heath's help in this regard was in the management of U.S. personnel, a task that Heath had already dedicated considerable energy to during his tenure in Saigon. O'Daniel was a particular concern. While French authorities praised his predecessor, General Trapnell, for his 'tactful understanding' of the situation in Indochina, doubts existed over O'Daniel's suitability for the post.⁷⁵ The general's most persistent critic was Heath, who repeatedly stressed O'Daniel's ineptitude and poor rapport with Navarre and moved to halt his appointment as MAAG chief.⁷⁶ 'Navarre, while personally liking him, entertains a very low opinion of O'Daniel's understanding of the peculiar problems of this war and of his solutions for overcoming them', Heath told Bedell Smith on 24 February.⁷⁷ Latching on to a suggestion made by O'Daniel and noting the general's good relations with Congress and top-level policymakers, Heath argued that O'Daniel would be better utilised as a travelling spokesman for 'our policy and needs in Indochina', visiting Vietnam for a few days each month.⁷⁸

With O'Daniel holding the support of key policymakers, Heath was unsuccessful in preventing the general's permanent appointment as MAAG chief.⁷⁹ Several senior figures in the State Department shared the ambassador's concerns, though, and requested that Heath keep a close eye on O'Daniel.⁸⁰ 'I hope that you can steer him clear of those areas where he can only irritate the French. I know that this is quite an assignment but it is no more difficult than many

⁷³ Heath to Bedell Smith, 24 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1076.

⁷⁴ So associated was Van Fleet with the issue of training, that he was advised to avoid visiting Indochina on his Asian tour during the spring and summer of 1954. Telegram 2251 from Department of State to Saigon, 11 May 1954, 751g.00/5-954, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁷⁵ For example, McClintock asked the State Department 'if Iron Mike O'Daniel is exactly the blunt instrument we should use to galvanize the French Command to [a] more imaginative effort?', while Secretary Dulles feared that O'Daniel 'would probably have trouble with the French'. McClintock to McBride, 8 June 1953, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1953, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA; Memorandum of Telephone Conversation with Frank Nash, 1 June 1953, 12:45pm, Telephone Memoranda (Excepting to and from White House) January 1953-April 1953 (2), Box 1, Telephone Conversation Series, JFD Papers, DDEL.

⁷⁶ Heath to Bonsal, 23 August 1953, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1953, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

⁷⁷ Heath to Bedell Smith, 24 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1076.

⁷⁸ Heath to Bonsal, 2 February 1954, in Memorandum by Bonsal to Robertson, 'Letter from Ambassador Heath', 23 February 1954, 751g.00/2-254, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁷⁹ On Eisenhower's support for stationing O'Daniel permanently in Saigon, see Memorandum of Discussion at the 179th Meeting of the National Security Council, 8 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 953.

⁸⁰ For Bonsal's opposition to the appointment, see Memorandum by Bonsal to Robertson, 'Letter from Ambassador Heath', 23 February 1954, 751g.00/2-254, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; and for Bedell Smith's protest against the decision, see Smith to Heath, 12 March 1954, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1953, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

you have successfully completed', Smith wrote to Heath.⁸¹ In mid-March, Heath occupied himself with O'Daniel's arrival in Vietnam. Explaining that a link had formed in French minds between O'Daniel's appointment and harmful rumours about American intentions to expand MAAG's authority, Heath urged Washington to delay O'Daniel's arrival.⁸² The ambassador also pressed Washington to instruct O'Daniel 'to refrain for the first few weeks or even months from action which might be interpreted by the French as intervention and to confine himself to the administration of MAAG'.⁸³ Heath hoped this would minimise friction between the two parties and make French officials more open to American military advice in the future. 'Later, if [O'Daniel] succeeds in winning the confidence of the French High Command', Heath noted, 'he may be in [a] position to make suggestions with some hope of their acceptance. I stress, however, that in the beginning he must tread softly'.⁸⁴

The State Department were responsive to some of Heath's suggestions. They agreed to delay O'Daniel's arrival until early April in order to 'give time for [the] French reaction reported [in your] reftel to subside' and informed Heath that Washington was tailoring its public comments 'to [the] effect [that] O'Daniel is [a] routine replacement for Trapnell with no change in MAAG[s] terms of reference'.⁸⁵ Washington also seemed receptive to Heath's proposal about restricting O'Daniel's early interventions. However, the State Department clearly felt that the French and, therefore, Heath were overreacting, explaining that 'it would be deplorable if these sensitivities were to prevent [the] US making [a] maximum contribution to [the] success [of] this vital and difficult enterprise'.⁸⁶ Confident in American expertise in training indigenous armies, they argued that French officials should remain 'receptive and sympathetic [...] toward suggestions and advice emanating from our side' in line with the latest Franco-American aid agreement.⁸⁷ The Department counted on Heath's ability to 'be able to restore some sense of

⁸¹ Smith to Heath, 12 March 1954, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1953, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

⁸² For example, in a 21 February cable, Heath reported: 'In view of newspaper stories regarding [an] increase in powers and functions of MAAG, however, [Navarre] wanted it clearly understood from the start that his very willing acceptance of General O'Daniel was predicated on [the] understanding that [the] latter's functions were limited to military assistance'. Telegram 1501 from Heath to Department of State, 21 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1062.

⁸³ Telegram 1687 from Heath to Department of State, 15 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1121.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Telegram 1691 from Secretary of State to Saigon, 17 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1129. At a press conference on 17 February, for example, Ike reassured a *Le Monde* correspondent who inquired about O'Daniel being sent to Indochina 'with increased responsibilities' that the general's appointment 'merely means there would be a man to relieve Trapnell in Indochina'. Dwight D. Eisenhower: 'The President's News Conference', 17 February 1954, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10164>> [accessed 7 July 2016].

⁸⁶ Telegram 1691 from Secretary of State to Saigon, 17 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1130.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1129.

proportion [to] our French friends [on] the whole matter'.⁸⁸ While seemingly happy to take advantage of Heath's ability to soothe Franco-American relations, Washington still regarded the ambassador as overly sensitive to French whims.

Ill-advised remarks from the Pentagon to the press about installing a U.S. training mission in Vietnam did little to ease Heath's task of convincing French officials of the benign nature of U.S. assistance or the need to remain open to U.S. advice. Reports from Paris indicated that French press officers at the Quai d'Orsay, the French foreign office, were having to deny rumours on this subject several times a day and stressed 'the damaging effect it has in France and Vietnam at this time when the Indochina question is so delicate'.⁸⁹ The embassy could not restrain O'Daniel for long either.⁹⁰ On 24 April, McClintock reported that O'Daniel had recently presented Navarre with a plan for relieving Dien Bien Phu, where he received a 'polite, icy negative reply'.⁹¹ Mending relations between Navarre and O'Daniel was perhaps too much of a task for the embassy. McClintock later reflected 'that to expect Navarre and O'Daniel to work in unison was about as optimistic as to harness a water buffalo and a gazelle to pull a plow through a Vietnamese rice paddy'.⁹²

Another area where Heath contributed to U.S. attempts to preserve the French war effort during the battle for Dien Bien Phu was in press management.⁹³ American concern about the press's ability to undermine U.S. attempts to keep the French fighting in Indochina reached its zenith during the early months of 1954. In an NSC meeting in early February, Nixon outlined that 'what should really concern us is the constant stream of bad news from the battle areas. This is developing a defeatist attitude in the United States as well as in France'.⁹⁴ The French high commission issued a series of complaints about the 'distorted picture of the present campaign' they believed that American journalists were providing in early 1954.⁹⁵ These stories, they argued, 'might cause public opinion in France finally to conclude that the war in Indochina was a bad bargain and that France should withdraw its forces forthwith'.⁹⁶ On the other side, American

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Telegram 3544 from Dillon to Department of State, 25 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1161.

⁹⁰ Telegram 2096 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 23 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2354, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁹¹ Telegram 2102 from McClintock to Department of State, 24 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1400.

⁹² Robert McClintock, *The Meaning of Limited War* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), p. 170.

⁹³ Ferguson, 'Press Management', 228-253.

⁹⁴ Memorandum of Discussion at the 183rd Meeting of the National Security Council, 4 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1016.

⁹⁵ Memorandum by McClintock to Heath, 15 February 1954, in Foreign Service Despatch 349 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Press Relations of General Navarre', 19 February 1954, 751g.00/2-1954, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁹⁶ Ibid.; Telegram 1469 from Heath to Department of State, 17 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1053.

correspondents protested bitterly about French efforts to impede their reporting, leaving U.S. officials concerned that tight French press censorship would encourage the production of critical reports in the American media.

French officials and American correspondents both looked to the Saigon embassy for assistance. Journalists petitioned the embassy to aid their push for a more liberal French press policy, while Navarre sent members of his staff to the embassy to protest the stories filed by American correspondents.⁹⁷ Heath could sympathise with both positions. He was aware of Navarre's deficiencies with the press and, although praiseworthy of some journalists, critical of the tendency of others to bow to editorial demands 'for exciting news or dope stories on what [the] future holds' without due consideration of French sensitivities.⁹⁸ The embassy urged the French to take steps to liberalise their policy towards the press and journalists to use their "wisdom and discretion [...] in a war situation".⁹⁹

From the decision to support France's war in 1950, U.S. officials in Indochina had sought to impress upon their European ally the value of liberalising their press policy. Heath unsuccessfully raised the prospect of an American intervention on this issue following the defeats along RC4 in late 1950, while Cogny's openness to liberalising French press policies in mid-1953 yielded few tangible results.¹⁰⁰ By 1954, U.S. officials began to draw direct links between French failings with the press and pessimistic reporting in the American media.¹⁰¹ Comparing the more optimistic reports he received from official representatives in Indochina with the more alarmist press coverage of the Viet Minh incursion into Laos in December 1953, Secretary Dulles hypothesized that the French inability to provide adequate news briefings was playing a part in the overly gloomy press coverage.¹⁰² Time-Life reporter John Mecklin agreed stressing to U.S. representatives in Indochina that the 'alarmist stories exaggerating the proportions of the French setback' in central Laos were a direct result of the French decision to prohibit newsmen from

⁹⁷ Telegram 1469 from Heath to Department of State, 17 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1053.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Telegram 2085 from Saigon to Department of State, 22 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2254, CF 1950-1954, Box 3677, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰⁰ Telegram 734 from Heath to Secretary of State, 1 November 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 917. On Cogny's openness to liberalising French press censorship in Indochina, see Telegram 780 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 29 May 1953, 751g.00/5-2953, Box 3674, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰¹ For the long list of journalists' complaints in 1954, see Mecklin to Gruin, 'French & Press in Indo-China', 5 February 1954, in Foreign Service Despatch 349 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Press Relations of General Navarre', 19 February 1954, 751g.00/2-1954, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰² For the embassy's more optimistic appraisal of the Viet Minh incursion into Laos, see Telegram 1110 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 27 December 1953, 751g.00/12-2753, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. For the more alarmist assessment of the American press, see 'Indo-China Cut in Half by Red Push: Town is Overrun at Thailand Line; Bangkok Declares Emergency State', *Washington Post*, 27 December 1953, p. M1; Tillman Durdin, 'Indo-China is Sliced in Two as Foe Reaches Thai Border: Indo-China is Split by Vietminh Drive', *NYT*, 27 December 1953, p. 1; p. 3.

travelling to the French command post until a few days later.¹⁰³ Given such an order, Mecklin believed that journalists made the not illogical jump that the attack must have been of a very serious nature. Mecklin added that the restrictions the French placed on travel for correspondents also limited opportunities for the American press to report French successes. Fruitful French operations like the one that took place just northeast of Seno in January 1954, Mecklin suggested, were 'so very badly reported in Saigon that nobody fully appreciated the full proportions of the French success until days later'.¹⁰⁴

Embassy officials took up the matter with the French high commission in mid-February. Explaining the irritation that American journalists felt 'at the present system of press relations in Indochina', McClintock stressed that U.S. correspondents felt that they 'were subject to undue restriction and censure, and that in their present frame of mind they might be capable of filing stories which, were they not under this feeling of injury, they in calmer moments would not send'.¹⁰⁵ McClintock hoped the French 'would, for their part, realize that possibly a more liberal policy would pay dividends in the long run'.¹⁰⁶

The French did not buckle. After the fighting began at Dien Bien Phu and journalists were unable to visit the fortress, press restrictions increased. Reporters complained about the limited and distorted information provided by French authorities on the battle, the censorship of anything approaching even mild criticism, and a new rule outlining that correspondents could only file reports at certain points each day.¹⁰⁷ Following an appeal to the State Department urging the 'French high command here to relax censorship and other restrictions imposed on news coverage' on 15 April, Heath and McClintock took the matter to the French again.¹⁰⁸ This time they enjoyed more success. On 19 April, news arrived from the French Foreign Office 'that recent changes in censorship regulations had been removed and [that the] situation [is] now [the] same as before [the] Dien Bien Phu battle commenced'.¹⁰⁹ 'Although recognizing [that the] problem of press relations [in] Indochina [remained] still less than satisfactory', the State Department concluded that there did 'not appear to be anything further [the] Dep[artmen]t can do

¹⁰³ Mecklin to Gruin, 'French & Press in Indo-China', 5 February 1954, in Foreign Service Despatch 349 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Press Relations of General Navarre', 19 February 1954, 751g.00/2-1954, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Memorandum by McClintock to Heath, 15 February 1954, in Foreign Service Despatch 349 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Press Relations of General Navarre', 19 February 1954, 751g.00/2-1954, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ 'French Ease Curbs on War Reporters', *NYT*, 15 April 1954, p. 12.

¹⁰⁸ 'U.S. Newsmen Want French to Relax Indochina Censorship', *The Tuscaloosa News*, 15 April 1954, p. 2; Telegram 2023 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 16 April 1954, 751g.00/4-1654, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰⁹ Telegram 3941 from Paris to Secretary of State, 19 April 1954, 751g.00/4-1954, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

at this time'.¹¹⁰ Censorship, at the pre-Dien Bien Phu level, and French restrictions on the information they gave to reporters, however, continued to irritate American journalists throughout the battle and its aftermath.

Of prime concern to the embassy in their interventions with the American press during the battle for Dien Bien Phu was the coverage of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC). Although not every American had access to a television by the time of Dien Bien Phu, nightly news programmes were reaching millions of people across the United States by the middle part of the 1950s, making what they said of keen interest to U.S. officials.¹¹¹ NBC had, to date, proved a useful ally, liaising with the U.S. government in the production of shows like *Battle Report – Washington*, a current affairs programme designed to give viewers first-hand accounts of the struggle against communism.¹¹² Heath appeared on the show in early 1951 to talk about Indochina.¹¹³ NBC, however, caused quite a stir in Indochina during the height of the fighting at Dien Bien Phu. Robert Hecox, an NBC correspondent who evaded French censors by sending the story out from Indochina on a tape, filed a report arguing that Colonel Christian de Castries, the French commander at Dien Bien Phu, 'is prepared to resign his command and his commission in protest over [the] treatment he and his men have received at [the] hands of military superiors'.¹¹⁴ Navarre was livid, telling Heath that he feared that the 'publication or broadcast of such a report would endanger [the] lives of [the] gallant defenders of Dien-Bien-Phu by encouraging [the] enemy to feel that de Castries was in serious straits'.¹¹⁵ Navarre told Heath that he was inclined to throw the correspondent in prison if the story was made public.¹¹⁶

Following his meeting with Navarre, Heath instructed Sturm to tell Hecox to 'take immediate steps to kill the story' and urged the consul to make Hecox aware that if the French imprisoned him, 'this Embassy would find it difficult to intervene [on] his behalf'.¹¹⁷ Both Hecox and NBC, able to point to the fact that they had received the information from a source close to

¹¹⁰ Telegram 2050 from Department of State to Saigon, 22 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2254, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹¹¹ J. Fred MacDonald, *Television and the Red Menace: The Video Road to Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1985), p. 26.

¹¹² Nancy Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947-1960* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 117.

¹¹³ For Heath's statement on *Battle Report*, see Statement by Donald Heath, 'Indochinese Resistance to Communist Domination', 4 February 1951, No. 606, Vol. XXIV, 1 January-25 June 1951, *The Department of State Bulletin*, p. 262.

¹¹⁴ Telegram 576 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 12 April 1954, 751g.00/4-1254, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹¹⁵ Telegram 1999 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 15 April 1954, 751g.00/4-1554, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

de Castries, resisted government pressure to drop the story.¹¹⁸ Sturm and the Department refused to employ Heath's threat as a means of persuasion, believing 'that such a threat would incline them [NBC] to use [the] script' and only give Hecox reason to 'exaggerate [the] importance of [the] incident beyond its merit'.¹¹⁹ When the story was broadcast on 15 April, U.S. officials were relieved to see it appear in a softer form than was feared – the reaction to the piece was fairly restrained in the United States and France.¹²⁰

Embassy frustration with NBC did not end there. NBC sought out Frank Mullen, a former USIS Saigon radio officer, to film some footage in Saigon highlighting the 'increasing American colony in Saigon as we get more involved in the war to the north and the contrast between the harshness of the war [...] and the placidity of this "nerve center" of the war'.¹²¹ Mullen confided in the embassy, who advised him that a 'story of that type would not be in [the] national interest'.¹²² Mullen heeded this advice and Heath urged the State Department to inform NBC that 'their proposed news reel is not in the public interest'.¹²³ The embassy's attempts to minimise harmful news coverage during Dien Bien Phu, therefore, enjoyed some success.

'I Had No Indication of What Washington Thought of Recent French Suggestions Re [the] Internationalization of [the] War'

The embassy played a key role in monitoring developments at Dien Bien Phu after the battle began in earnest on 13 March. Saigon diplomats composed nearly six hundred cables during the course of the battle, many of which were dedicated to providing Washington with up-to-date information on the military situation in northwest Tonkin. Reports from Heath and McClintock kept Washington apprised of the fate of the fortresses outposts, French efforts to reinforce the garrison and the assessments of leading French figures in Indochina on the garrison's fate. The embassy's twelve military attachés provided additional commentary on Dien

¹¹⁸ Telegram 586 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 15 April 1954, 751g.00/4-1554, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 1968 from Department of State to Saigon, 15 April 1954, 751g.00/4-1554, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹¹⁹ Telegram 1968 from Department of State to Saigon, 15 April 1954, 751g.00/4-1554, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²⁰ Telegram 1977 from Department of State to Saigon, 16 April 1954, 751g.00/4-1654, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²¹ On the reasons for Mullen's dismissal, see Oral History Interview with Robert F. Franklin, 4 March 1988, Interviewed by Earl Wilson, Frontline Diplomacy, <<https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004fra02/2004fra02.pdf>> [accessed 16 September 2016]; Telegram 2001 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 15 April 1954, 751g.00/4-1554, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²² Telegram 2282 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 8 May 1954, 751g.00/5-854, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²³ Telegram 2001 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 15 April 1954, 751g.00/4-1554, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

Bien Phu, producing daily and weekly summaries of events at the beleaguered fortress.¹²⁴ Washington was appreciative of the embassy's efforts to document the battle.¹²⁵ After the fortress fell, the State Department cabled Saigon and Hanoi, commending them 'for [their] comprehensive [and] prompt reporting [on the] course and significance [of] military developments, notably [the] battle [for] Dien Bien Phu, and for maintaining continuous close relations [with] high civil military officials which have so greatly contributed value [to the] reports'.¹²⁶ Dulles read the Saigon posts' reporting with interest throughout the battle, the State Department forwarded a number of the embassy's cables on to other influential advisors and the president, and the Far East section of the Army's intelligence branch used attaché reports to produce briefings for senior military figures and to construct the National Intelligence Estimates.¹²⁷

Although American diplomats in Vietnam tapped various sources for information on the battle, including their British colleagues and the international press, they remained heavily dependent on the French, who were much more attentive to American requests for updates on the military situation than they had been in previous years.¹²⁸ Navarre and Dejean made concerted efforts to keep American diplomats informed of the latest developments at Dien Bien Phu. They shared French intelligence reports, battle plans, secret telegrams, aerial reconnaissance maps and radio reports from de Castries.¹²⁹ The result was that, for the most part, American diplomats were

¹²⁴ See, for example, Telegram OARMA MC 171-54 170805Z (Army Message) from Saigon to Secretary of State, 17 April 1954, 751g.00/4-1754, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram OARMA MC202-54 (Army's Message) from USARMA Saigon to Secretary of State, 28 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2754, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²⁵ Memorandum of Discussion at the 189th Meeting of the National Security Council, 18 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1133.

¹²⁶ Telegram 2240 from State Department to Saigon, 10 May 1954, 751g.00/5-1054, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²⁷ The State Department forwarded the following cables to Eisenhower during the crisis: Telegram 2096 from McClintock to Secretary of State, 23 April 1954, Box 2, Dulles – April, 1954 (1), Dulles-Herter Series, AW File, DDE Papers, DDEL; Telegram 2098 from McClintock to Secretary of State, 24 April 1954, Box 2, Dulles – April, 1954 (1), Dulles-Herter Series, AW File, DDE Papers, DDEL. For other occasions in which embassy reports were utilised by senior officials, see Memorandum of Discussion at the 184th Meeting of the National Security Council, 11 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1036; Memorandum of Conversation by Merchant, 26 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 1386-1387; Allen, p. 61.

¹²⁸ For the diplomatic mission's conversations with British officials on Dien Bien Phu, see Telegram 505 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 22 March 1954, 751g.00/3-2254, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. For examples of the diplomatic mission's use of journalistic assessments, see Telegram 512 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 24 March 1954, 751g.00/3-2454, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 574 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 12 April 1954, 751g.00/4-1254, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. See Chapter 3 for Heath's complaints about the tardiness with which French officials shared information with the U.S. legation during the fighting for RC4 in late 1950.

¹²⁹ For French efforts to share intelligence reports with American representatives in Vietnam, see Telegram 1683 from Heath to Department of State, 14 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 1119-1120; on battle plans, see Telegram 1752 from Heath to Department of State, 20 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part

able to provide Washington with a fairly accurate assessment of the battle. A more candid approach had its benefits for the French. By providing U.S. representatives in Indochina with official documents, which often highlighted the desperate situation at Dien Bien Phu, French officials improved their hopes of obtaining badly needed military assistance. Heath urged Washington to respond faster to the French request for more transport helicopters to evacuate the wounded in late March after he was read a one-and-a-half page extract of Navarre's official correspondence.¹³⁰ Although Ike refused the French request, the State Department expressed appreciation for the embassy's role in flagging up the most urgent needs of the French.¹³¹ Heath was also more circumspect in his reporting during the fighting than he had been in the buildup to Dien Bien Phu, injecting notes of caution as he relayed back French assessments of their chances at the fortress.¹³²

The embassy's influence in the Eisenhower administration's debates over intervention remained quite limited, however. Reports of the conversations that embassy officials had with Navarre and Dejean contain few references to the issue of American intervention, while Washington rarely solicited the advice of the embassy on this issue.¹³³ As with the Special Committee, embassy officials were often out of the loop on high-level U.S. government thinking about intervention.¹³⁴ McClintock told Dejean on 24 April 'that I had no indication of what Washington thought of recent French suggestions re [the] internationalization of [the] war'.¹³⁵ It was only in July after a conversation with Radford in Washington that Heath discovered just how close the United States had come to intervening in Indochina.¹³⁶ Given that French and American

1, p. 1135; on secret telegrams, see Telegram 1806 from Heath to Department of State, 27 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 1177-1188; on reconnaissance maps, see Telegram 1827 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 29 March 1954, 751g.00/3-2954, CF 1950-1954, Box 3676, RG 59, USNA; and on radio reports, see Telegram 545 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 2 April 1954, 751g.00/4-254, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹³⁰ Telegram 1806 from Heath to Department of State, 27 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1177.

¹³¹ Duiker, p. 156; Telegram 1827 from Department of State to Saigon, 1 April 1954, 751g.00/4-154, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹³² Spector, p. 189; Telegram 1729 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 18 March 1954, 751g.0/3-1854, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹³³ For one of the few times where it was discussed, see Telegram 2098 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 24 April 1954, Box 2, Dulles-Herter Series, AW File, DDE Papers, DDEL. According to John Gunther Dean, an American working in the economic mission in Vietnam, Navarre visited Heath during the battle 'to ask for American air strikes to silence the North Vietnamese artillery which was installed on the hills overlooking the French camp of Dien-Bien-Phu'. Dean suggests that Heath then passed this request on to Washington. However, I have not been able to locate documentary evidence of such a request. Oral History Interview with John Gunther Dean, 6 September 2000, Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <<http://adst.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Dean-John-Gunther.pdf>> [accessed 15 March 2018].

¹³⁴ McClintock, p. 169.

¹³⁵ Telegram 2102 from McClintock to Department of State, 24 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1400.

¹³⁶ Heath to Bonsal, 4 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1282.

military officials in Vietnam conceived the plan, it would seem likely that Heath knew about Operation Vulture. However, according to McClintock, the embassy was oblivious to the studies completed by the U.S. military for the potential use of nuclear weapons at Dien Bien Phu'.¹³⁷

Nevertheless, embassy officials provided an important conduit for French representatives to highlight the desperate nature of the French position at Dien Bien Phu and the need for American intervention.¹³⁸ They also gauged the Vietnamese reaction to the possible internationalisation of the war. Most Vietnamese nationalists were anxious about the prospect of American intervention, fearing that Vietnam might become 'a "new Korea"' and that U.S. intervention would bring China into the war.¹³⁹ However, although Eisenhower placed a degree of importance on obtaining Vietnamese endorsement for intervention, as James Waite notes, 'US efforts to build a coalition focused on securing French and Commonwealth acquiescence, taking Vietnamese nationalist support for granted'.¹⁴⁰ Had Vietnamese opinion mattered more to the administration, the Saigon embassy might have played a more prominent role in the American preparation for United Action, convincing anxious nationalists to authorise an U.S.-led intervention.

The Saigon post hosted important military figures sent to Indochina to judge the possibility and potential usefulness of U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. Among the most important was Brigadier General Joseph Caldara, the chief of Bomber Command. Caldara arrived in Saigon on 20 April to make a feasibility study for the use of American airpower in Indochina. He spoke to French officials, inspected their airfields and flew over Dien Bien Phu. He also met with officials in the Saigon embassy, finishing his visit by running through his assessment of the bombardment possibilities in Indochina with McClintock.¹⁴¹ There existed tactical targets for B-29 strikes in Indochina, he told the diplomat, and B-29s could be stationed at Tan Son Nhut near Saigon and at Clark Field in the Philippines. Caldara argued that it was crucial that the United States, and not the French, hold control over what targets are hit and that SHORAN navigation

¹³⁷ In May 1957, McClintock was told by General Curtis LeMay that 'he had drawn up a plan for the tactical nuclear bombardment of Dien Bien Phu. Asked what would happen to the French garrison, LeMay calmly replied, "Well, I guess they'd have got it too"'. McClintock, p. 165. For the studies that took place on the use and feasibility of nuclear weapons at Dien Bien Phu, see Spector, pp. 200-201.

¹³⁸ Telegram 2098 from McClintock to Secretary of State, 24 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1379; Heath-Jacquet Meeting, Geneva, 4 May 1954, Afternoon: U.S. Delegation to the Department of State, 4 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 688.

¹³⁹ Waite, *The End of the First Indochina War*, p. 97. However, embassy officials believed that Vietnamese nationalists in the north were more open to such a move. 'They [are] nearer to [the] guns and to China and realize [the] extent to which [the] Viet Minh control most of [the] delta and [the] Viet Minh[']s capability, even without victory at Dien Bien Phu, [to] inflict crucial damage in [the] delta where their forces have much greater mobility than [the] Franco-Vietnamese forces'. Telegram 2125 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 27 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2754, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁴⁰ Waite, *The End of the First Indochina War*, p. 98.

¹⁴¹ John Prados, *Operation Vulture* (New York: Ibooks, 2004), pp. 200-202.

and bombing systems be installed in Vietnam before an attack was made. Upon McClintock's suggestion, Caldara also agreed to recommend to his superiors that the military consult the Saigon embassy on the political consequences of each operation prior to launch.¹⁴²

It is difficult to gauge embassy opinion on intervention. While in early February Heath had suggested that U.S. intervention in Vietnam would bring the war 'to a fairly quick close' and expressed his desire for U.S. forces to renew the fight with the Chinese, he remained confident that Navarre could yet turn the tide in Indochina and that U.S. intervention, for now, was inadvisable.¹⁴³ 'Neither we nor the French are ready to throw American or Korean battalions into the breach at this time', he told Bonsal.¹⁴⁴ His use of 'at this time' is perhaps revealing. By late April, his confidence in Navarre's leadership badly shaken by developments at Dien Bien Phu, Heath's position shifted. Although U.S. military involvement under Navarre's leadership 'would be confusing and frustrating as well as wasteful', he told Secretary Dulles on 26 April, 'limited combat support may be necessary on [a] short range basis in order to get the French to remain and fight long enough to give us time to train the Vietnamese national army'.¹⁴⁵ However, the ambassador did not expand on what he meant by 'limited combat support'.¹⁴⁶ Regardless, the administration did not seek out Heath or McClintock's views on intervention.

The administration did not consult its men on the spot for a number of reasons. A partial explanation lies in the difficult relations that senior diplomats in Saigon enjoyed with key policymakers in Washington. McClintock had a frosty relationship with Dulles. According to Morris Draper, an official working in the State Department's Executive Secretariat in this period, 'Dulles never care[d] for McClintock. Dulles didn't have any sense of humor'.¹⁴⁷ The increasing criticism of Heath's performance in Saigon in Washington during the first half of 1954 weakened the embassy's position further still, as did Heath's difficult relationship with Eisenhower. The roots of Heath's uneasy relations with the president lay in the time they shared in post-war Berlin when Eisenhower was the military governor of the U.S. occupation zone and Heath worked for Robert Murphy, the U.S. political advisor. According to Heath's son, his father resented Eisenhower's decision to give Heath, Sr., the role of roughing up the Soviets during meetings of the Allied Control Commission. This created a tense relationship between the two men.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² Telegram 2122 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 26 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2654, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁴³ Heath to Bonsal, 9 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 1028-1029.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1028.

¹⁴⁵ Memorandum from Heath to Secretary of State, 26 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 572.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Oral History Interview with Morris Draper, 27 February 1991, Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, *Frontline Diplomacy*, <<https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004dra01/2004dra01.pdf>> [accessed 20 March 2018].

¹⁴⁸ Author's Correspondence with Donald R. Heath, Jr., 17 August 2013.

Eisenhower looked to a wide range of figures for advice during the crisis.¹⁴⁹ The most influential figure was Secretary Dulles. The president placed great confidence in Dulles's thinking and spoke daily about Indochina with him over the spring.¹⁵⁰ Dulles personally supervised U.S. efforts in Paris, London and Washington to win over allied governments to the idea of United Action and participated in a number of key meetings in Washington. Although Dulles's tendency to act as a lone ranger has often been overplayed – he, after all, read many of the reports that came in from his diplomats in Indochina – the secretary, nevertheless, did not regularly seek the Saigon embassy's thoughts on intervention.¹⁵¹ Similarly, he sidestepped the Saigon embassy when it came to preliminary consultations with the Vietnamese on United Action, approaching the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington himself rather than requesting diplomats in Saigon to take the matter up with the Buu Loc government.¹⁵²

Other American diplomats played a more influential role in U.S. government deliberations on intervention. Dillon in Paris was the American envoy most actively involved. He met with Dulles and Eisenhower during a trip back to the United States in late February, received several French requests for intervention and participated in a number of key meetings during Dulles's sojourns to Paris to try to secure the French assurances necessary for an American intervention.¹⁵³ Following a French approach for U.S. intervention in late April, Dillon laid out the choice in stark terms. He advised Washington that 'we must in making our decision realize that military intervention by US Forces in the next few days prior to [the] 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'.¹⁵⁴ French requests for intervention also came through their own embassy in Washington.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President, Volume 2, 1952-1969* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984), p. 623.

¹⁵⁰ John P. Burke and Fred I. Greenstein, *How President's Test Reality: Decisions on Vietnam 1954 & 1965* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1989), p. 57.

¹⁵¹ Richard Immerman, *John Foster Dulles: Piety, Pragmatism, and Power in U.S. Foreign Policy* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999), p. 49.

¹⁵² The Saigon embassy was not the only diplomatic post to find its role in substantive policy matters lessened by Dulles's modus operandi. Winthrop Aldrich complained in a 1964 interview about Dulles' tendency to bypass him and treat him as little more than a messenger boy during his time as the U.S. ambassador to London. Andrew Boxer, 'Winthrop Aldrich, 1953-57', in *The Embassy in Grosvenor Square: American Ambassadors to the United Kingdom, 1938-2008*, ed. by Alison Holmes and J. Simon Rofe (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), pp. 117-134 (p. 118).

¹⁵³ Memorandum from Bonbright to Acting Secretary of State, 'Visit to Washington of Ambassador Dillon', 19 February 1954, 751g.00/2-1954, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁵⁴ Telegram 4060 from Paris to Secretary of State, 25 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2554, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁵⁵ Telegram Tedul 7 from Acting Secretary of State to Secretary of State, 26 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 569.

Policymakers also consulted with Donovan, whose performance in Thailand had impressed.¹⁵⁶ In Thailand, the ex-OSS chief acted, according to one biographer, as ‘a de facto regional diplomat for Southeast Asia’.¹⁵⁷ Donovan took a particularly keen interest in Indochina, travelling frequently to Saigon to receive the latest information from French and American officials.¹⁵⁸ The Special Committee sought out Donovan’s views on the Geneva Conference and on drawing up ‘a possible defense arrangement on Southeast Asia’, and Donovan used his trips back to Washington in December 1953/January 1954 and March 1954 to appraise the administration of his views, advising against an intervention at Dien Bien Phu.¹⁵⁹ ‘Donovan was not an advocate of losing causes’, his former assistant William vanden Heuvel recalled, ‘and he saw [that] Dien Bien Phu from a military standpoint couldn’t prevail’.¹⁶⁰

A number of factors ensured that Dillon and Donovan played a more significant role in the debate over intervention than Heath. Playing in their favour was their political affiliation – both were influential Republicans – and the close personal connections they enjoyed with a number of key figures in the administration. Offered the Paris post in reward for his service to Eisenhower’s campaign for the Republican nomination, Dillon enjoyed a close relationship with Secretary Dulles, having helped him and his brother craft foreign policy speeches for Thomas Dewey’s 1948 run at the presidency.¹⁶¹ Donovan had worked with many of the administration’s senior officials in the OSS during World War II and had formed a firm friendship with Eisenhower during Ike’s time as president of Columbia University, campaigning hard for his election in 1952.¹⁶² Had Donovan had been given the Saigon ambassadorship back in February,

¹⁵⁶ As Bedell Smith noted in an NSC meeting on 11 March, Donovan had done a ‘splendid job’. ‘When he had been originally proposed as U.S. Ambassador’, the undersecretary of state explained, ‘nearly everyone in the State Department opposed the nomination and feared the results. Actually, however, Ambassador Donovan had conducted himself perfectly, had done exactly what the State Department had asked him to do, and had made great progress in Thailand’. Memorandum of Discussion at the 188th Meeting of the National Security Council, 11 March 1954, *FRUS, East Asia and Pacific, 1952-54*, Volume XII, Part 1 (hereafter Vol. XII, Part 1), (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952-1954), p. 398.

¹⁵⁷ Douglas C. Waller, *Wild Bill Donovan: The Spymaster who Created the OSS and Modern American Espionage* (New York: Free Press, 2012), p. 369.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ For the Special Committee’s consultation with Donovan, see Memorandum of Discussion at the 188th Meeting of the National Security Council, 11 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XII, Part 1, pp. 398-399. On Donovan’s opportunities to appraise Eisenhower of his views, see Telegram 1139 from Parsons to Department of State, 7 December 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XII, Part 2, pp. 697-698; Memorandum for the President, 6 January 1954, OF 8-F-Donovan Ambassadors and Ministers, Donovan Hon. William J, Box 135, Official File Series, White House Central Files, 1953-61, DDE Papers, DDEL; Author’s Interview with William J. vanden Heuvel, 5 May 2016.

¹⁶⁰ Author’s Interview with William J. vanden Heuvel, 5 May 2016.

¹⁶¹ Robert C. Perez, and Edward F. Willett, *Clarence Dillon: A Wall Street Enigma* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1995), p. 135.

¹⁶² Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947-1958* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), pp. 178-179; Waller, p. 360.

as had been discussed, he would likely have carved out a more influential role for the Saigon embassy on the question of intervention.

Another factor at work was geography. The two men found themselves in nations central to the administration's plans for United Action. France's importance was obvious, while Thai support for United Action was crucial. U.S. officials hoped that the backing of an independent Asian nation such as Thailand would help to remove the colonial stigma around the proposed coalition, whose membership was otherwise made up of colonial powers and their former possessions. Thai officials 'gave unconditional approval to United Action'.¹⁶³ In 1954, just as in the late 1940s when the United States deliberated over the political allegiance of Ho Chi Minh, American diplomats from outside of Indochina played a more influential role than American representatives working within the country.¹⁶⁴

The ultimate decision on intervention rested with Eisenhower. The president led from the front on Indochina. He voiced his own views on intervention in NSC meetings, redrafted and edited Dulles's 29 March United Action speech and attempted to cajole British Prime Minister Winston Churchill into joining the American-led alliance to protect Southeast Asia.¹⁶⁵ While some historians have depicted the president 'as at least a closet dove' during the crisis and others 'as a hawk who was frustrated in his desire to use American forces to rescue French forces at Dien Bien Phu and revitalize the war effort', a middle ground view has emerged in recent years.¹⁶⁶ Ike's interest in United Action was more than an attempt to placate administration hawks and protect him politically if the fortress fell. 'United Action was certainly part bluff', Herring and Immerman argue, 'but it also involved a willingness to commit United States military power if conditions warranted it and if the proper arrangements could be made'.¹⁶⁷ Regardless of the president's real motive, Ike's failure to secure international support tied his hands on intervention.

¹⁶³ Fineman, p. 191.

¹⁶⁴ The U.S. Ambassador to Moscow William Bullitt and the U.S. Ambassador to Paris Jefferson Caffery intervened decisively in government debates about the nature of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the late 1940s, overruling the more nuanced appreciation of Ho's political allegiances formed by diplomats in Vietnam. Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam*, pp. 166-170.

¹⁶⁵ Jean Edward Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace* (New York: Random House, 2012), p. 617.

¹⁶⁶ Mark Atwood Lawrence, 'Explaining the Early Decisions', p. 35. For examples of the former interpretation of Eisenhower's behaviour, see Melanie Billings-Yun, *Decision against War: Eisenhower and Dien Bien Phu, 1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). For the latter, see John Prados, 'Assessing Dien Bien Phu', in Lawrence and Logevall, pp. 226-231; James R. Arnold, *The First Domino: Eisenhower, the Military and America's Intervention in Vietnam* (New York: Morrow, 1991).

¹⁶⁷ Herring and Immerman, 'Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu', p. 363. Also see Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 473.

‘American Intervention in Indo-China Might be Interpreted as [a] Protection of Colonialism’

Although the Saigon embassy’s direct contribution to government debates about military intervention was relatively limited, it played a more influential role in satisfying, albeit inadvertently, one of the political criteria that Eisenhower established for the use of American military force. Highlighting his fear ‘that American intervention in Indo-China might be interpreted as [a] protection of colonialism’ in early April, the president added a French guarantee of independence for the Associated States to the other criteria: allied support, congressional authorisation and a French commitment to continuing the fight.¹⁶⁸ While this condition did not assume the same importance as others, encouraging France to finalise Vietnamese independence served other important purposes as well.¹⁶⁹ For the Saigon embassy, its importance had less to do with intervention – although embassy officials were aware of the stress that Washington put on this issue – and more to do with U.S. attempts to strengthen the Western negotiating position at Geneva.¹⁷⁰

The Saigon embassy was at its most valuable to Washington during the Dien Bien Phu crisis in the management and reporting of the political situation in Vietnam. Policymakers, aware of the embassy’s close relations with the principal Vietnamese players and the prime position it occupied in interpreting the internal political situation, repeatedly looked to Heath and his subordinates for ways to inject renewed vigour into Bao Dai’s government in the months leading up to the fall of the fortress.¹⁷¹ Policymakers also entrusted Heath with reassuring the Vietnamese in the event of a French collapse, urging him to get the Associated States to refrain from making a decision about what to do next ‘until and unless [the] US [is] given [the] opportunity of examining [the] situation and determining [the] extent to which by positive action we can insure [the] continuance of [the] struggle under favorable conditions’.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Editorial Note, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1236.

¹⁶⁹ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 471-472.

¹⁷⁰ For the Saigon embassy’s awareness of the stress that Washington placed on Vietnamese independence as regards intervention, see Telegram 3575 from Secretary of State to Paris, 9 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1298. A copy of this cable was sent to Saigon. As Dulles told Bidault in April, a French commitment to full Vietnamese independence would create a ‘unity of purpose at Geneva’ and would increase the will of the Vietnamese to fight. Telegram 2667 from Godley to Department of State, ‘Minutes of Conversations held in Paris by the Secretary of State and Foreign Minister Bidault with relation to “Unified Action” in Southeast Asia’, 21 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1331.

¹⁷¹ For examples of Washington seeking the advice of the Saigon embassy on the political situation, see Acting Telegram 1400 from Secretary of State to Saigon, 5 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 1019-1020; Telegram 1552 from Secretary of State to Saigon, 26 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1083.

¹⁷² Telegram 1831 from Secretary of State to Saigon, 1 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1206. Heath retained this authority until early June. Telegram 2539 from Department of State to Saigon, 8 June 1954, 751g.00/6-854, Box 3679, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

U.S. officials continued to believe that much of the blame for the Bao Dai government's failure to challenge the DRV's popular appeal lay with the French refusal to provide the Vietnamese with complete independence. In a meeting with Ike in early 1954, the Vietnamese ambassador to the United States explained that as little as 'two or three percent' of the local population believed French promises about independence.¹⁷³ Searching for ways to alter this perception, the Department asked Heath in early February if a 'declaration granting self-determination as to membership in [the] French Union [would] be helpful locally'?¹⁷⁴ Although the Saigon envoy wished for a more dynamic Vietnamese government, in the early part of the year he remained convinced that such a step would prove counterproductive. With last year's National Congress still firmly in his mind, Heath feared that it would only 'encourage irrational nationalists to use this offer as springboard to a wild leap into "complete independence"' and that this would almost 'certainly result in French public opinion deciding to wash [its] hands of further effort in this war'.¹⁷⁵

For a time it seemed that U.S. pressure would not be necessary. Having signed an agreement with the Laotian government in October 1953 that gave Laos full independence and free membership in the French Union, the French invited the Vietnamese government to Paris for similar negotiations in March 1954.¹⁷⁶ The Vietnamese delegation, led by Buu Loc, set out their desire for the same two treaties the French had agreed with Laos. A day after the Vietnamese arrived in Paris, however, the French National Assembly adopted an *ordre du jour*, the fourth paragraph of which established that the Vietnamese delegation's desire to make participation in the French Union voluntary would release France from its obligations in Vietnam.¹⁷⁷ As one historian notes, it made 'any negotiated treaty redefining the nature of association in the French Union [...] difficult, not to say impossible'.¹⁷⁸ The impasse pressed Heath into action.

For much of his tenure in Indochina, Heath had attempted to apply the brakes on Vietnamese independence. In early March 1954, Heath's position underwent a significant shift, just as he was being criticised for his sympathetic position towards the French. Although preserving a French commitment remained high on his list of priorities, Indochina's inclusion at the Geneva Conference convinced him that the United States needed to play a more active role in securing Vietnamese independence. Following the 9 March *ordre du jour*, Heath argued that the

¹⁷³ Memorandum of Discussion at the 183rd Meeting of the National Security Council, 4 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1014.

¹⁷⁴ Telegram 1400 from Acting Secretary of State to Saigon, 5 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1019.

¹⁷⁵ Telegram 1417 from Heath to Department of State, 10 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1030.

¹⁷⁶ On Franco-Laotian negotiations, see Dommen, p. 219.

¹⁷⁷ For the full text of the order, see Telegram 3285 from Paris to Secretary of State, 10 March 1954, 751g.00/3-1054, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁷⁸ Dommen, p. 223.

'French and ourselves would be in [a] far stronger position at [the] Indochina phase of [the] Geneva conference if [the] French Government could find its way clear to accept [the] essence of Vietnamese proposals re independence'.¹⁷⁹ Heath suggested that if the French refused the 'Communists will come to [the] Geneva conference with a much stronger hand'.¹⁸⁰ There were other benefits to a French acceptance of the Vietnamese proposals, the ambassador argued. Heath felt that it 'would have [a] good effect on public opinion throughout Vietnam, would effectively refute Ho Chi Minh propaganda that Vietnam is a puppet state, and would do much to rally opinion to a government of national union'.¹⁸¹ With these benefits in mind, Heath advised that the 'French Government should be apprised of our views'.¹⁸² Edmund Gullion, the former deputy chief of mission in Saigon who had struggled with Heath for two years over the degree of pressure the U.S. mission should place on France to meet Vietnamese demands for independence, could not believe his eyes. In a memo to his superiors in the Policy Planning Staff in late March, he wrote, 'I am entirely in accord with this telegram and only wish that it had come in under the same dateline three years ago, two years ago, or even one year ago'.¹⁸³

Heath had the support of Secretary Dulles, who shared Heath's belief in the energising effect that a Franco-Vietnamese agreement would have on the Vietnamese will to fight and the United States' capacity to convince its allies to contribute to United Action.¹⁸⁴ Dulles pressed the French on this matter personally during his trips to Paris in the spring, explaining that the French refusal to consider a provision permitting withdrawal from the French Union tainted the Vietnamese government with colonialism.¹⁸⁵ Aware that the Associated States were still heavily dependent on the French, Dulles hoped that 'some formula could be found which would [...] make clear that the French would wish the Associated States to have full independence'.¹⁸⁶ He

¹⁷⁹ Telegram 1778 from Heath to Department of State, 24 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1155.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1156.

¹⁸¹ Telegram 1762 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 21 March 1954, 751g.00/3-2154, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁸² Telegram 1778 from Heath to Department of State, 24 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1156.

¹⁸³ Footnote 4, in *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ For the State Department's initial reluctance to authorise an American approach on this issue, see Telegram 1766 from Department of State to Saigon, 25 March 1954, 751g.00/3-2454, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. Ambassador Dillon registered his resistance to the move in early April, see Telegram 3675 from Dillon to Department of State, 2 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 1212-1214. Sir Percy Spender, the Australian ambassador to the United States, and Pote Sarasi, the Thai ambassador to the United States, stressed the importance of obtaining Vietnamese independence to secure their countries' contribution to United Action, see Memorandum of Conversation, by Bonbright, 'Indochina', 4 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1234; Memorandum of Conversation, by Landon, 'United Action in Southeast Asia', 5 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XII, Part 1, p. 403.

¹⁸⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, 14 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1335.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

suggested that this could be done by inserting a clause giving the Associated States the right to withdraw from the French Union five years after the war had concluded.

The Saigon embassy supplemented Dulles's efforts in Paris with their own moves designed to persuade French officials to accede to Vietnamese requests. One of the reasons behind the *ordre du jour*, Dejean told Heath, was a growing concern in the French National Assembly that the Vietnamese delegation, and Bao Dai's government more broadly, was not representative of Vietnamese public opinion.¹⁸⁷ Heath believed, therefore, that the creation of an elected national assembly would resolve the Franco-Vietnamese impasse over negotiations and provide the means to unify the anti-communist groups in the fight against the Viet Minh.¹⁸⁸ Several influential Vietnamese politicians stressed to U.S. officials in Vietnam the soothing effect a national assembly would have on the political situation.¹⁸⁹ Finding that formula would not be easy. The 'newness and lack of strength of [the] Buu Loc Government, the inertia and confusion of [the] Vietnamese themselves, [a] lack of strong political leaders and the opposition of Bao Dai' presented formidable barriers, Heath admitted.¹⁹⁰ A lack of time and the absence of numerous leading Vietnamese officials in Paris for Franco-Vietnamese negotiations complicated matters further. 'Still', Heath concluded, 'the reward would be great, and the present political climate seems ripe for such development'.¹⁹¹ The State Department agreed.¹⁹²

Bao Dai and Buu Loc initially exhibited little enthusiasm for a national assembly. Bao Dai informed Heath that a national assembly would 'result in greater national division and squabbling and gravely detract from [the] national war effort', while Buu Loc placed greater stress on the 'formation of a war Cabinet to insure a more determined and efficient prosecution of [the] war'.¹⁹³ Vietnamese leaders also placed much of the blame for the refusal of anti-communist groups to pledge their allegiance to the Bao Dai government on continued French payment of the armies of groups like the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao, payments that dis-incentivised

¹⁸⁷ Dommen, p. 223; Telegram 1692 from Heath to Department of State, 16 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1123.

¹⁸⁸ Telegram 1417 from Heath to Department of State, 10 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1031.

¹⁸⁹ Telegram 1638 from McClintock to Department of State, 10 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 1100-1101; Telegram 500 from Sturm to Department of State, 18 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1131.

¹⁹⁰ Telegram 1688 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 15 March 1954, 751g.00/3-1554, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Telegram 1703 from Department of State to Saigon, 18 March 1954, 751g.00/3-1554, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁹³ Telegram 1781 from Heath to Department of State, 24 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1152; Telegram 1846 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 31 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 1192-1193.

these groups from incorporating their soldiers into the VNA.¹⁹⁴ A solution would not be forthcoming on French payments until after Geneva.¹⁹⁵

The Vietnamese government, partly in reaction to U.S. and French pressure but mostly in response to mounting agitation from Vietnamese nationalists, nevertheless announced that it would begin exploring the establishment of a national assembly in late March.¹⁹⁶ This failed to arouse much of a reaction from representatives of Vietnam's politico-religious groups, with one representative telling the embassy that they 'are still awaiting action'.¹⁹⁷ A series of decrees issued by the new war council to boost mobilisation for the VNA in mid-April also failed to have a decisive effect.¹⁹⁸

Bao Dai's decision to give the Binh Xuyen control over the government's security services, a move McClintock described as akin to '[the] city of Chicago placing its police force in [the] hands of Al Capone during [the] latter's heyday', was a further blow to the embassy's hopes of producing a more unified anti-communist effort prior to Geneva.¹⁹⁹ One French expert told McClintock that the 'Cao Dais and Hoa Haos were now certain also to demand profitable concessions, so that the south would dissolve into greater chaos, and the much discussed unity of Vietnam, which seemed on [the] point [of] realization [a] year ago, would in his view be completely destroyed'.²⁰⁰ McClintock suggested that U.S. officials should pressure Bao Dai to

¹⁹⁴ Telegram 1846 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 31 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1193. The Hoa Hao were a 'heterodox religious group' established in the late 1930s in southern Vietnam, whose initial cooperation with the Viet Minh had been ended by the Viet Minh's decision to execute their leader, Huynh Phu So. Miller, pp. 91-92.

¹⁹⁵ Chapman, p. 65.

¹⁹⁶ Telegram 1840 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 30 March 1954, 751g.00/3-3054, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. See Miller, *Misalliance*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁹⁷ Foreign Service Despatch 429 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Views of Tran Van Tuyen on Political Developments', 2 April 1954, 751g.00/4-254, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁹⁸ Telegram 1990 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 14 April 1954, 751g.00/4-1454, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Chapman, p. 64.

¹⁹⁹ Telegram 2188 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 3 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1460. The Binh Xuyen were one of the most powerful politico-religious groups in southern Vietnam in the 1950s, commanding their own army and considerable influence in Saigon. The organisation was formed in the 1920s, when a disparate group of pirates banded together to form a crime syndicate that established themselves in Cholon-Saigon. The Binh Xuyen had initially allied itself with the Viet Minh, breaking off this relationship in 1948 after being promised opportunities to enrich themselves under Bao Dai's rule. For more on the early history of the Binh Xuyen, see Chapman, pp. 16-39; Christopher Goscha, 'Binh Xuyen', *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War (1945-1954)*, <<https://indochine.uqam.ca/en/historical-dictionary/142-binh-xuyen.html>> [accessed 22 May 2018].

²⁰⁰ Telegram 2164 from Saigon to Department of State, 30 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1450. In a conversation with McClintock on 9 May, the Cao Dai leadership complained about the lucrative rice export licenses that the Binh Xuyen had received. Telegram 2293 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 9 May 1954, 751g.00/5-954, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

rescind the order and stop him handing control of the Saigon-Cholon police force, as was rumoured, over to the Binh Xuyen as well.²⁰¹

The State Department were receptive to McClintock's advice. They instructed William Gibson, first secretary in the U.S. Embassy in Paris, to contact Buu Loc to ask for the government's reasoning behind this move and urged Heath, who had left Saigon for Europe to prepare for the upcoming Geneva Conference in April, 'to draw Bao Dai's attention to [the] unfortunate results of his decree transferring police authority to [the] Binh Xuyen'.²⁰² On 5 May, Gibson spoke with Buu Loc.²⁰³ Although Buu Loc indicated his own opposition to the move, he stood by Bao Dai, who he explained had wanted a loyal and strong force in place in Saigon while he was abroad.²⁰⁴ McClintock found Quát, the de facto head of the government in the absence of Buu Loc and Bao Dai, equally resistant.²⁰⁵

The embassy's failure to get Bao Dai to retract his decision on the Binh Xuyen was part of a broader U.S. failure during the fighting at Dien Bien Phu to shape the chief of state's actions. U.S. officials hoped 'to try to make Bao Dai himself a more effective leader' by urging him to take a more active role in government affairs and advising him on the virtue of his policies.²⁰⁶ The embassy suggested that flying Bao Dai to the United States for medical care might help. The chief of state had a long list of health complaints – the most recent of which was chronic malaria and a liver condition – which he often used to excuse himself from his duties.²⁰⁷ The French tendency to see such a move as further proof of U.S. interventionism in Indochina, however, torpedoed the idea.²⁰⁸ To McClintock, the trip would have made little difference anyway. He argued, 'I do not think that even American doctors will be able to change His Majesty's character'.²⁰⁹

²⁰¹ Telegram 2188 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 3 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1460.

²⁰² Telegram SECTO 91 from Geneva to Secretary of State, 4 May 1954, 751g.00/5-454, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 2198 from Department of State to Saigon, 6 May 1954, 751g.00/5-454, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²⁰³ Telegram 4221 from Paris to Secretary of State, 5 May 1954, 751g.00/5-554, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Telegram 2207 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 4 May 1954, 751g.00/5-454, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²⁰⁶ Memorandum of Discussion at the 183rd Meeting of the National Security Council, 4 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1015; Telegram 1781 from Heath to Department of State, 24 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1155.

²⁰⁷ On 18 January, for example, Bao Dai implied in a conversation with Heath that he had delayed his proposed trip to France because of a recent spate of boils. Telegram 1265 from Heath to Department of State, 18 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 981.

²⁰⁸ Telegram 3151 from Achilles to Department of State, 2 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1091.

²⁰⁹ Footnote 2, in Telegram 1552 from Secretary of State to Saigon, 26 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1083.

Although U.S. aid provided insufficient leverage to force Bao Dai's hand, Franco-Vietnamese negotiations made progress throughout the spring. In mid-April, a Vietnamese diplomat informed U.S. officials in Paris that an agreement, including French acceptance of the Vietnamese desire for an equal voice in meetings of the High Council of the French Union, was imminent. '[The] Vietnamese', the diplomat told one American official, 'attribute French molification to US influence'.²¹⁰ However, even though the French and Vietnamese had come to an agreement, the French refused to sign the treaties before the Geneva Conference began, insisting that negotiations 'on the subsidiary (financial) conventions' be completed first.²¹¹ Bao Dai greeted the news with disgust, explaining his disappointment in a public statement on 25 April, a move that rankled the French.²¹² After making 'some vague references to parliamentary and public opinion in France', one senior French official in Indochina told embassy representatives that 'some sort of joint declaration or resumé of the contents of the treaties [...] previous to the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference should be sufficient as evidence of French good faith'.²¹³ Though the French cabinet was divided on the issue, opinion in the National Assembly was broadly against providing independence to the Vietnamese.²¹⁴ At Geneva, the Viet Minh, on the back of a stunning victory at Dien Bien Phu (the French fortress fell on May 7), would face an opposition government that neither enjoyed full independence from France or the full support of Vietnam's anti-communist nationalists. It was to events in Switzerland that U.S. attention now turned.

This chapter reveals that the Saigon embassy was little involved in U.S. government debates on intervention. Embassy officials were often out of the loop on developments in Washington and the Eisenhower administration did not seek the views of Heath and McClintock on a U.S.-led intervention at Dien Bien Phu. Top-level officials' greater engagement with Vietnam and their direct interaction with their French counterparts in Paris, the fact that French requests for U.S. air intervention came from Paris and not Saigon, and Heath's decline in standing and difficult relationship with Eisenhower ensured that the embassy did not play a significant role in contemplating intervention. Instead, the embassy's role was limited to

²¹⁰ Telegram 3927 from Paris to Secretary of State, 17 April 1954, 751g.00/4-1754, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²¹¹ Memorandum of Conversation, by Heath, 24 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1384.

²¹² For the text of Bao Dai's public statement on negotiations and the French reaction to it, see Foreign Service Despatch 2757 from Paris to Department of State, 'Transmission Text Communiqué Issued by the Cabinet of Bao Dai at Paris April 25', 29 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2954, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²¹³ Foreign Service Despatch 497 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Conversation with French Deputy Commissioner General', 30 April 1954, 751g.00/4-3054, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²¹⁴ Dommen, p. 226.

reporting on the battle, hosting military officials sent to survey the options in Indochina and, albeit inadvertently, contributing to government efforts to satisfy Eisenhower's desire for Vietnamese independence before an intervention at Dien Bien Phu. Had the administration placed greater emphasis on obtaining Vietnamese support for an intervention then the Saigon embassy would have played a more active role. Heath and McClintock, too, might have found themselves as key political consultants in the selection of bombing targets had Eisenhower given the go ahead for an intervention.

American diplomats in Indochina, however, continued to have an important role in the formulation and implementation of other parts of U.S. policy. The embassy remained a chief contributor to U.S. attempts to shape the political situation in Indochina, taking a lead role in U.S. attempts to foster a unified and strong anti-communist government during the battle. Embassy officials pressured Bao Dai to play a more active role in government and sought to find ways to accelerate Franco-Vietnamese negotiations. Sensitive to the French though he remained, Heath's decision to embrace a tougher policy with the French on Franco-Vietnamese negotiations complicates scholarly understanding of his position. Heath's actions here show the pragmatic streak that influenced his diplomacy during his time in Indochina. While most of the time he saw a pro-French stance as crucial to U.S. success in Indochina, he was not afraid to adopt positions contrary to French interests when he felt the success of the Indochina enterprise required it. However, the embassy found both the Vietnamese and French relatively unresponsive to their suggestions. The treaties establishing Vietnamese independence remained unsigned and anti-communist groups continued to operate independently from the Vietnamese government. The embassy's failure highlights the limits to American power in Vietnam and the intractability of mediating an acceptable solution that would satisfy their French and Vietnamese allies.

Heath retained a significant role in U.S. attempts to stave off a French departure from Indochina, with State Department officials, in particular, continuing to value his ability to ease Franco-American tension. Heath achieved a modicum of success, using his influence to temporarily restrain O'Daniel, convince the French of the benefits of a slightly more liberal press policy, and find ways to block more negative stories from appearing in the American media. However, Heath and McClintock were unable to restrain O'Daniel for long, American reporters continued to condemn the restrictions they worked under, and embassy pressure was not always enough to get journalists to drop pessimistic reports that irritated Franco-American relations. Although the embassy eased some of the surface irritants of the Franco-American relationship in Indochina, it could do little to bridge the more significant divide between the two countries on the larger purpose of the war.

Chapter 6 – The Geneva Conference, May-July 1954

On 8 May 1954, following the culmination of discussions on Korea, the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference began. Several representatives from the U.S. Embassy in Saigon were in attendance. Donald Heath had made a forceful case for his embassy's participation in the days after the Geneva Conference was announced. He told Bonsal in late February, 'I do not know what views the Department has on the make-up of the American delegation to the Geneva Conference, but [I] would observe that the only people who know the present Vietnamese Ministers in their new roles are the Foreign Service officers now in Saigon'.¹ 'I believe the Department', he stressed, 'should give serious consideration to sending someone from this Embassy to Geneva'.² The idea received support from Bonsal and senior figures in the State Department agreed that representation from Saigon would be beneficial at Geneva.³

To date, there has been little examination of the Saigon embassy's contribution at Geneva. For example, in Robert F. Randle's detailed study of the conference, Heath's name appears only three times.⁴ Scholarly work on U.S. efforts at the Geneva Conference has tended to focus on the actions of leading figures from Washington like Walter Bedell Smith, John Foster Dulles and U. Alexis Johnson, the men who led the U.S. delegation in Switzerland.⁵ More broadly, in recent years, historians have taken advantage of newly available documents from China and Vietnam to offer vital insights into the motivations and effectiveness of the communist delegations at Geneva.⁶

This chapter provides the first in-depth examination of the Saigon embassy's involvement at the Geneva Conference. It examines how the embassy contributed to U.S. efforts at Geneva, assesses the extent to which the actions of embassy officials shaped the conference's settlement, and explores the impact of the Geneva Accords on the structure and makeup of the U.S. diplomatic mission in Indochina. The chapter shows that embassy officials contributed to U.S. efforts at Geneva in a number of ways. The interventions of Saigon diplomats helped

¹ Heath to Bonsal, 26 February 1954, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1954, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

² Ibid.

³ Bonsal to Heath, 1 March 1954, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1954, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

⁴ Robert F. Randle, *Geneva 1954: The Settlement of the Indochinese War* (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1969).

⁵ For example, see Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 549-613; James Cable, *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

⁶ Asselin, 155-195; Chen Jian, 'China and the Geneva Conference of 1954', *The China Quarterly*, 129 (March 1992), 103-122.

policymakers realise the palatability of partition over the risk of losing Indochina altogether and American officials from Saigon played a key role in shepherding a reluctant Vietnamese government through the conference, convincing Vietnamese officials to accede to a settlement dividing Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel. The chapter demonstrates that diplomatic posts remained relevant in an era of international conferences and face-to-face meetings between principal policy-makers.⁷

Saigon Diplomats at Geneva

Following Heath's appeal to Washington, policymakers agreed to send a number of Saigon diplomats to Geneva. Heath was among those invited. In March, Douglas MacArthur II, Counselor in the State Department, argued that the head of the U.S. delegation should 'have the best possible support we can give him, and it is suggested that his principal advisers throughout the Conference be Ambassador Dillon, Assistant Secretary Robertson, Ambassador Heath, and presumably Admiral Davis of the Department of Defense'.⁸ Heath was appointed as a special adviser and head of the U.S. delegation's Indochina working group. He left Saigon to take up his new responsibilities in Europe in April. Joining Heath at Geneva were Saigon army attachés Lieutenant Colonel Robert C. Taber and Lieutenant Colonel Donald Kallet, who took up roles as research and reference officers in the delegation. Americans who had formerly served in Indochina also participated. John Getz, who worked in the Saigon legation as a third secretary from late 1949 through to mid-1952, took a break from his work in the PSA office to join Taber and Kallet as a research and reference officer. Others present at Geneva would later work in Saigon. Lieutenant Colonel John E. Dwan, working in the Department of Defense at the time, would accompany Heath's successor J. Lawton Collins to Vietnam in late 1954, while G. Frederick Reinhardt, U.S. counselor in Paris, would succeed Collins as the chief American representative in Vietnam in 1955.

The U.S. delegation made far greater use of its on-the-spot observers than the other major powers attending the conference. Neither China nor the Soviet Union, of course, had established permanent diplomatic representation in Vietnam; the Viet Minh did not have their own capital. The Soviet Union appointed its first ambassador to Vietnam just days after the conference's conclusion.⁹ The British had posts in Hanoi and Saigon, but its delegation did not appoint members of their diplomatic mission in Indochina to Geneva. The efforts of the British head of

⁷ John W. Young, *David Bruce and Diplomatic Practice* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 168.

⁸ Memorandum by MacArthur, 'Questions Relating to the Geneva Conference', 13 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 459.

⁹ Asselin, p. 183.

mission Hubert Graves to send second secretary John Cloake were quashed by the Foreign Office, who preferred to employ Cloake as a 'long-stop in the Office while all the people who had never set foot in Indo-China went off to Geneva'.¹⁰ Although the French employed some officials who had previously served in Indochina, French representatives then assigned to Saigon and Hanoi were absent from the negotiating team sent to Geneva.¹¹

In a 14 June restricted session of the conference, Bedell Smith used the presence of acting and former American diplomats from Indochina in his delegation in an attempt to gain the upper hand in a debate over Laos and Cambodia. At the conference, the communist powers insisted on the significance of the Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak resistance groups harassing the anti-communist governments in Laos and Cambodia, pushing for recognition of these groups and their inclusion in a political settlement. U.S. officials opposed their participation and the creation of coalition governments in Cambodia and Laos, arguing that the two nations 'were simply victims of Viet Minh aggression'.¹² 'The US delegation at this conference includes several members who have been and still are assigned to these missions', Smith announced.¹³ These individuals, he asserted, 'have traveled widely in these two countries; they have talked to people in the cities and in the villages; they have seen with their own eyes the situation as it has developed'.¹⁴ He argued, therefore, 'that whatever armed opposition to the legal governments of Cambodia and Laos exists is provided by the military forces of the Viet Minh and the Communist political cadres under the protection of its army'.¹⁵

The Embassy and U.S. Attempts to Sabotage the Conference

U.S. policy with regards to the Geneva Conference went through two distinct stages. Initially, from the build up to the conference in the spring to late June, policymakers set out to try to influence the outcome of the settlement. Deeply suspicious of negotiating with the communists and aware that any loss of territory to the communists in Asia would hinder Republican hopes at the ballot box in the November mid-term elections, the Eisenhower administration sought to prevent their allies from agreeing to unfavourable terms that would leave Vietnam and, more broadly, Southeast Asia open to communist domination. Policymakers hoped that the United

¹⁰ Interview with John Cecil Cloake, British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, Churchill College Archives, <<https://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/media/uploads/files/Cloake.pdf>> [accessed 21 July 2017].

¹¹ 'List of Participants in the Geneva Conference on Indochina', *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, pp. 408-409; Statler, *Replacing France*, pp. 309-310.

¹² Rust, *Eisenhower and Cambodia*, p. 41.

¹³ Thirteenth Restricted Session on Indochina, Geneva, 14 June, 3pm: Telegram Secto 441 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 14 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1141.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1142.

States could succeed either in producing a more favourable settlement or, ideally, in sabotaging the conference altogether and reigniting the French war effort. There were indications that France might be willing to continue the fight. Although the Laniel government had been forced into accepting negotiations to appease domestic criticism of the war, senior figures like Bidault retained an interest in continuing the war if a satisfactory resolution to the conflict could not be agreed at Geneva.¹⁶

American efforts to disrupt a settlement would have to be subtle – it was crucial that the Laniel government be seen to do its best to achieve an honourable settlement at Geneva if it was to cling on to power and continue the war. U.S. officials tried to convince their French colleagues of the hollowness of communist promises and refused to agree to a solution that would place the security of the Associated States in jeopardy. They expressed particular concern about partitioning Vietnam, the conference's eventual settlement. American officials saw the northern region of Tonkin as central to Western hopes of preserving Vietnam from communist control and feared that partition would simply provide the DRV with the time and resources to conquer the rest of Indochina at a later date. The Eisenhower administration also revived their interest in an American intervention in Indochina if Geneva failed to produce a favourable solution. Although Eisenhower refused to do so unilaterally, the president seemed interested in employing American air power in Vietnam if the United States could persuade some of its allies to cooperate. Importantly, the president no longer saw British support as a prerequisite for intervention; congressional pressure to stand up to the communists and frustration with his allies' ability to restrain American actions had forced Ike to consider intervening without the British.¹⁷ Dulles laid out a series of conditions to the French under which the United States would intervene and met with allied representatives from Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere.¹⁸

Heath occupied an important role in U.S. attempts to shape the outcome at Geneva in the first phase of U.S. involvement. As chair of the Indochina working group, he supervised the production of a series of reports designed to prepare the U.S. delegation for the conference. Part of this effort focused on formulating methods to prevent their allies and adversaries from agreeing to a settlement unfavourable to U.S. interests.¹⁹ Tactics suggested to achieve this objective included creating allied and enemy uncertainty about the possibility of a U.S.-led intervention and convincing allies to sign an agreement that would ensure that the settlement at Geneva did not handover Indochina to communism. Moreover, Heath's working group prepared detailed counter-arguments to convince their allies against considering proposals such as partition

¹⁶ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 551-554.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 565.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 551-569; Waite, *The End of the First Indochina War*, pp. 125-153.

¹⁹ Memorandum by Heath to Smith, 3 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 674.

or a coalition government.²⁰ It also collated ideas on ‘fruitful ways of playing on Communist and particularly Chinese Communist sensitivities’ so as to push their Cold War adversaries into the adoption of tough, inflexible negotiating positions less acceptable to U.S. allies.²¹ If successful, the group hoped that this would entice the French into abandoning the negotiations and reigniting their war effort. The working group urged the U.S. delegation to make the French experience ‘to the fullest degree the difficulties, frustrations, and exacerbations of such negotiations’.²²

Heath’s other major contribution during the conference was with the Associated States delegations that travelled to Geneva. Both American and French officials sought to take advantage of the close relations that Heath had built up with the Indochinese leadership during his four years in Saigon. One of Heath’s first tasks was in heading U.S. efforts to convince Bao Dai to allow Viet Minh participation at the conference and to send his own delegation to Geneva. The Bao Dai government held deep concerns about the conference, opposed the idea of sitting opposite the Viet Minh at the negotiating table and feared that the French might sell out to Viet Minh demands.²³ The United States, anxious about the propaganda boost the conference would give the DRV, nevertheless saw Viet Minh participation as inevitable. The desire to avoid a five-power conference that would enhance Chinese prestige and imply U.S. recognition of the PRC, alongside a feeling that France had gambled away any leverage it might have on the question of participation through its acceptance of negotiations without any conditions, led U.S. officials to accept DRV representation. Furthermore, if Bao Dai’s government was to be represented at Geneva, and U.S. officials were hopeful that a delegation representing the anti-communist government would attend and that their presence would help to overcome communist propaganda claims about their government’s lack of sovereignty, it was difficult to argue against Viet Minh participation.²⁴

Visits by Heath to see Bao Dai, who had temporarily relocated to France to keep a close eye on Franco-Vietnamese negotiations and the Geneva Conference, supplemented the efforts of French officials like Minister of the Associated States Marc Jacquet to gain the chief of state’s authorisation for Viet Minh participation.²⁵ After Bao Dai made encouraging but noncommittal sounds in a meeting with Jacquet, Bidault urged Heath to take up the matter with the chief of

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 674-675; Memorandum by Yager, ‘USDel/10’, 3 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, pp. 682-685.

²¹ Memorandum by Heath to Smith, 3 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 675.

²² Ibid.

²³ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 550; Telegram 3985 from Dillon to Department of State, 21 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 541; Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 86.

²⁴ Telegram 3035 from Smith to Paris, 4 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 431; Position Paper Prepared for the Indochina Phase of the Geneva Conference, ‘GI D-7a US Position on Participation in the Indochina Phase of the Geneva Conference’, 24 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, pp. 481-483.

²⁵ Telegram Secto 30 from Secretary of State to Department of State, 28 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 603.

state.²⁶ Heath proved willing, leaving Jacquet hopeful that ‘Ambassador Heath’s visit today should accelerate [this] process’.²⁷ However, Bao Dai needed little persuasion from Heath. The conversation had barely begun when the chief of state told Heath that he had concluded ‘that it was necessary for the Vietnamese to take part in the conference and not interpose objections to [the] Viet Minh being present’.²⁸ Bidault’s pledge to Bao Dai that France would oppose partition, a settlement that the Vietnamese vehemently opposed but that rumours suggested was gaining support among leaders of both Cold War blocs, was key to gaining the chief of state’s support for Viet Minh participation.²⁹ On 2 May, the Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Quoc Dinh, who would head the Vietnamese delegation for the first part of the conference, confirmed to Secretary Dulles that Bao Dai had accepted the invitation to participate in the conference.³⁰

After Bao Dai’s delegation set off for Geneva, the State Department requested that Heath meet the advance guard of the Vietnamese delegation on their arrival at the train station. American officials in Paris also informed the Vietnamese delegation that Heath, and Bonsal, would act as their primary point of contact with the United States throughout the conference.³¹ American diplomats believed the Vietnamese would need considerable guidance. Shocked at ‘the naiveté of [the] questions put to us by both Buu Loc and [Nguyen Trung] Vinh and [the] evidence [that] they had little conception of how international conferences were run’, Ambassador Douglas Dillon felt that the Vietnamese ‘will undoubtedly continue [to] lean on [the] US heavily for advice at Geneva’.³² While Vietnamese officials appeared excited at the opportunity the conference provided to ‘free ourselves at last from the French orbit’, Dai Viet official Bui Diem admitted that Vietnamese officials ‘knew little about international politics and consequently felt uncomfortable with the idea of this wider forum’.³³

After agreeing to maintain ‘close contact’ between the two delegations, Heath met frequently with Vietnamese officials in the early days of the conference, offering U.S. assistance in checking the Vietnamese delegation’s translated speeches and discussing tactics with Bao Dai’s representatives.³⁴ The Vietnamese delegation’s primary goal was, as Heath put it, ‘to stall

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Telegram 4137 from Dillon to Department of State, 29 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 613.

²⁸ Telegram Secto 47 from Secretary of State to Department of State, ‘Heath-Bao Dai Meeting, Cannes’, 29 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 603.

²⁹ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 551.

³⁰ Telegram Dulte 50 from Smith to Department of State, ‘Dulles-Dinh Meeting, Geneva, May 2, Evening’, 4 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 666.

³¹ Telegram 4221 from Paris to Secretary of State, 5 May 1954, 751g.00/5-554, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

³² Ibid.

³³ Bui Diem, p. 82.

³⁴ Memorandum by Getz, 7 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, pp. 717-718; Telegram Secto 144 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 8 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 733; Telegram Secto 158 from U.S.

for time without openly opposing the French, hoping the conference will break up without reaching a “solution” acceptable to the Communists, the French and ourselves’, a stance that bore striking similarities with that of the United States.³⁵ The Vietnamese hoped then that the French would ‘have to keep on with the fight, with increased assistance, perhaps intervention from the U.S.’.³⁶ In late May and early June, as the Vietnamese delegation became increasingly uncomfortable with the conference’s movement towards partition and considered withdrawing, Heath encouraged the Vietnamese to stay the course.³⁷ He stressed the importance of giving Bidault their support given the delicate domestic situation in France and the French foreign minister’s preference for continuing the fight.³⁸ Support for the Laniel government’s Indochina policy was declining in France. The prime minister scraped a two-vote victory in a National Assembly debate on his Indochina policy in mid-May, and members of the public and influential commentators began to speak out in greater numbers in favour of partition as a means to bring the war to an end.³⁹ Heath indicated to the Vietnamese delegation, therefore, that ‘it would be unthinkable to break up the conference at this stage’.⁴⁰ To do so would risk losing what remained of Laniel’s domestic support base and any chance of preserving the French war effort.⁴¹

In mid-June, U.S. policymakers took advantage of a breakdown in negotiations over the issue of an international supervisory committee and the position of Laos and Cambodia to reduce its presence at Geneva. Many of the United States’ key players at Geneva, including the chief of the delegation Bedell Smith, withdrew, leaving a skeleton staff led by State Department official U. Alexis Johnson to act as an ‘observation and reporting group’.⁴² Heath, too, would remain for a short period; in the eyes of top policymakers, he remained crucial to maintaining Indochinese morale at Geneva. ‘These little people are likely to feel that they are actually being deserted in what for them is [a] crisis if Heath leaves now’, Smith wrote to Dulles.⁴³ On 19 June, Smith informed Dinh of his departure and that ‘he would leave Ambassadors Johnson and Heath to represent the United States who would maintain association with and support of the Vietnamese

Delegation to Department of State, 9 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, pp. 744-745; Memorandum of Conversation, by Heath, 12 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, pp. 779-780.

³⁵ Memorandum by Heath to Smith, 16 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 825; Waite, *The End of the First Indochina War*, p. 125.

³⁶ Memorandum by Heath to Smith, 16 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 825.

³⁷ Waite, *The End of the First Indochina War*, p. 128.

³⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, by Heath, 22 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 891.

³⁹ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 563.

⁴⁰ Telegram Dulte 141 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 2 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1009.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Telegram Dulte 180 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 14 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1136.

⁴³ Telegram Dulte 189 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 17 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1170.

and the other two delegations from Indochina'.⁴⁴ Growing concerns over the direction the conference was heading in meant that U.S. policymakers greeted news of the stalled negotiations positively, hoping that it might signal the start of the conference's collapse.⁴⁵ U.S. officials were particularly concerned about the productive strides Franco-Viet Minh negotiators had made on partition in the weeks before. Pham Van Dong, chief of the Viet Minh delegation, had explicitly endorsed the idea of partition at the conference in late May and, although Bidault remained resistant to dividing Vietnam into two zones, other members of the French delegation were more open to the idea. The interest in partition of Jean Chauvel, the French ambassador to Switzerland and a leading delegate at Geneva, and Indochina hand Claude Cheysson culminated in the beginning of preliminary Franco-Viet Minh discussions on the topic in early June. Originally intended as a forum to discuss the evacuation of the wounded and the exchange of prisoners from Dien Bien Phu, military discussions in Vietnam between Colonel Michel de Brébisson and Colonel Ha Van Lan turned to the topic of a partition involving two regroupment zones. De Brébisson indicated his interest in the Viet Minh proposal, while Viet Minh representatives laid out their conception of partition.⁴⁶

In Heath's final few days at Geneva, French officials again looked to him for help with the Vietnamese delegation. Having hammered out the basis of an agreement with the Viet Minh that would divide Vietnam at the eighteenth parallel (it would later be changed to the seventeenth parallel), the French delegation were conscious of the difficulty of bringing their Vietnamese allies on board with the idea, particularly given their earlier promise not to agree to a partition. Jean Chauvel explained to Smith 'that Ambassador Heath might be of real service [in] this connection'.⁴⁷ When Chauvel explained the idea to Heath, the American made no comment.⁴⁸ Heath continued to cling to the hope of maintaining some sort of French presence in northern Vietnam and supporting French efforts to divide the country was contrary to the U.S. delegation's instructions.⁴⁹ Regardless, it was too late; the ambassador's time at Geneva was at an end. In late June, he made his way to Washington, where he consulted with key members of the administration before heading back to Saigon.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, by Heath, 19 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, pp. 1196-1197.

⁴⁵ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 574.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 566-567; Randle, pp. 274-275.

⁴⁷ Telegram Dulte 187 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 'Smith-Chauvel Meeting, Geneva, June 16, Morning', 16 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1155.

⁴⁸ Telegram Secto 534 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 26 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1252-1253.

⁴⁹ Heath to Bonsal, 4 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1282; Telegram Tedul 212 from Secretary of State to U.S. Delegation, 17 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1172.

⁵⁰ Telegram Secto 534 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 26 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, pp. 1252-1253.

It was not just at Geneva where American diplomats from Saigon made their contribution to the U.S. effort at the conference; those officials who remained in Saigon provided a number of important services too. As chapter 5 detailed, the Saigon embassy played an influential role in American efforts to improve the Western negotiating position at Geneva, pressing the French and Vietnamese to complete negotiations on Vietnamese independence before the conference began. Although eventually initialled on 4 June, the Franco-Vietnamese treaties remained unsigned by Bao Dai and French president René Coty.⁵¹ Smith reflected that the lack of a formal signature ‘placed Vietnam and ourselves in a difficult situation’.⁵² American officials believed that a formal understanding of independence would have done much to refute Viet Minh propaganda about the puppet-status of the anti-communist government, establishing Bao Dai’s government as the legitimate voice for Vietnam at the conference.⁵³ However, to the new French prime minister, Pierre Mendès France, who was appointed following the fall of the Laniel government in mid-June, the failure to sign the agreements provided greater freedom of action at Geneva, ensuring his right to conclude the agreements in Bao Dai’s name.⁵⁴

Additionally, the embassy canvassed the views of Indochinese political figures on their government’s participation at the conference, assessed the settlements proposed at Geneva and the likely reaction in Vietnam, and provided American representatives at Geneva with background information on the Vietnamese delegation.⁵⁵ Diplomats in Saigon also supplemented the efforts of CIA official Chester L. Cooper in Geneva to determine if Ho Chi Minh was still alive.⁵⁶ One ex-Viet Minh official told McClintock on 9 June that Ho remained ‘very much alive’

⁵¹ Dommen, p. 240.

⁵² Telegram Secto 422 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, ‘Smith-Dinh Meeting, Geneva, June 10, Morning’, 11 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1107.

⁵³ Telegram 1778 from Heath to Department of State, 24 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1156.

⁵⁴ Dommen, p. 265.

⁵⁵ For the embassy’s commentary on Indochinese views of participating at the conference, see Telegram 30 from McClintock to Department of State, 21 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 541. For Washington’s request for the Saigon posts’ assessment of the likely reactions of Associated States leaders to particular agreements at Geneva, see Telegram Tosec 557 from Secretary of State to U.S. Delegation, 16 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1398; Telegram 617 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 29 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2954, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 618 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 29 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2954, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. On the embassy’s role in providing background on members of the Vietnamese delegation, see Telegram Secto 552 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 2 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1272. On the embassy’s assessment of the settlements proposed at Geneva, see Telegram 2277 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 8 May 1954, Box 3, Dulles-Herter Series, AW File, DDE Papers, DDEL; Telegram 43 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 3 July 1954, 751g.00/7-354, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 220 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 17 July 1954, 751g.00/7-1754, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁵⁶ For more on Chester Cooper’s efforts to confirm if Ho Chi Minh was alive and if he remained leader of the Viet Minh, see Cooper, *In the Shadows of History*, p. 116; Cooper, *The Lost Crusade*, p. 76.

and, although constantly moving location, that he probably remained around Thai Nguyen.⁵⁷ When military talks between Franco-Vietnamese forces and the Viet Minh on the technical implementation of the forthcoming cease-fire began in Trung Gia just north of Hanoi on 4 July, U.S. representatives in Vietnam provided their colleagues in Geneva and Washington with news of developments. Without representation in these talks, American diplomats turned to journalists, British diplomats and Vietnamese officials for information. When one of his staff urged Heath to press the French to let an American attaché sit in on these discussions, the ambassador, anxious to avoid associating the United States with an unfavourable settlement, refused. Heath feared that a U.S. presence at these talks would provide the French with an opportunity 'to associate [the] US in any capitulatory arrangement they might decide to make'.⁵⁸ Embassy communications felt 'tremendously overburdened' by the fast moving events in Vietnam and at Geneva following Dien Bien Phu's fall.⁵⁹

Perhaps the most crucial challenge that the embassy faced with regard to the conference was managing Vietnamese concerns about partition. Although some Vietnamese nationalists believed that partition would offer better opportunities to extend their influence than a united Vietnam under Viet Minh leadership, as would likely be the case if elections took place, virtually all anti-communist nationalist groups publicly opposed the idea of partition. Opposition to the division of Vietnam was crucial if these groups wanted to uphold a nationalist reputation that would enable them to build up support after the French departure.⁶⁰ In the week leading up to the conference, Vietnamese political figures protested the prospect of dividing Vietnam in several ways. Bao Dai issued a communiqué publicly opposing partition, while several Vietnamese officials voiced their concern to U.S. officials in Vietnam.⁶¹ The Hanoi municipal council's adoption of a resolution coming out strongly 'against all attempts to divide the territory of Vietnam' on 28 April was followed a day later by 15,000 people marching through Hanoi carrying signs in opposition to a division.⁶² French and American officials were concerned that rumours about partition would undermine Vietnamese morale, with one Vietnamese nationalist

⁵⁷ Telegram 2702 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 9 June 1954, 751g.00/6-954, Box 3679, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁵⁸ Telegram 112 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 9 July 1954, 751g.00/7-954, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁵⁹ Telegram 2317 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 10 May 1954, 751g.00/5-1054, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁶⁰ Chapman, p. 67.

⁶¹ Foreign Service Despatch 2757 from Paris to Department of State, 'Transmission Text Communiqué Issued by the Cabinet of Bao Dai at Paris April 25', 29 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2954, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 620 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 29 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2954, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁶² Telegram 617 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 29 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2954, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 623 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 30 April 1954, 751g.00/4-3054, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

stressing to American representatives that talk of dividing the country was ‘having [a] most unfortunate effect on nationalist leaders in north Vietnam’.⁶³

To prevent rumours about partition inhibiting Franco-Vietnamese military and political progress, McClintock, chargé d’affaires during Heath’s absence, urged Washington to make a statement indicating American opposition to partition.⁶⁴ McClintock saw this as doubly important as doubts increased over the U.S. position on partition among the Vietnamese. In a 29 April press conference, Eisenhower refused to endorse or reject partition as a solution in Indochina and by early May Vietnamese newspapers were carrying stories that the United States was willing to accept the division of the country.⁶⁵ After McClintock reiterated the importance of a top official outlining U.S. opposition to Vietnam’s partition on 4 May, Smith suggested that Secretary Dulles make a comment along these lines at his next press conference.⁶⁶ In a radio and television broadcast to the nation on 7 May, Dulles, without mentioning partition explicitly, indicated U.S. opposition to an armistice ‘which would provide a road to a Communist takeover’.⁶⁷ Dulles’s words did not noticeably ease Vietnamese concerns. In mid-May, French and British officials informed the U.S. Consulate in Hanoi that the Vietnamese had ‘begun to include us [the United States] in [the] group to which Vietnamese protests against division are being directed’.⁶⁸ The embassy could not do much more to allay Vietnamese concerns about partition. Governor Tri told U.S. officials that the very continuation of the conference ‘perpetuates [the] idea of a possible division of Vietnam’.⁶⁹

Accepting Partition

In late June, the task of convincing Vietnamese nationalists that the United States did not support partition became defunct as U.S. policymakers changed their stance at Geneva. U.S.

⁶³ Telegram 620 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 29 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2954, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Dommen, p. 244.

⁶⁴ Telegram 620 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 29 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2954, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 2419 from McClintock to Department of State, 29 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 609.

⁶⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower: ‘The President’s News Conference’, 29 April 1954. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10223>> [accessed 21 July 2017]; Telegram 2202 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 4 May 1954, 751g.00/5-454, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁶⁶ Telegram 2202 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 4 May 1954, 751g.00/5-454, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram Secto 111 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 6 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 701.

⁶⁷ Radio and Television Address to the Nation by the Secretary of State, Delivered in Washington, 7 May 1954, 9:30pm, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 725.

⁶⁸ Telegram 658 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 13 May 1954, 751g.00/5-1354, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

officials moved away from trying to covertly sabotage the conference to accepting the necessity of partition and a settlement at Geneva, and managing the consequences of the accords. This was partly because by mid-June, U.S. policymakers, who had previously displayed considerable distaste for the idea of dividing Vietnam, were moving slowly to the realisation that ‘partition served American interests better than allowing the negotiations to fail’.⁷⁰ Rather than risk further battlefield losses to the Viet Minh, senior figures in Washington accepted the preservation of an anti-communist state in the south as the best possible likely solution. The declining Franco-Vietnamese position in Indochina indicated that the Viet Minh might win more territory on the battleground than they would at Geneva if the war continued and Laniel’s replacement with Mendès France – a long-term critic of the war who refused to accept international intervention in Vietnam, favoured partition, and announced his desire to conclude a settlement at Geneva by 20 July – removed any serious American hopes of jockeying the French into continuing the fight.⁷¹

The Saigon embassy was at the vanguard of this American shift about partition.⁷² A slew of embassy reports in the months leading up to the conference revealed diplomats’ belief in the unworkability of partition in Vietnam.⁷³ However, by mid-May McClintock admitted that he would ‘rather resort to that desperate recourse, retaining above-all, [the] important airbase at Tourane, than to contemplate building [on] ramparts of sand in Cambodia and Laos’.⁷⁴ Throughout the summer, embassy officials provided commentary on the workability of several different lines of partition.⁷⁵

A Saigon embassy representative played a key role in easing American distaste for partition, drawing up of a clause that would allow people a three hundred day period to relocate to either the northern or southern zones of Vietnam after partition.⁷⁶ Saigon embassy attaché Taber first raised the idea, later included in the Geneva accords as article 14(d), with fellow military adviser General John Daley at Geneva.⁷⁷ Alongside their fears about the strategic

⁷⁰ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 574; pp. 591-592.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 592-593.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 574.

⁷³ For the embassy’s earlier opposition to partition, see Foreign Service Despatch 467 from Saigon to Department of State, ‘Comment on Laniel’s Conditions for a Cease-Fire in Indochina’, 20 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2054, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Foreign Service Despatch 492 from Saigon to Department of State, ‘Comments of British Minister Favoring Partition Solution for Indochina’, 29 April 1954, 751g.00/4-2954, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁷⁴ Telegram 2374 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 13 May 1954, 751g.00/5-1354, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁷⁵ Telegram 220 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 17 July 1954, 751g.00/7-1754, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁷⁶ Philip E. Catton, “‘It Would Be a Terrible Thing if We Handed These People over to the Communists’: The Eisenhower Administration, Article 14(d), and the Origins of the Refugee Exodus from North Vietnam”, *Diplomatic History*, 39 (2015), 331-358 (pp. 332-333).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 344.

ramifications of losing the northern half of the country to the Viet Minh, the Eisenhower administration's initial opposition to partition was fuelled by a desire to avoid abandoning significant numbers of northerners, whom U.S. officials regarded as more capable than their southern counterparts, to the communists. They held northern Vietnam's estimated one million Catholics in particularly high esteem for the strong anti-colonial and anti-communist positions they exhibited. Article 14(d), therefore, offered the Eisenhower administration the chance to keep this important part of the population from the communists.⁷⁸ The provision of a point on the peaceful resettlement of refugees made it into a seven-point communiqué identifying the minimum terms that the United States and British officials deemed acceptable at Geneva following Churchill and Foreign Minister Anthony Eden's visit to the United States in June.⁷⁹ The communiqué followed the conclusion of Anglo-American talks in Washington designed to repair relations after the British refusal to support the United States at Dien Bien Phu. The agreement's other terms included the preservation of at least half of Vietnam and more if possible, and no political provisos that would leave the anti-communist states open to communist domination.⁸⁰ The seven points made clear, as Waite notes, that while the United States 'might not associate itself with an agreement in Geneva, it would not obstruct an acceptable compromise based on partition'.⁸¹

As U.S. opposition to partition softened by early July, anti-communist Vietnamese continued to show little enthusiasm for the idea. Protestors marched through Hanoi and Saigon in opposition to a division of Vietnam as the end of the conference neared.⁸² Particularly strong opposition came from the influential Catholic nationalist Ngo Dinh Diem, who replaced Buu Loc as prime minister in mid-June. Bao Dai granted Diem full civil and military powers on 19 June and Diem's new cabinet took office on 7 July. Diem condemned partition, advocated a reconquering of the southern delta following the French decision to evacuate it, and threatened to resign if a divided Vietnam was realised.⁸³ French officials feared that Diem might reject the settlement, sabotage the conference and launch an uprising against the French in Indochina.⁸⁴

Dulles, who had been impressed by Mendès France and convinced that he would do his best to secure a settlement in line with the Anglo-American seven points, urged the need for Diem to accept the reality of the situation 'in order to avert a reaction on his part that might

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 338-339.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 351.

⁸⁰ Statler, *Replacing France*, pp. 102-103.

⁸¹ Waite, *The End of the First Indochina War*, p. 163.

⁸² Telegram 231 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 18 July 1954, 751g.00/7-1854, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 72 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 19 July 1954, 751g.00/7-1954, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁸³ Catton, "It Would Be a Terrible Thing if We Handed These People over to the Communists", p. 355.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 344-345.

jeopardise the prospect of salvaging something from a settlement'.⁸⁵ Heath, who arrived back in Vietnam in July to resume his duties as head of the American mission and identified U.S. influence as crucial in persuading Diem 'not to reject the agreement', carried the message.⁸⁶ The embassy's role had shifted from reassuring Vietnamese nationalists of their opposition to partition to selling the idea directly to Diem's government. Indicating to Diem that his government intended to support French plans for partition, Heath suggested that the United States would offer Diem their assistance following the agreement's conclusion. He also stressed that the U.S. government recognised the Diem government's sovereignty over the whole of Vietnam and 'that it regards [the] loss of northern areas, which it cannot accept as final, as dictated by harsh military necessity'.⁸⁷ Heath's trump card, however, in easing Diem's concerns was article 14(d).⁸⁸ To historian Philip Catton, the U.S.-led drive to include article 14(d) in the Geneva agreements left Diem more ready to accept partition and maybe even averted Diem's resignation.⁸⁹ Although the Diem government refused, like the United States, to sign the agreement at Geneva, the new prime minister ordered his delegation to respect the accords while declaring the right of his government to reserve its position. The decision followed a meeting with Heath, in which the Saigon ambassador advised Diem that rejecting the agreement outright 'would be a grave step not to be undertaken lightly' given that there was no immediate replacement for the 185,000 French troops currently keeping the Viet Minh at bay.⁹⁰ As the French had earlier hoped, Heath eventually played his part in minimising Vietnamese protests over the settlement.

Before his departure from Geneva, Heath also played an important role in American attempts to secure the best terms they could in Cambodia and to prepare the ground for a future American effort there. U.S. officials had fought vigorously against conceding ground to the communists in Cambodia during the conference, protesting against the proposed participation of the Khmer Issarak in proceedings and the idea of a regrouping zone for communist forces. After delegates agreed on 19 June to initiate bilateral cease-fire talks between Viet Minh commanders and their Cambodian and Laotian counterparts, U.S. officials worried that the Cambodians might agree to Viet Minh terms that would inhibit prospective U.S. attempts to strengthen Cambodia's

⁸⁵ Ibid.; Waite, *The End of the First Indochina War*, p. 172.

⁸⁶ Telegram 226 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 17 July 1954, 751g.00/7-1754, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁸⁷ Telegram 248 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 19 July 1954, 751g.00/7-1954, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁸⁸ Telegram Tosec 529 from Secretary of State to U.S. Delegation, 10 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, pp. 1325-1327; Telegram 150 from Heath to Department of State, 12 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, pp. 1339-1340.

⁸⁹ Catton, "It Would Be a Terrible Thing if We Handed These People over to the Communists", p. 355.

⁹⁰ Telegram 214 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 16 July 1954, 751g.00/7-1654, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

ability to resist communism. The U.S. delegation regarded Viet Minh terms outlawing the possibility of foreign military supplies, military bases and training missions in return for a withdrawal of Viet Minh forces as tantamount to ‘the “neutralization” of Cambodia’.⁹¹ While the Cambodian delegation informed Heath of their intention to decline these conditions and push for an unconditional withdrawal of Viet Minh forces, they pressed him on the need for assurances of American arms and a French or American training mission if they were to maintain this stance. Heath wrote to Washington to request authorisation to provide the assurances the Cambodians had requested.⁹² A few days later, Dulles gave the go ahead.⁹³ On 26 June, Heath reassured the Cambodians of U.S. interest in furnishing a military training mission and arms for the Cambodian government if Cambodia continued to oppose Viet Minh attempts to hamper ‘future Cambodian defense dispositions’.⁹⁴ Heath reported that the Cambodian Foreign Minister ‘expressed general satisfaction and agreement’ at his comments.⁹⁵

A Glass Half Empty or Half Full?

Mendès France’s assumption of power gave renewed impetus to the negotiations at Geneva. Increasingly concerned that a U.S. failure to aid France at Geneva would leave Franco-American relations irreparable and assured by Mendès France that the French would do their best to uphold the Anglo-American conditions on a settlement, Secretary Dulles agreed to send Smith back to Geneva in mid-July.⁹⁶ Despite U.S. acceptance of partition as the best available solution, Dulles instructed Smith to do what he could to disassociate the United States with the negotiations and ‘forbade Smith to sign any declaration in concert with the Soviets’.⁹⁷ Dulles was keen to do what he could to protect the Eisenhower administration from domestic criticism that the United States had bowed to communist pressure.⁹⁸ When the conference finally concluded a settlement in July, the United States did not sign the agreement, limiting itself to a unilateral declaration that outlined the American intention to avoid employing force to disturb the agreements. The accords partitioned Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel, ordered French forces to regroup to the south of that line and Viet Minh forces to the north, outlined that nationwide

⁹¹ Telegram Secto 510 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 23 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1227.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 1228.

⁹³ Telegram Tosec 479 from Secretary of State to U.S. Delegation, 25 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, pp. 1246-1247.

⁹⁴ Telegram Secto 531 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 26 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1252.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 104; Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 601.

⁹⁷ Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 105.

⁹⁸ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 602.

elections to unify Vietnam would take place in 1956, and authorised an international control commission to ensure the implementation of the agreements. The accords also limited the number of foreign military personnel permitted in both North and South Vietnam.

The Eisenhower administration offered a cautious response to the settlement. While Ike stressed that ‘the United States has not itself been party to or bound by the decisions taken by the Conference’, he expressed hope ‘that it will lead to the establishment of peace consistent with the rights and needs of the countries concerned’.⁹⁹ Privately, though, there was considerable pessimism in the administration. In August, a National Intelligence Estimate stressed that the agreement ‘has accorded international recognition to Communist military and political power in Indochina and has given that power a defined geographic base’.¹⁰⁰ It also posited that the Viet Minh could take over South Vietnam within two years and warned of the growing communist threat in Laos.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles understood that Geneva had turned out better than most Americans had feared. In an NSC meeting following the conference’s culmination, Dulles argued that ‘communist gains at Geneva were “relatively moderate” and that the goal now was to “salvage what the Communists had ostensibly left out of their grasp in Indochina”’.¹⁰²

Heath’s glass was also half full. Despite his hope that France might retain a foothold in the north, the Saigon ambassador believed that the accords presented an opportunity for the United States to save at least part of Indochina from eventual communist domination.¹⁰³ The ambassador felt that South Vietnam would enjoy important economic advantages over its northern counterpart; virtually all of the surplus economic areas in Vietnam, including rice and rubber, lay within the borders of South Vietnam.¹⁰⁴ Heath believed that national elections, the prospect of which caused great concern in U.S. official circles given Ho Chi Minh’s immense popularity, would likely not come to fruition either. ‘Truly free elections in North Vietnam would require not only [the] neutral international supervision of actual voting but [the] absolute freedom on non-Communist parties to campaign for months preceding [the] elections without restraint or

⁹⁹ Editorial Note, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1503

¹⁰⁰ ‘Post-Geneva Outlook in Indochina’, NIE 63-5-54, 3 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1905.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1905-1906.

¹⁰² Dulles quoted in David L. Anderson, *Trapped by Success: The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953-1961* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 63.

¹⁰³ Telegram 220 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 17 July 1954, 751g.00/7-1754, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. On Heath’s hope for salvaging a foothold in the north, see Telegram 124 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 10 July 1954, 751g.00/7-1054, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 936 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 9 September 1954, 751g.00/9-954, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰⁴ Telegram 218 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 17 July 1954, 751g.00/7-1754, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

surveillance by [the] Communist authorities. [The] Last will never happen', Heath cabled Washington in late July.¹⁰⁵

Notable successes were secured in Laos and Cambodia too. Despite the accords providing two northern provinces for the Pathet Lao forces to regroup and restricting the ability of the United States to increase their military presence in the country, there were some important gains in Laos. The accords recognised the Western-leaning government's sovereignty, allowed French officers training the Laotian army to remain, and ordered Viet Minh troops out of the country.¹⁰⁶ Lloyd Rives, chargé d'affaires in Vientiane, felt that 'Laos came out well at Geneva'.¹⁰⁷ The general reaction in Laos to the cease-fire agreements, Rives reported, was 'favorable since [the] main points of territorial integrity and withdrawal [of the] Viet Minh invaders [was] won as was [the] refusal [to] recognize [the] existence [of the] Pathet Lao'.¹⁰⁸ Cambodian officials were also pleased with the settlement.¹⁰⁹ The Cambodian delegation successfully resisted Chinese pressure to ban foreign bases and military training groups in Cambodia during the final period of the conference. A signed declaration allowed Sihanouk's government to request international support in these areas if they felt the nation's security was under threat, opening the door for an increased American presence in Cambodia. The settlement, too, called for the withdrawal of Viet Minh forces, and the demobilisation of the Khmer resistance troops in the country and their integration into the national community; at no point, either, were the Khmer Issarak represented at the conference.¹¹⁰ Heath and Dulles were both fulsome in praise of the strength that the Cambodians had displayed at the conference, what historian William Rust has called 'the high point of US approval of Sihanouk and his government'.¹¹¹

The Geneva Accords could have been a lot worse for the United States, particularly given the crushing victory the Viet Minh had secured at Dien Bien Phu and the progress that Viet Minh troops had made in northern Vietnam in July.¹¹² The final terms of the accords 'essentially adhered' to the acceptable criteria that Eisenhower and Dulles agreed with Churchill and Eden during their June meetings in the United States.¹¹³ The Viet Minh had made significant

¹⁰⁵ Telegram 405 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 30 July 1954, 751g.00/7-3054, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰⁶ William J. Rust, *Before the Quagmire: American Intervention in Laos, 1954-1961* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), p. 8.

¹⁰⁷ Telegram 4 from Vientiane to Secretary of State, 29 July 1954, 751g.00/7-2954, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Telegram 32 from Phnom Penh to Secretary of State, 28 July 1954, 751g.00/7-2854, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹¹⁰ Rust, *Eisenhower and Cambodia*, p. 46.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹¹² Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 607-608.

¹¹³ Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, p. 59.

concessions on the line of partition in Vietnam (the seventeenth rather than the thirteenth parallel) and the schedule for elections (within two years rather than six months), resulting in a settlement that gave the United States a window to build up South Vietnam as a viable alternative to the DRV.¹¹⁴ The maintenance of a French training group in Laos and the ambiguity contained in the accords relating to Cambodia's right to request outside military assistance also left open the opportunity to utilise Western influence, funds and arms to strengthen the other Associated States' ability to repel the communist threat.

Saigon embassy officials made several important contributions to the relatively favourable agreement that emerged from Geneva. Support from Heath and other Americans, particularly the hints Americans gave about the possibility of future American aid, emboldened the Cambodians in their refusal to back down in their negotiations with the communist powers over the issue of foreign assistance. Heath, McClintock and Taber, too, both played significant roles in limiting the disruption caused by Bao Dai's government for the French at the conference, pressing Vietnamese officials to stay the course and finding ways to increase the appeal of partition as it became clear no better solution would be forthcoming. The United States also succeeded in increasing communist fears about the possibility of a U.S. intervention and in receiving guarantees from their French and British allies that the eventual accords would not leave Indochina open to communist domination, two means that Heath's working group suggested would help produce a settlement more favourable to U.S. interests. Although the American failure to secure the support of important allies and the worsening situation in Vietnam ensured that American intervention, once again, was not realised, fear of American military intervention made the communist delegations more inclined to offer concessions at the conference.¹¹⁵ The Soviet Union, China and the DRV feared that a lack of flexibility in their positions would force France to abandon the negotiations and call for American intervention.¹¹⁶ However, the threat of U.S. intervention was not the only motivator for the communist delegations, and the United States failed to employ several of the other tactics that Heath's working group advised might produce a favourable settlement. The counter-arguments drawn up by Heath's working group proved ineffective in preventing participants at Geneva from coming to embrace partition. Heath's hope that the United States could push China into the adoption of a tough negotiating stance that would convince France to adjourn the conference and continue the fight proved misplaced too. The Chinese delegation resisted such American attempts,

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 63; Chapman, p. 69.

¹¹⁵ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 569-573.

¹¹⁶ The Chinese, weary from fighting in Korea, wanted to avoid internationalising the war so they could focus on rebuilding their economy and boost their international position by acting as peacemaker at the conference. Jian, pp. 109-110.

demonstrating ‘an unexpected flexibility’ and acute understanding of the need for compromise in its diplomacy at Geneva.¹¹⁷

The proactive diplomacy of Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai, Anthony Eden and Mendès France was critical to the final agreement at Geneva.¹¹⁸ Newly released archival material also reveals that the DRV decision-making was shaped more by their own assessments of their interests and ‘the possibilities of the moment’ than Soviet and Chinese pressure.¹¹⁹ Viet Minh leaders were concerned about the balance of forces in Indochina (French Union forces continued to outnumber those of the DRV), and Ho and other leaders feared that a prolongation of the conference would leave open the possibility of an American intervention that could threaten all they had accomplished so far. Diem’s appointment increased the Viet Minh appetite to concede ground in the negotiations, including its hope for political recognition of the Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak and elections to unify Vietnam’s two halves within six months. In return, the Viet Minh gained control of all territory above the seventeenth parallel, providing international recognition for the DRV, a crucial opportunity to rest and rebuild the Viet Minh’s weary army, and a base to push for control of the remainder of Vietnam when the time was right.¹²⁰

Changes to the U.S. Diplomatic Mission in Indochina

The culmination of the Geneva Conference brought with it changes to the makeup and structure of the U.S. diplomatic mission in Vietnam. Since his arrival in mid-1950, Heath had overseen all U.S. diplomatic activity in the Associated States. Spending the vast majority of his time in Saigon, Heath visited Cambodia and Laos intermittently during his tenure, leaving the day-to-day work at those posts to chargé d’affaires. Following the conference, Eisenhower, hopeful that the raising of the status of these U.S. posts would have a salutary political effect in Cambodia and Laos, upgraded the legation at Phnom Penh to an embassy and the consulate in Vientiane to a legation.¹²¹ Ike made the announcement on 21 July, and the Senate confirmed the appointments of McClintock as the first U.S. ambassador to Cambodia and career diplomat Charles W. Yost as the first minister to Laos on 18 August.¹²² McClintock presented his credentials to the Cambodian government on 2 October and Yost to the Laotian authorities on 1 November. The move brought Heath’s supervision over U.S. diplomatic activities in Cambodia and Laos to an end. The Cambodians received the news that Phnom Penh would soon receive its

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 110.

¹¹⁸ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 608-612.

¹¹⁹ Asselin, p. 158.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Rust, *Eisenhower and Cambodia*, p. 47. The U.S. delegation at Geneva had proposed the idea as earlier as 3 May. U.S. Delegation Memorandum, ‘USDEL/9’, 3 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 681.

¹²² Randle, p. 351.

own ambassador positively. Cambodian leaders ‘are tremendously encouraged by [the] President’s decision to send [an] Ambassador here’, a report from Phnom Penh revealed.¹²³ Heath, too, seemed to welcome the move in Laos. After enduring an uncomfortable meeting with a French representative in Vientiane, Heath explained that ‘I continue [to] feel his reticence toward me and [I believe the] appointment [of a] resident Minister especially useful in this respect’.¹²⁴ Heath made his farewell calls to Laos and Cambodia in September.¹²⁵ These changes mirrored the French reorganisation of their diplomatic presence in Indochina, with French representatives in Laos and Cambodia now reporting directly to the Ministry of the Associated States rather than through Saigon.¹²⁶

There was rotation in Hanoi as well, with former Saigon embassy political officer Thomas J. Corcoran replacing Turner Cameron, who took up a first secretary position in Saigon, in September.¹²⁷ Despite the scheduled Viet Minh takeover of Hanoi, the State Department tasked Corcoran with keeping the U.S. consulate open for as long as possible, even as they closed both their economic mission and USIS offices in Hanoi and encouraged non-official Americans to leave the city.¹²⁸ The U.S. decision to retain its consulate in Hanoi provided the first real direct opportunity for American officials to observe the DRV since the late 1940s.¹²⁹ It was, as Corcoran later reflected, also symbolic. The Hanoi consulate remained, he recalled, ‘to point out that we were not pulling out, we weren’t prejudicing the Geneva Conference as the end of everything. It was an armistice. We were going to wait and see what happened’.¹³⁰ The consulate remained open until December 1955, when evidence of increased Viet Minh pressure and restrictions on the consulate’s radio transmissions convinced Corcoran that it was time to leave.¹³¹ U.S. diplomats would not staff a permanent post in Hanoi again until 1995.

¹²³ Telegram 32 from Phnom Penh to Secretary of State, 28 July 1954, 751g.00/7-2854, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²⁴ Telegram 8 from Vientiane to Secretary of State, 6 August 1954, 751g.00/8-654, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²⁵ Telegram 969 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 11 September 1954, 751g.00/9-1154, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 1186 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 23 September 1954, 751g.00/11-2354, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²⁶ As British diplomat Hubert Graves noted, ‘General Ely’s powers as Commission-General (as distinct from those of Commander-in-Chief) are therefore much less than those enjoyed by Monsieur Dejean’. Graves to Eden, 13 August 1954, FO 371/112040, TNA.

¹²⁷ Cameron had replaced Sturm in Hanoi in March 1954.

¹²⁸ Simpson, *Tiger in the Barbed Wire*, p. 134; p. 137; Telegram 38 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 11 July 1954, 751g.00/7-1154, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹²⁹ The U.S. consulate in Hanoi was one of the main points of contact between Viet Minh and American representatives during the late 1940s. These meetings dropped off as the U.S. position shifted to supporting the French in 1949. Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, p. 229.

¹³⁰ Oral History Interview with Thomas J. Corcoran, 21 June 1988, Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, Frontline Diplomacy, <<https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004cor01/2004cor01.pdf>> [accessed 4 September 2017].

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

Although the United States failed to avert a settlement at the Geneva Conference, American diplomats working in Vietnam, serving both at Geneva and Saigon, nevertheless made an important contribution to a set of accords that limited the territory lost to the communists and prepared the ground for a renewed U.S. effort to prevent Indochina's fall to communism. The embassy played a key role in American preparations for the conference. Heath led the Indochina working group, supervising the drawing up of reports designed to prepare U.S. representatives for the discussions and offering tactical suggestions on how to achieve U.S. objectives in Switzerland. The U.S. succeeded in implementing some of Heath's tactical suggestions during the conference – the threat of American intervention helped to exhort greater concessions from the communist powers than would otherwise have been possible. However, the Eisenhower administration enjoyed less luck with regards to some of Heath's other proposals, failing to find a way to frustrate France's search for an honourable peace without compromising Franco-American relations as conditions in Vietnam deteriorated.

A number of embassy officials participated in the U.S. delegation at the conference, with senior officials taking advantage of their on-the-spot knowledge to assert the upper-hand over their rivals and buck up America's Indochinese allies. Heath successfully pressed the Vietnamese to stay the course at Geneva and used article 14(d), drawn up by Taber, to convince Diem to acquiesce in partition. Taber's work on article 14(d) and embassy reporting played a significant role in the administration's eventual realisation that the partition of Vietnam might serve American interests better than the war's continuation. Heath's assurances about likely future U.S. assistance to Cambodia, too, helped bolster the tough stance the Cambodian delegation took with the communist powers at the conference, leaving open the possibility of extending the U.S. commitment in Cambodia in the future. With Eisenhower raising the status of U.S. posts in Laos and Cambodia after the conference, Heath's attention now shifted solely to doing what he could to buttress the anti-communist government in South Vietnam.

Chapter 7 – Ngo Dinh Diem and the U.S. Commitment to South Vietnam, July-November 1954

Ambassador Donald Heath returned to Saigon from consultations in Washington in early July to find Vietnam under Ngo Dinh Diem's leadership. Even before Diem arrived in Vietnam to take the reins of government, there was speculation that the United States had facilitated Diem's appointment.¹ As the British minister in Saigon, Hubert Graves, noted, 'It is suggested by his opponents that Monsieur Diem owes his appointment to American support and this view has gained some currency'.² Diem was certainly one of the best-known anti-communist Vietnamese figures among Americans. Absent from Vietnam since 1950, Diem had spent a considerable portion of his time in exile in the United States, meeting with a range of influential figures in government, the press and the private sector in an attempt to garner American support for a future run at the prime ministership.³ In early 1954, too, U.S. policymakers, perhaps with Diem in mind, had expressed interest in the leadership potential of Catholic Vietnamese.⁴ However, in a meeting with Diem's predecessor, Buu Loc, in mid-June, Robert McClintock rejected the notion that Diem was America's candidate. He explained that 'this was news to us and although we had heard many nice things of Diem as a man of great rectitude and patriotism, my government had never in his case nor any other sought to interfere in [the] domestic politics of Vietnam'.⁵ Suspicions remained, however, particularly after the United States spent much of the rest of 1954 intervening with French and Vietnamese opponents of Diem to preserve the new prime minister's position. American assistance played an important supporting role in ensuring Diem remained in office by November 1954.

This chapter assesses the Saigon embassy's involvement in Diem's appointment as prime minister of the State of Vietnam and American efforts to strengthen and preserve Diem's

¹ Graves to Foreign Office, 12 July 1954, FO 371/112026, TNA; Telegram 971 from Paris to Secretary of State, 3 September 1954, 751g.00/9-354, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. Figures in the DRV, too, saw Diem as 'a "lackey" of the US whose appointment had been arranged by Washington'. Asselin, p. 168.

² Graves to Foreign Office, 12 July 1954, FO 371/112026, TNA.

³ For Diem's lobbying in the United States, see Joseph G. Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby: The American Friends of Vietnam, 1955-1975* (Chapel Hill, NC; London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp. 1-9.

⁴ Memorandum of Discussion at the 183rd Meeting of the National Security Council, 4 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1015.

⁵ Telegram 2807 from McClintock to Department of State, 17 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1718. McClintock also denied the accusation to British Minister Hubert Graves, telling him that 'Diem was not an American candidate or champion'. Telegram 63 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 5 July 1954, 751g.00/7-554, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

government during the latter half of 1954. The degree of U.S. complicity in Bao Dai's selection of Diem has divided scholars, with Seth Jacobs pointing to the decisive influence of U.S. actors and Edward Miller placing greater stress on the domestic support built up by Diem's brothers in Vietnam.⁶ In examining the embassy's role in Diem's rise to power, this chapter sheds fresh light on this question. It argues that if U.S. involvement was crucial in engineering Diem's appointment, American diplomats in Vietnam played little role in it. They were much more interested in an alternative figure: Nguyen Huu Tri. Scholars have largely ignored American interest in Tri, a prominent member of the Dai Viet political group and influential governor of North Vietnam during much of the early 1950s. Regardless of their position on the importance of the U.S. role in Diem's appointment, historians seem to concur that Americans saw few genuinely acceptable alternatives to Diem in this period.⁷ In bringing to light the failed attempts of U.S. diplomats in Saigon and Hanoi to promote a government under Tri's leadership, the chapter challenges this view, reveals the limits to the embassy's – and by extension the United States' – influence over Vietnamese internal affairs, highlights the increasingly neo-colonial nature of the embassy, and buttresses the argument that the domestic campaign run by Diem's brothers was more important than Diem's American support base in his acquisition of the top job in Vietnam.

This chapter also challenges contemporary wisdom about Heath's role in the months following Diem's appointment, where historians have tended to focus predominantly on the ambassador's criticism of Diem.⁸ Heath's support for Diem was not as strong as that of other Americans in the diplomatic mission in Vietnam or in Washington. On several occasions, Heath exhibited deeply pessimistic views about Diem's prospects and seemed open to replacing him. With this in mind, and noticing that Heath's departure from Saigon coincided with Washington's decision to throw greater support behind Diem, scholars have tended to equate the decision to remove Heath from Saigon in November with the ambassador's less favourable reporting about Diem. The current literature suggests Heath's more sceptical views about Diem's capacity to succeed clashed with the more optimistic assessments of the prime minister put forward by other Americans, resulting in Heath's discharge from Saigon.⁹

⁶ Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man*, p. 54; p. 59; Miller, *Misalliance*, pp. 49-53.

⁷ Thomas L. Ahern, Jr., *The House of Ngo: Covert Action in South Vietnam, 1954-63* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 2000), p. 4; p. 24; Chapman, p. 72; p. 78; Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 591; Seth Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America's War in Vietnam, 1950-1963* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 33.

⁸ Miller, *Misalliance*, pp. 75-76; p. 95; Chapman, pp. 82-83; Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 638-639; Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 128; Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man*, p. 176; Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, pp. 8-10.

⁹ Chapman, pp. 82-83; Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 128; Moyar, p. 45; Don Oberdorfer, *Senator Mansfield: The Extraordinary Life of a Great Statesman and Diplomat* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2003), pp. 127-132; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, p. 84; Boot, pp. 236-237.

This chapter makes a different case. It argues that while Heath did express serious doubts about Diem throughout the autumn, he also acted at other times as an keen defender of the prime minister, resisting the attempts of Diem's domestic and international rivals to win him over to the idea of a coup, using his influence to help sustain Diem's position, and urging Washington to increase its military and economic assistance to Diem's fledgling government. Indeed, Heath's efforts to bolster Diem's position contributed to the deepening of U.S. involvement in Vietnam during his final few months in Saigon. In those moments where he entertained the idea of finding a replacement for Diem, Heath did not linger on the idea for long. His frustrations notwithstanding, the ambassador could name no viable alternative to Diem. The difference between Heath and those Americans more typically characterised as firm supporters of Diem was less pronounced than much of the literature asserts. Despite his criticism of Diem, Heath did much to contribute to U.S. efforts to sustain the prime minister's position. This chapter explores these actions in greater depth than previous works.¹⁰ It also contends that Heath's replacement as ambassador had little to do with his attitude towards the Diem government. The Eisenhower administration had decided Heath's future in early July, long before more optimistic American reporting about Diem supposedly undermined the ambassador's position. In fact, Washington's assessment of Heath's performance actually improved during his final few months in Saigon.

The Embassy and Diem's Rise to Power

The Saigon post's involvement with Diem's attempts to win American support began in mid-1950. On 18 June, Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Thuc, the Catholic Bishop of Vinh Long, met with Chargé Edmund Gullion and Second Secretary H. Francis Cunningham at the U.S. legation to request three visas to travel to the United States for Diem, himself and another companion. Gullion was aware of Diem's political significance, describing him in his report as 'reputedly the chief leader of the Vietnamese Catholics' and 'perhaps the most prominent of the Vietnamese "fence sitters"'.¹¹ However, U.S. representatives in Vietnam held concerns about Diem's capacity to lead. In September 1950, Heath argued that 'it was common knowledge that he [Diem] and Bao Dai could not possibly work together' and expressed fear 'that Mr. Diem did not possess some of the qualities which are unfortunately needed by any politician in order to succeed'.¹²

¹⁰ For those works that devote some time to addressing the role Heath played in trying to sustain Diem's position, see Chapman, p. 78; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, pp. 78-82; and Miller, *Misalliance*, pp. 104-105.

¹¹ Foreign Service Despatch 248 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Political Views of Ngo Dinh Thuc, Catholic Bishop of Vinh Long', 23 June 1950, 751g.00/6-2350, Box 3667, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹² Memorandum of Conversation, 26 September 1950, in Foreign Service Despatch 202 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Transmittal of Memorandum of Conversation with Bishop Pham Ngoc Chi', 28 September 1950, 751g.00/9-2850, Box 3668, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

Nevertheless, in late July, the legation confirmed that it had issued Diem a visa and urged Washington to give these ‘prominent figures’ the VIP treatment.¹³ Among other things, American diplomats hoped it would provide Washington with the chance to pressure Diem to abandon his exile and contribute to the fight against the Viet Minh.¹⁴

The State Department responded warmly to Heath’s recommendations, arranging a variety of events for Diem and pressing him to take up a more active role in Vietnam.¹⁵ Pressure applied by U.S. officials in Washington, however, was not enough to force Diem to abandon his self-imposed exile.¹⁶ Diem believed that political conditions were not yet ripe for his return. In late 1950, Diem refused to accept the prime ministership unless Bao Dai agreed to increase the power of the federal government and decrease the influence of Vietnam’s regional governors; Bao Dai refused and Diem remained absent from Vietnam for almost four years.¹⁷

During his absence from Vietnam, the State Department kept the Saigon post up-to-date with Diem’s activities in the United States and periodically asked American representatives in Vietnam for their appreciation of Diem’s position.¹⁸ His name, too, appeared sporadically in the Saigon post’s discussions of possible changes to the Vietnamese government.¹⁹ Although embassy reports stressed Diem’s national prestige, frequently referring to him as the anti-communist figure best placed to rival Ho Chi Minh in this regard, American diplomats in Vietnam continued to believe that Diem’s ‘intransigence, his anti-French stand and his cordially reciprocated dislike of Bao Dai’ ruled him out as a viable candidate.²⁰ There was also concern about how Diem’s Catholicism would affect his capacity to lead a predominantly Buddhist country.²¹

If U.S. pressure was crucial in engineering Diem’s appointment in 1954, it did not come from American diplomats in Saigon. The embassy did not re-establish contact with Diem

¹³ Telegram 119 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 28 July 1950, 751g.00/7-2850, Box 3667, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ For the reception that the State Department gave Diem, see Coors to Huskey, 3 October 1950, lot 54 D190, Visits – Tours – Missions, Box 10, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA; Landon to Shepard, 22 September 1950, lot 54 D190, Visits – Tours – Missions, Box 10, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA; Jacobs, *America’s Miracle Man*, p. 26.

¹⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, 21 June 1951, lot 54 D190, Indochina – Personalities – 13-091 – Miscellaneous, Box 7, PSA Division, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁷ Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 38.

¹⁸ Telegram 429 from Department of State to Saigon, 14 September 1953, 751g.00/9-1453, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 509 from Department of State to Saigon, 25 September 1953, 751g.00/9-2553, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁹ Telegram 261 from Heath to Secretary of State, 30 July 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 467; Telegram 1505 from Heath to Department of State, 30 January 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 22.

²⁰ Telegram 1496 from Heath to Secretary of State, 24 February 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 385; Memorandum by Heath to Secretary of State, 28 April 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 523.

²¹ Telegram 1156 from Heath to Secretary of State, 9 December 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 558.

following his departure from Vietnam in late 1950.²² Although Heath did express interest in obtaining Diem's views on rumours that began to circulate that he was the leading candidate to replace Buu Loc in spring 1954, the ambassador did not outwardly endorse Diem, warning his colleagues against giving any 'indication we might be supporting Diem'.²³ State Department records also show that Heath did not meet personally with Diem until after his confirmation as prime minister and that the Saigon ambassador did not push Bao Dai to back Diem during their meetings in France.²⁴ American diplomats in Indochina also exhibited little more than a passing interest in the activities of Ngo Dinh Nhu, Diem's brother and chief cheerleader in Vietnam.²⁵ On 10 May, Counselor Randolph Kidder, who arrived in Saigon in June 1953, revealed that he had yet to talk to Nhu.²⁶ It was not until after Diem's appointment as prime minister and a year after Kidder's arrival that one of the most senior figures in the embassy met with Nhu.²⁷ However, Nhu did enjoy close relations with the CIA, initially establishing links with American agents in Vietnam in 1951.²⁸ According to official CIA historian Thomas Ahern, though, CIA records indicate little more than 'a peripheral CIA role' in Diem's appointment.²⁹

The reaction of American diplomats in Indochina to the news of Diem's selection also underscores the embassy's limited involvement in Diem's appointment. In the weeks leading up to Bao Dai's decision, U.S. diplomats in Vietnam continued to express concern about Diem's capacity to lead. Although acknowledging that Diem's 'integrity might prove [a] real asset should Bao Dai wish to make use of him in Vietnam', McClintock worried that 'his integrity might also make it most difficult for many officials at all levels in government [to] cooperate under any administration headed by him'.³⁰ The response in Vietnam to Diem's appointment strengthened McClintock's impression. He reported that it 'has totally failed [to] arouse [the] enthusiasm [of

²² Memorandum from Drumright to Murphy, 'Vietnamese nationalists who may play a more prominent role in the future', 11 May 1954, 751g.00/5-1154, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²³ Telegram 1767 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 22 March 1954, 751g.00/3-2254, Box 3676, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram Secto 425 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 11 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1122.

²⁴ Telegram 4978 from Paris to Secretary of State, 21 June 1954, 751g.00/6-2154, Box 3679, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²⁵ Foreign Service Despatch 128 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Background on Vietnamese National Congress', 22 September 1953, 751g.00/9-2253, Box 3675, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 1886 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 3 April 1954, 751g.00/4-354, Box 3677, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²⁶ Foreign Service Despatch 515 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Views on Political Conditions in Vietnam of M. Wintrebert, Office of the French High Commissariat', 10 May 1954, 751g.00/5-1054, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²⁷ Foreign Service Despatch 588 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Views of Ngo Dinh Nhu', 21 June 1954, 751g.00/6-2154, Box 3679, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²⁸ For the relationship of CIA officials in Vietnam with Nhu, see Ahern, pp. 14-25.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³⁰ Telegram 2532 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 25 May 1954, 751g.00/5-2554, Box 3679, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

the] Vietnamese people so essential if [the] war effort and National Army [was] to get [the] necessary support'.³¹ McClintock's meeting with Diem in early July did not leave him any more optimistic. The American chargé left irritated at Diem's 'narrowness of view', his 'egotism', his 'blind hatred of the French', and his tendency to view American assistance as the sole panacea for his nation.³² Describing Diem as 'a messiah without a message', McClintock warned the State Department that the new prime minister would be 'a difficult man to deal with'.³³ Other Western diplomats were slightly more optimistic. The British consul in Hanoi, R. V. Johnston-Smith, suggested that Diem might 'yet succeed in pulling some chestnuts out of the fire'.³⁴

'The Ablest Man in Southeast Asia'

Although the Saigon embassy did not play a significant role in Diem's rise to the prime ministership, it expressed interest in interfering in Vietnamese domestic politics during this period. With France's days in Vietnam numbered following defeat at Dien Bien Phu, U.S. officials began to consider taking a more 'dominant and direct role' in Vietnam.³⁵ A few days before Diem's appointment as prime minister, McClintock urged Washington to take a more proactive role in Vietnamese internal politics. 'The time had come', he pressed, 'to sever the umbilical cord and to make the baby grow up'.³⁶ 'I thought we should have to put frank and friendly pressure on [the] Vietnamese to pull themselves together if there was going to be a government on this side comparable to that on the other side'.³⁷ McClintock took his own advice, proposing a plan to reorganise the anti-communist government to Washington in May. With most scholars focused on determining the degree of U.S. influence behind Diem's appointment, few studies have explored McClintock's initiative in much depth.³⁸ An examination of McClintock's efforts demonstrates the limits to the embassy's influence in shaping Vietnamese domestic politics in this period and sheds important light on Diem's appointment.

Concern over the declining political situation in the aftermath of Dien Bien Phu sparked McClintock's interest in applying U.S. influence to reshape the Vietnamese government. The

³¹ Telegram 2819 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 18 June 1954, 751g.00/6-1854, Box 3679, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

³² Telegram 48 from McClintock to Department of State, 4 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 1783-1784.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 1783.

³⁴ Asselin, p. 168; Johnston-Smith to Graves, 20 July 1954, FO 371/112026, TNA.

³⁵ Edward Lansdale quoted in Boot, p. 215.

³⁶ Telegram 2786 from McClintock to Department of State, 15 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1698.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ For those few studies which give McClintock's interest in a U.S.-led coup some attention, see Dommen, pp. 236-237; Gibbons, p. 260.

absence of top-level Vietnamese officials from Vietnam at the Geneva Conference and Franco-Vietnamese discussions in Paris, the increasing Viet Minh threat to the Tonkin Delta and uncertainty over the French and U.S. commitment in Indochina caused Vietnamese morale to plummet. State Department officials suggested that one means of reinvigorating the political situation would be to pressurise Bao Dai to return from Cannes to Vietnam to take hold of the situation.³⁹ McClintock, however, warned that ‘we should not assume that this will be an automatic salvation’.⁴⁰ He suggested that it would be hard work to prevent the chief of state from relapsing ‘into his comfortable habits of big game shooting’ and ‘conspiracy’.⁴¹ To McClintock, the failure of Bao Dai to return to Vietnam might prove a blessing in disguise. For over a year now, the chargé had advised the State Department to consider dropping their support for Bao Dai.⁴² Bao Dai’s decision to entrust control of South Vietnam’s security forces to the Binh Xuyen and rising fears over the chief of state’s inability to mobilise the VNA led McClintock to raise the prospect again in May 1954.⁴³ Influenced by his experience in Brussels and Cairo, McClintock told the State Department that ‘I have witnessed [the] departure of two kings within [the] past three years and have yet to see [the] forebodings justified that [the] abdication of these monarchs would spell [the] ruin of [their] country’.⁴⁴

On 17 May, assuming that Bao Dai could not be induced to return, McClintock put forward his plan for an alternative Vietnamese government. In this scenario, McClintock called for U.S. and French pressure on ‘local elements [...] to depose Bao Dai and establish a Council of Regency’.⁴⁵ In an attempt to give the government national legitimacy, McClintock recommended that former prime ministers Buu Loc and Tran Van Huu, the influential Catholic priest Le Huu Tu, and Diem serve as members of the council. For the top job, McClintock recommended Nguyen Huu Tri, governor of North Vietnam, who in a 13 May cable from Hanoi

³⁹ Telegram Tosec 158 from Secretary of State to U.S. Delegation, 14 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, pp. 800-801.

⁴⁰ Telegram 2419 from McClintock to Department of State, 17 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1576.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² ‘As a long-range project[,] [a] means should be found either to curb [the] present unlimited powers of Bao Dai or (in my view preferably) to get rid of Bao Dai’, McClintock wrote on 20 May 1953. Telegram 2256 from McClintock to Department of State, 20 May 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 573.

⁴³ Telegram 2188 from Saigon to Department of State, 3 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1460; Telegram 2526 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 25 May 1954, 751g.00/5-2554, Box 3679, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁴⁴ McClintock was in Brussels when King Leopold III abdicated in favour of his son in 1951 and in Cairo when the Egyptian military overthrew King Farouk in a coup in 1952. Telegram 2256 from McClintock to Department of State, 20 May 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 574. British Minister Hubert Graves revealed in early 1954 that Bao Dai was being compared to Farouk in the north. Saigon to Eden, 1 February 1954, FO 371/112024, TNA.

⁴⁵ Telegram 2419 from McClintock to Department of State, 17 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1577. McClintock provided few details as to how the council of regency would operate.

had been praised for forming ‘an effective government and administrative apparatus in North Vietnam’ and acquiring the support of the French and influential northern groups.⁴⁶ McClintock argued that Tri’s ‘definite administrative capacity and [...] his ability under trying circumstances to maintain morale and good government in Tonkin’ left him best placed to lead Vietnam at this crucial juncture.⁴⁷ The chargé argued that this government, with Tri at the head, would ‘have [the] additional advantage of indicating clearly to [the] Viet Minh that we do not contemplate [the] partition of Vietnam and that we repose confidence in [the] Tonkinese as well as in other elements of this country’.⁴⁸ Outgoing prime minister, Buu Loc, was one of several Vietnamese figures who concurred in Tri’s leadership potential. In a conversation with McClintock, he stressed that Tri was one of the few anti-communists that the U.S. media and American propaganda agencies could build up to rival Ho Chi Minh.⁴⁹ Alongside his cable, McClintock used CBS journalist David Schoenbrun to transmit his views on replacing Bao Dai directly to U.S. officials in Paris.⁵⁰

Americans in Vietnam had long exhibited interest in Tri. Described by *Life* reporter Andre Laguerre as a ‘dapper, dark-eyed man of mixed Hindu-Annamite extraction’, Tri was an influential member of the Dai Viet political group and occupied the key position of governor of North Vietnam throughout much of the final four years of the Franco-Viet Minh War.⁵¹ Tri established close relations with the U.S. mission, drawing the suspicions of the French and pro-French elements in the Vietnamese government, and impressed virtually every American he met in Vietnam.⁵² Hanoi Consul Paul Sturm characterised Tri as the ‘most impressive political figure I have met in [the] Far East since 1946’, while Heath regarded Tri as ‘a truly impressive

⁴⁶ Telegram 660 from Cameron to Department of State, 13 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 1551-1552.

⁴⁷ Telegram 2419 from McClintock to Department of State, 17 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1577.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Telegram 2807 from McClintock to Department of State, 17 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1720.

⁵⁰ Telegram 4396 from Paris to Secretary of State, 16 May 1954, 751g.00/5-1654, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁵¹ Andre Laguerre, ‘The Gamble in Indo-China’, *Life*, 28 August 1950, p. 39. As Chapman notes, ‘The Dai Viet was an anticolonial, anticommunist party that grew out of the tradition of bourgeois reform movements such as the Constitutionalist Party that was active in 1920s southern Vietnam’. Chapman, p. 45.

⁵² On Tri’s career prior to 1950, see Christopher Goscha, ‘Nguyen Huu Tri’, *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War (1945-1954)*, <<https://indochine.uqam.ca/en/historical-dictionary/1001-nguyn-hu-tri-19051954.html>> [accessed 3 January 2017]. On French anxiety about Tri’s relationship with the Americans, see Telegram 1567 from Heath to Secretary of State, 8 March 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 389; Sherry, p. 432. On Nguyen Van Tam’s concern about Tri’s closeness to the Americans, see Hanoi Consul to Graves, 9 December 1952, FO 959/129, TNA.

person'.⁵³ To some U.S. officials, all hope of defeating the Viet Minh rested on Tri's shoulders. James Hendrick, head of the U.S. economic mission in northern Vietnam during 1953, later recalled that his hopes for Vietnam were 'pinned in large measure on the extraordinarily effective Governor of North Vietnam, Nguyen Huu Tri'.⁵⁴ Heath believed effective cooperation with Tri as so crucial to the success of U.S. policy that he considered firing Hendrick's replacement Admiral James M. Shoemaker, in part, because of the poor relations he had formed with the governor. 'Tri is too important a man and the political and military situation in Tonkin too important to send anybody but a very high type of American as STEM chief in that region', Heath told Bonsal.⁵⁵ Like Diem, Tri also drew admiring glances from the CIA, who described him as able, nationalistic and popular.⁵⁶

While officials in the Saigon post identified several other anti-communist Vietnamese nationalists as also holding leadership potential, Tri's strong political base, national reputation and administrative ability marked him out for special attention from the Americans.⁵⁷ The Dai Viet had over ten thousand members and supporters in Vietnam, and enjoyed a reputation, as a CIA report indicated, as the 'most able group in Viet Nam'.⁵⁸ U.S. officials, contrary to what some scholars suggest, exhibited deep interest in the Dai Viet.⁵⁹ Tri also was one of the few anti-communist figures to enjoy a national standing in Vietnam, rivalling Diem in this regard. As

⁵³ Telegram 749 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 10 May 1952, 751g.00/5-1052, Box 3672, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 171 from Heath to Secretary of State, 7 August 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 847. Tri's warm relations with the Americans led Prime Minister Huu to consider Tri as the first Vietnamese minister to Washington in late 1950. Asked how U.S. policymakers would receive Tri's appointment, Heath informed Huu that 'Tri enjoyed [a] very good reputation among [the] Americans here and abroad'. However, when the Vietnamese established a diplomatic mission in Washington in July 1952, Tran Van Kha was appointed minister and Tri retained his position as governor in Tonkin. Telegram 1124 from Heath to Secretary of State, 24 December 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 954.

⁵⁴ Hendrick to Dillon, 6 August 1954, Hanoi, 1953-54, Box 5, James P. Hendrick Papers, HSTL.

⁵⁵ Heath to Bonsal, 10 August 1953, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1953, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

⁵⁶ Central Intelligence Bulletin, 18 April 1951, Central Intelligence Agency Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room (hereafter CIA FOIA ERR), <<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00975A000100600001-3.pdf>> [accessed 12 August 2017], p. 3; Central Intelligence Bulletin, 22 February 1953, CIA FOIA ERR, <<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00975A001000440001-1.pdf>> [accessed 12 August 2017], p. 6.

⁵⁷ In a cable in February 1954, Heath identified Phan Huy Quát, Nguyen Van Hinh, Nguyen Van Huyen and Tri as much more capable than Bao Dai. Telegram 1417 from Heath to Department of State, 10 February 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1031.

⁵⁸ Vietnamese Nationalist Groups, CIA FOIA ERR, <<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP80R01443R000200140004-2.pdf>> [accessed 14 August 2017], p. 1; Miller, *Misalliance*, pp. 93-94.

⁵⁹ Duiker, p. 106. For broader American interest in the Dai Viet, see Telegram 1265 from Heath to Department of State, 18 January 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 980; Memorandum of Conversation between Wellborn and Tuyen, 4 December 1952, in Foreign Service Despatch 207 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Views of Tran Van Tuyen on Current Political Developments', 11 December 1952, 751g.00/12-1154, Box 3673, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

Heath noted in April 1953, 'There are only two [anti-communist] Vietnamese now with something approaching national prestige; Ngo Dinh Diem, the Catholic lay-leader, self-exiled at present in the United States, and Tri, Governor of North Viet-Nam'.⁶⁰ The governor's administrative ability and ingenuity in his approach to pacification in the north drew him further plaudits from U.S. officials.⁶¹ Although Americans expressed deep concern at Buu Loc and Diem's capacity to administer government affairs, they lauded Tri as the pre-eminent Vietnamese administrator.⁶² In comparison to the 'deliquescent' situation in the south in May 1954 under Buu Loc, McClintock revealed that 'there is a greater cohesion, discipline, and good administration under Governor Tri'.⁶³ Dong Quan, a STEM-funded village regroupment scheme aimed at tackling Viet Minh infiltration in the Red River Delta, stood out to U.S. officials as a clear example of Tri's inventiveness in pacifying the north.⁶⁴ French officials, too, praised the 'imagination, courage and skill' that Tri's administration had demonstrated in 'meeting [the] problems posed by the war'.⁶⁵ That Tri was Tonkinese – the part of the Vietnamese population deemed the most vigorous, politically capable and martial by Western and Vietnamese officials alike – only aided his cause with American diplomats in Vietnam.⁶⁶

However, it was Tri's ability to maintain a nationalist appeal while working with the Bao Dai government that set him ahead of a range of his competitors, including Diem, for the American mission's affection. Embassy officials, deeply frustrated by the refusal of Diem and Cao Dai leader Pham Cong Tac to join the struggle, found Tri's acceptance of the need for a continued French presence in Indochina and decision to work with Bao Dai's government

⁶⁰ Memorandum by Heath to John Foster Dulles, 28 April 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 523.

⁶¹ Tillman Durdin, 'Vietnamese Asks Direct U.S. Help: Expresses Opposition to Any Assistance to Country Being Given Through France', *NYT*, 6 March 1950, p. 3; Andre Laguerre, 'The Gamble in Indo-China', *Life*, 28 August 1950, p. 39.

⁶² As Thomas Ahern notes, 'Even the CIA people in Saigon, generally more sympathetic than the Embassy staff, saw him [Diem] as a hopelessly incompetent administrator who always lost the forest in the trees'. Ahern, p. 13.

⁶³ Telegram 2446 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 18 May 1954, 751g.00/5-1854, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁶⁴ Hendrick to Editors of *Life* Magazine, 3 August 1953, Hanoi, 1953-54, Box 5, James P. Hendrick Papers, HSTL.

⁶⁵ Telegram 26 from Sturm to Department of State, 11 July 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 655; François Guillemot, *Dai Viet, Indépendance et Révolution au Viêt-Nam: L'échec de la Troisième Voie, 1938-1955* (Paris: Indes Savantes, 2012), p. 493.

⁶⁶ Telegram 1179 from Heath to Department of State, 11 December 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 49; 'U.S. Policy for Post Armistice Vietnam', in Memorandum from McClintock to Smith, 'A U.S. Policy for Post-Armistice Indochina', 12 August 1954, 751g.00/8-1254, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 2670 from Lacy to Department of State, 25 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1613; Paris to Foreign Office, 17 February 1950, FO 959/53, TNA; Telegram 2759 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 13 June 1954, 751g.00/6-1354, Box 3679, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Catton, "'It Would Be a Terrible Thing if We Handed These People over to the Communists'", p. 338.

refreshing.⁶⁷ Diem's choice to campaign in the United States (a move that won Diem few supporters within the higher echelons of the Eisenhower administration) and to avoid tarnishing his anti-colonial reputation by refusing to collaborate with the French was not as integral in attracting American admirers as some scholars assert. Indeed, as Elkind notes, Diem's absence actually damaged his nationalist credentials.⁶⁸ The support that Tri won from influential American diplomats in Indochina by pitching in in the struggle against the Viet Minh reveals that the decision of many of Diem's opponents to stay in Vietnam and work with Bao Dai's government did not necessarily preclude them from obtaining American support.⁶⁹ Tri's acceptance of the governorship of the north impressed American diplomats, leaving Heath to tag him as one of the few 'responsible Vietnamese' nationalists.⁷⁰ Despite his participation in Bao Dai's government and cooperation with French, Tri retained a reputation as a strong nationalist figure in Vietnam throughout the period.⁷¹ Tri's refusal of Bao Dai's offer to serve as prime minister in a government which gave top cabinet positions to pro-French leaning figures in 1951 and his insistence throughout the early 1950s that Franco-Vietnamese 'cooperation must be that which exists between two equal partners' helped maintain his nationalist credibility, at least for American officials.⁷²

McClintock's push to install Tri as head of a council of regency in 1954 was not the first U.S. attempt to promote the Dai Viet man to the top position. Since the commitment of U.S. aid to Indochina in 1950, members of the Saigon post had hoped that Bao Dai would make Tri prime minister.⁷³ Following the end of Tri's first tenure as governor of North Vietnam in spring 1951, rumours circulated that Tri had gone to Hong Kong and Tokyo to consult with American

⁶⁷ On McClintock's agitation at Pham Cong Tac's behaviour, see Telegram 2699 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 8 June 1954, 751g.00/6-854, Box 3679, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁶⁸ Elkind, p. 13.

⁶⁹ Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin*, p. 33.

⁷⁰ Telegram 171 from Heath to Secretary of State, 7 August 1950, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, p. 847; Telegram 736 from Heath to Department of State, 26 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 849.

⁷¹ National Intelligence Estimate, 'Probable Developments in Indochina through Mid-1954', NIE 91, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 596; Memorandum of Conversation between Wellborn and Tuyen, 4 December 1952, in Foreign Service Despatch 207 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Views of Tran Van Tuyen on Current Political Developments', 11 December 1952, 751g.00/12-1154, Box 3673, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Daily Digest, Office of Current Intelligence, 3 May 1951, CIA FOIA ERR, <<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T01146A000200070001-3.pdf>> [accessed 12 August 2017], p. 7.

⁷² Telegram 2532 from Gullion to Department of State, 15 June 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 189; Graves to Eden, 23 June 1952, FO 959/128, TNA; Tillman Durdin, 'Vietnamese Asks Direct U.S. Help: Expresses Opposition to Any Assistance to Country Being Given Through France', *NYT*, 6 March 1950, p. 3; Consul Hanoi to Graves, 8 November 1952, FO 959/129, TNA.

⁷³ Telegram 1419 from Gullion to Secretary of State, 12 February 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 380; Telegram 1156 from Heath to Secretary of State, 9 December 1951, *FRUS*, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 558; Telegram 2532 from Gullion to Department of State, 15 June 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 189.

officials.⁷⁴ After Tri's return to the governorship in late 1952, U.S. officials began to think seriously about using their influence to promote his cause. In April 1953, Heath reported, 'If he [Tri] succeeds in his governorship of the north he might then succeed [Prime Minister Nguyen Van] Tam with advantage. At some future date the embassy might discreetly support him vis-à-vis Bao Dai and the French (to the extent of not incurring the reproach of intervening in local politics)'.⁷⁵ When rumours started that Bao Dai intended to remove Tam and replace him with a more nationalistic leader in late 1953, Tri remained Heath's favoured candidate.⁷⁶ Following the fallout from the Vietnamese National Congress in October 1953, embassy officials hoped that Tri's elevation to the top job 'might incline rabid nationalists to support [the] government and adopt a more cooperative and reasonable attitude toward France'.⁷⁷ However, Heath decided against pressing Bao Dai to appoint Tri.⁷⁸ Why? It is difficult to know. Heath held concerns over Tri's northern identity and his ability to win over leaders in the south.⁷⁹ Perhaps rumours that Bao Dai was ready to announce a figure of 'undoubted nationalist complexion and background such as Tri or Quat' also left the ambassador hopeful that U.S. intervention would not be necessary.⁸⁰ If this was Heath's belief, he was sorely mistaken. In January 1954, the pro-French Buu Loc succeeded Tam.

U.S. agencies in Vietnam nevertheless continued to assist Tri in 1954, lending their support to his Dong Quan project, his efforts to obtain American arms for his regional militia and his urgent request for aid to help evacuate villagers in the north as the Viet Minh advanced.⁸¹ The mission's efforts to promote Tri ensured that the governor appeared on a select list of sixteen 'relatively prominent and able Vietnamese nationalist leaders' with pro-US and anti-communist stances compiled by the State Department in May 1954.⁸² While Diem topped the list, Tri made it

⁷⁴ Memorandum by D.C. Rivett-Carnac, 29 February 1952, FO 959/127, TNA. While Rivett-Carnac suggested this trip took place in late 1950, Tri did not leave his post until April 1951. Gibbs to Foreign Office, 5 April 1951, FO 959/111, TNA.

⁷⁵ Memorandum by Heath to John Foster Dulles, 'Current Situation in Indochina', 28 April 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 523.

⁷⁶ Telegram 845 from Heath to Department of State, 13 November 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 862; 'Viet-Nam', by Blum, Folder 19, Box 2, Robert Blum Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

⁷⁷ Telegram 736 from Heath to Department of State, 26 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 849.

⁷⁸ Telegram 942 from Heath to Department of State, 1 December 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 981-982.

⁷⁹ Telegram 736 from Heath to Department of State, 26 October 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 850.

⁸⁰ Memorandum by Bonsal to Robertson, 'General O'Daniel's visit to Indochina, November 6-15, 1953', 8 December 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 910.

⁸¹ Telegram 2256 from McClintock to Department of State, 20 May 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 573; Telegram 493 from Sturm to Department of State, 16 March 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1127.

⁸² Memorandum from Stuart to Hoey, 'Pro-US anti-Communist Vietnamese Leaders', 10 May 1954, 751g.00/5-1054, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. On the role of the mission's reports in contributing to the list, see Memorandum from Drumright to Murphy, 'Vietnamese nationalists who may play a more prominent role in the future', 11 May 1954, 751g.00/5-1154, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

into the top half at number seven.⁸³ Tri relegated his Dai Viet colleague Phan Huy Quát, who has occupied a much greater position in historians' discussion of the alternatives U.S. officials considered for Diem's position (albeit in 1955), to ninth place.⁸⁴

McClintock's 17 May proposal for U.S. involvement in forming a council of regency led by Tri did not receive the response he had hoped. Although there was some interest in the idea of replacing Bao Dai in Washington, high-level U.S. officials were reluctant to initiate a coup to remove the Vietnamese chief of state, believing that he remained valuable to the anti-communist cause.⁸⁵ Secretary Dulles was among those averse to the move. He clung to the belief that there was no effective substitute for Bao Dai and that the United States 'must seek what good we can derive from his cooperation at least for the time being'.⁸⁶ Sharing the secretary's belief in Bao Dai's continued importance in Vietnam, Heath in Geneva registered some additional concerns about McClintock's plan. Although Heath felt that 'a regency might conceivably be a future solution', he argued that a government headed by Tri 'would be very unpalatable to the southern Vietnamese and Tri would be very unhappy heading a government in which Tam, whom he dislikes and distrusts, held the extremely important portfolio of the interior'.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the Saigon ambassador doubted that the French would support such a scheme and that Bao Dai remained 'the best trump we have'.⁸⁸

In the late spring and summer, U.S. officials tried in vain to convince Bao Dai to return to Vietnam. However, Bao Dai insisted on the need to stay in France to consult with the Vietnamese delegations negotiating Vietnam's relationship with France and Indochina's fate at Geneva.⁸⁹ Exasperated after one failed attempt to alter Bao Dai's position, Heath told Bonsal that

⁸³ Memorandum from Stuart to Hoey, 'Pro-US anti-Communist Vietnamese Leaders', 10 May 1954, 751g.00/5-1054, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁸⁴ Ibid. For the efforts of some U.S. officials in Vietnam to promote Phan Huy Quát as an alternative to Diem in 1955, see Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man*, pp. 194-216; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, pp. 95-119.

⁸⁵ Gibbons, p. 261. On support in some quarters of the U.S. government for removing Bao Dai, see Memorandum of Conversation, by MacArthur, 'Notes made by Mr. MacArthur for his own information, following a meeting between the Secretary and Mr. Allen Dulles', 14 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1562; Memorandum from Day to Drumright, 'Situation in Viet-Nam', 14 May 1954, 751g.00/5-1454, Box 3678, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁸⁶ Telegram Tedul 110 from Secretary of State to U.S. Delegation, 22 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 892; p. 893. Dillon in Paris concurred, relaying to Washington that Bao Dai was 'more essential to their [French] purposes now than ever'. Telegram 3972 from Dillon to Department of State, 21 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1353.

⁸⁷ Telegram Secto 260 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 20 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 857.

⁸⁸ Ibid; Memorandum by Heath to Smith, 16 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 826.

⁸⁹ Telegram Secto 229 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 16 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 824; Telegram Secto 234 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 17 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, pp. 829-830.

there 'is no excuse for his cowardliness at this crucial moment in his country's history'.⁹⁰

Nevertheless, the ambassador remained convinced that the United States should not countenance further discussion 'about his defection and eventual replacement now. We need to keep up at least a façade of Government until we find someone to take over'.⁹¹

Regardless, McClintock and other embassy officials continued to promote Tri, the idea of a council of regency and the need to depose Bao Dai. On 25 May, in a meeting with Defense Secretary Charles Wilson and other senior defense and military personnel in Manila, Francis Meloy, the embassy's second secretary, pointed to Tri's 'firm administration and leadership [...] in [the] north' as one of the few 'elements of strength' in Vietnam.⁹² The embassy's promotion of Tri seemingly had some effect, pushing Admiral Radford to inquire about Tri with French general Jean Étienne Valluy in early June. As the minutes record: 'General Valluy commented, in response to a question by Admiral Radford, that Governor Tri was one of the best men in the area'.⁹³

McClintock, finding support for his plan to set up a regency from French officials in Indochina, continued also to promote an alternative form of government.⁹⁴ Following the announcement that Diem would succeed Buu Loc as prime minister, the chargé met with Dejean on 13 June. There the two diplomats, disturbed by Diem's ascension to the prime ministership, discussed the possibility of substituting Diem for an alternative leader and system. Dejean indicated his intention to recommend to Bidault the need to press Bao Dai to establish a triumvirate government led by Buu Loc, Tam and Huu.⁹⁵ The idea, McClintock noted, 'corresponds almost exactly with my proposal for a Council of Regency'.⁹⁶ In Dejean's plan, however, 'Tri would remain as Governor of [the] North where his presence was vitally needed'.⁹⁷ McClintock liked the idea, agreeing to 'urge that if Under Secretary Smith sees Bao Dai [that]

⁹⁰ Heath to Bonsal, 4 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1282.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Telegram 2670 from Lacy to Department of State, 25 May 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1613.

⁹³ Memorandum for the Record, by G. W. Anderson, Jr., 3 June 1954, 751g.00/6-354, Box 3679, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁹⁴ Various French officials also indicated to embassy officials the declining French support for Bao Dai. See, for example, Memorandum of Conversation, by Heath, 5 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1043.

⁹⁵ Dejean had earlier told McClintock of an alternative plan, with Bao Dai returning to Vietnam. In this earlier iteration, Bao Dai would take on the prime ministership, with Huu, Tam and General Nguyen Van Xuan all becoming vice premiers. McClintock perhaps had Tri in mind when he reflected privately that 'there should at least be a Deputy Prime Minister representing Tonkin'. Telegram 2576 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 28 May 1954, 751g.00/5-2854, Box 3679, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁹⁶ Telegram 2756 from McClintock to Department of State, 13 June 1953, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 1686.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

similar representations be made from our side', and pressed Dejean to meet with Dillon and Smith in Europe.⁹⁸

McClintock's willingness to substitute Tri for the more Francophile individuals suggested by Dejean reveals the great importance that the diplomat placed on securing French support to reshape the Vietnamese government. Although French involvement in Indochina was reaching its swansong, the presence of the French Expeditionary Corps ensured that French officials continued to have an important say in the months after Dien Bien Phu; French support would be crucial to the success of any U.S. effort to intervene in Vietnamese internal politics. Keen to preserve their economic and cultural interests in southern Vietnam as partition became the most likely resolution to the Indochina problem at Geneva, a number of Frenchmen promoted the idea of a Cochinchinese republic led by Francophile Vietnamese and made it clear that a government headed by northerners would not be acceptable.⁹⁹ Philippe Baudet, Mendès France's cabinet director, told Dillon that 'after [the] cease-fire it would be necessary to have a regime which would appeal to the inhabitants of South Vietnam'.¹⁰⁰ Begrudging acceptance of partition led some Americans to also discount the idea of a leader from the north.¹⁰¹ Moreover, U.S. officials in Hanoi took the view that Tri's role in the north was too important for him to be moved at this moment.¹⁰² McClintock's own decision to drop Tri and embrace candidates tainted by their association with French colonialism highlights his distaste for a Diem-led government. Seeing Diem as woefully unqualified to lead in Vietnam, McClintock was prepared to do what he could to avert Diem's appointment. It was the case of wrong place, wrong time for Tri. McClintock's effort to influence the shape of the next government, however, highlights the embassy's embrace of a more neo-colonial role after Dien Bien Phu.

If Americans hoped that a more profitable moment might present itself for Tri to become prime minister, they would be disappointed. Frustrated at French military decisions in the delta and disillusioned by the news of Diem's appointment, Tri resigned as governor in July.¹⁰³ Consul Turner Cameron in Hanoi indicated that the 'steady hand of Governor Tri will be badly

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 1686-1687.

⁹⁹ On the efforts of some French officials to promote the idea of a Cochinchinese Republic in Vietnam, see Telegram Secto 618 from U.S. Delegation to Department of State, 'Bonsal-Chau Meeting, Geneva, July 15', 16 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1387; Telegram 2854 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 22 June 1954, 751g.00/6-2254, Box 3679, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰⁰ Telegram 159 from Paris to Secretary of State, July 13, 1954, 751g.00/7-1354, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰¹ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 574; pp. 591-592.

¹⁰² Memorandum by Bonsal to Smith, 'Implication of Probable Vietminh Offensive in Tonkin Delta', 7 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XVI, p. 1052; Telegram 687 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 26 May 1954, 751g.00/5-2654, Box 3679, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰³ Telegram 2873 from McClintock to Department of State, 22 June 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1729; Telegram 687 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 26 May 1954, 751g.00/5-2654, Box 3679, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

missed'.¹⁰⁴ Following his resignation, Tri left for Saigon to investigate how Diem's government intended to confront Vietnam's problems, calling in on Heath on 20 July.¹⁰⁵ He articulated deep concerns about Diem's ability to lead his country and explained his intention to travel to Paris to urge Bao Dai to return to Vietnam. Heath suggested he set up a meeting with Dillon while he was there.¹⁰⁶ Tri never made it to Paris. On 26 July, he suffered an internal haemorrhage and, despite signs of an improvement after surgery, passed away a few days later after a relapse.¹⁰⁷

Or so it seemed! One rumour suggested that Tri had attempted to kill himself in response to the news of partition; a rumour categorically refuted by a French official in the Vietnamese Ministry of the Interior.¹⁰⁸ According to Duong Van Mai Elliott, a young Vietnamese whose father knew Tri, Tri was killed by Diem's assassins. Elliott recalls that 'rumors circulated that Diem's agents – or the agents of his Machiavellian brother Nhu – had shot Tri the moment he stepped off the plane at the airport'.¹⁰⁹ She contends that 'Tri's own family privately confirmed the rumors later'.¹¹⁰ Others, historian François Guillemot notes, shared Elliot's belief that Tri was assassinated, but claimed he had been poisoned.¹¹¹ If there was any foul play, the material in the U.S. and British archives does not support the theory.¹¹² Rather, American reports reveal that the governorship had left Tri physically and mentally exhausted, factors which almost certainly contributed to his death.¹¹³

Diem's Domestic Campaigning

¹⁰⁴ Telegram 20 from Hanoi to Secretary of State, 7 July 1954, 751g.00/7-754, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰⁵ Telegram 255 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 20 July 1954, 751g.00/7-2054, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ 'Vietnam Official Dead: Nguyen Huu Tri, Ex-Governor of North, Succumbs in Saigon', *NYT*, 27 July 1954, p. 21.

¹⁰⁸ Telegram 296 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 22 July 1954, 751g.00/7-2254, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁰⁹ Duong Van Mai Elliott, *The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 256.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Guillemot, p. 561; p. 609.

¹¹² Graves to Eden, 'Monthly Political Summary, July 1954', 7 August 1950, FO 474/8, TNA, p. 56; Telegram 296 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 22 July 1954, 751g.00/7-2254, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹¹³ Henry R. Lieberman, 'Governor Resigns in North Vietnam: Nguyen Huu Tri Gives Premier Free Hand – Stays on to Aid Refugees from the Delta', *NYT*, 9 July 1954, p. 3; Current Intelligence Bulletin, Office of Current Intelligence, CIA, 18 June 1954, CIA FOIA ERR, <<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00975A001600210001-0.pdf>> [accessed 12 August 2017], p. 6.

Bao Dai's decision to appoint Diem was not driven primarily by who could assure U.S. support for South Vietnam; if it had done, Tri would have been the superior candidate. No Vietnamese could rival the close-knit relations Tri had built with the American mission, enjoyed such rave reviews from American diplomats, or had proven themselves so adept in obtaining American aid. While Diem's contacts highlighted his potential in obtaining U.S. support for South Vietnam, Tri had already demonstrated his success in gaining American investment. No Vietnamese nationalist either had so skilfully maintained their anti-colonial reputation while collaborating with Bao Dai's government. Although Diem impressed a raft of well-placed Americans during the time he spent in the United States – a network that would later prove important in shoring up U.S. support for his regime – there is little evidence to suggest that senior policymakers 'were any more than vaguely aware of' Diem's existence prior to his appointment.¹¹⁴ Embassy reports had succeeded in raising Tri's profile among U.S. policymakers as high as Admiral Radford.

It is clear, therefore, that the efforts of Diem's family in Vietnam were more integral to his appointment as prime minister. Nhu, Ngo Dinh Can and Ngo Dinh Luyen all played key roles in their brother's ascent to power during his absence from Vietnam. Can worked on increasing Diem's support in central Vietnam, while Luyen, a former classmate of Bao Dai's, promoted Diem's cause with the chief of state in Europe. Nhu, the most influential figure, established a series of political organisations, including the clandestine Can Lao Party and the Movement for National Union and Peace, to promote Diem's cause and weaken the appeal of Bao Dai in Vietnam. Nhu's skilful efforts to disrupt the 1953 National Congress heavily influenced Bao Dai's decision to reconnect with Diem after four years in late 1953 and inquire again about Diem's interest in the prime ministership. In the face of Diem's domestic support and the connections he had formed with influential Americans, Bao Dai was left with little choice but to appoint Diem.¹¹⁵

Tri, on the contrary, enjoyed far less time to dedicate to garnering domestic support for a run at the prime ministership, preoccupied as he was by the war raging in the north. He made little effort to promote his own cause with the Americans or, it appears, with the Vietnamese chief of state, preferring instead to insist on the need for Bao Dai to return from Europe to take charge of the government personally.¹¹⁶ Exhausted by his efforts as governor, he perhaps lacked the energy to go on the campaign trail. The difficult relationship Tri had with Bao Dai did not help either. Tri's decision to refuse to take on the prime ministership in 1950 and 1952 and to

¹¹⁴ Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, p. 52.

¹¹⁵ Miller, *Misalliance*, pp. 49-53. For the battle to gain Bao Dai's blessing for the next Vietnamese leader between Luyen (promoting Diem) and Bui Diem (promoting Phan Huy Quát), see Bui Diem, pp. 83-86.

¹¹⁶ Telegram 255 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 20 July 1954, 751g.00/7-2054, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

renege on his acceptance of the role of defence minister in 1951 may have helped to sustain his nationalist reputation, but it left a bitter taste in Bao Dai's mouth that might have made the former emperor less inclined to consider Tri's candidacy in 1954. In a meeting with Heath in mid-1952, Bao Dai expressed disappointment with Tri's insistence that he would only entertain taking the prime ministership in a government containing strong nationalist figures. Bao Dai, aware that French authorities would not take kindly to such a government and of the importance of French troops, described Tri's position as 'utterly unrealistic'.¹¹⁷ Bao Dai also held concerns about the Dai Viet's national ambitions, choosing to provoke a confrontation between Tri and Huu in 1951 over the makeup of a new government as a pretext to fire Tri from his position as governor and reduce the Dai Viet's power in the north.¹¹⁸ Internal divisions within the Dai Viet Party over who should represent their interests as a potential prime minister did not help either. When a Dai Viet official met with Bao Dai to promote a member of the party as the next national leader in June 1954, he did so for Quát and not Tri.¹¹⁹

A Lame Duck Ambassador: Heath and U.S. Support for Diem

Heath continued to occupy an important role in Saigon as the United States reformulated its policy in Indochina in the aftermath of Diem's appointment. During his final few months in Saigon – he would eventually leave in November after four-and-a-half years in the post – Heath would weigh in on a number of crucial questions facing the United States. Could Diem succeed in establishing a strong, stable anti-communist government or would South Vietnam be better off in the hands of an alternative leader? If Diem was capable of doing so, what support should the United States give him to shore up his government and increase its ability to resist communist pressure? What assistance should the United States provide to the other Indochinese states?

The challenges that Diem faced were huge. He had, as Miller notes, 'inherited a government that was weak, inefficient, and tainted by its association with French colonialism'.¹²⁰ The influx of refugees fleeing the north complicated matters, as did the threat that Vietnam's southern politico-religious groups, often referred to by Western officials as 'sects', posed to Diem's control of South Vietnam. The Cao Dai and Hoa Hao controlled large swathes of territory in the south and maintained their own militias, while the Binh Xuyen's Bay Vien (also known as Le Van Vien) controlled the Saigon police force. Winning over these groups to the Diem government would be a difficult task. After Diem largely overlooked these groups in forming his first cabinet, the politico-religious organisations adopted a hostile stance to the new prime

¹¹⁷ Telegram 2371 from Heath to Department of State, 12 May 1952, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 167.

¹¹⁸ Guillemot, p. 493; p. 519.

¹¹⁹ Bui Diem, pp. 83-86.

¹²⁰ Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 87.

minister. Wise to Diem's aim of eliminating them through a divide-and-conquer strategy, they worked in conjunction with other domestic opponents of Diem in an effort to outmanoeuvre the prime minister.¹²¹ General Nguyen Van Hinh, the Francophile chief of staff of the VNA and son of former prime minister Nguyen Van Tam, was one of their chief collaborators, and the man who posed the greatest threat to Diem's government during the latter half of 1954. The young general, who had made clear his intention to establish a military dictatorship in Vietnam to U.S. officials in the spring, commanded the loyalty of much of the VNA, a force capable of unseating Diem.¹²² Over the summer and autumn, Hinh set about trying to recruit the allies he needed to launch a coup.

Threats to Diem's position also came from the French. Although high-ranking French figures like Deputy Prime Minister Paul Reynaud and Minister of the Associated States Marc Jacquet had supported Diem's appointment, a number of influential French officials campaigned against the new prime minister. These officials, including Dejean, saw Diem's anti-French attitude and refusal to sign the Geneva Accords as a direct threat to the Mendès France government's hope of preventing the outbreak of another war and of maintaining French cultural and economic influence in Vietnam.¹²³ French opponents put forward a range of alternatives to Diem whom they believed would prove more pliable to French interests. As Anderson notes, 'There were several separate and overlapping schemes involving Bao Dai; former prime ministers Phan [Tran] Van Huu, Nguyen Van Tam, and Buu Loc; Bao Dai's left-leaning cousin Buu Hoi (a scientist living in Paris); and the leaders of the various sects'.¹²⁴ Hinh, too, enjoyed close relations with French military commanders.¹²⁵ A number of British representatives in Vietnam were equally critical of Diem. They hoped they could make the Americans realise the foolhardiness of supporting Diem before it was too late.¹²⁶

For Diem's Vietnamese, French and British opponents, as well as the prime minister himself, the attitude of U.S. government officials like Heath mattered considerably in deciding the outcome of the struggle in South Vietnam. While, as Statler reveals, 'the French still considered themselves masters of the game in Saigon', French opponents to Diem in Vietnam saw American cooperation as vital. General Paul Ély, who replaced Dejean and Navarre as both commissioner-general and commander-in-chief in June 1954, feared that unilateral French action to remove Diem would only serve to strain Franco-American relations further after Dien Bien Phu and the French National Assembly's refusal to ratify plans for the EDC (it was defeated 319-

¹²¹ Chapman, p. 76.

¹²² Foreign Service Despatch 423 from McClintock to Department of State, 'Views of Vietnamese Chief of Staff on Current Political Situation', 1 April 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, pp. 1206-1209.

¹²³ Statler, *Replacing France*, pp. 118-120.

¹²⁴ Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, p. 78.

¹²⁵ Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 100.

¹²⁶ Graves to Allen, 2 October 1954, FO 371/112027, TNA.

264 on 30 August). Ély, thus, urged his colleagues to play on American anti-communist sentiments to persuade them of Diem's inadequacies and to join the French in engineering Diem's removal.¹²⁷ Both Diem and his Vietnamese opponents had long recognised the importance of the United States to their political chances. In the early 1950s, Diem travelled to the United States in an attempt to obtain American support for the prime ministership, while the politico-religious groups altered their political platforms to appeal to American anti-communist and anti-colonial principles.¹²⁸

The support of Saigon embassy officials was a valuable commodity for those groups vying for control of the Vietnamese government. The embassy enjoyed considerable scope to shape U.S. policy towards Diem in this period. Uncertain 'over whether and how to proceed in Vietnam during mid-1954' and distracted by events in Germany and Taiwan, top-level figures in the Eisenhower administration, as Miller notes, 'looked to the U.S. embassy in Saigon for ideas about policy and strategy'.¹²⁹ At various points during the autumn, as we shall see, the State Department gave the embassy considerable latitude in dealing with the situation. With the U.S. government yet to come down with a firm affirmation for the new prime minister, Diem attracting both derision and praise in U.S. circles, and Washington looking to its men-on-the-spot for advice on how to proceed, the question of whom the embassy would back took on profound importance.¹³⁰ Given Heath's Francophile attitude and previous tendency to view events in Indochina largely through a French prism, French officials must have felt optimistic about their chances of gaining Heath's support to remove Diem.

Although the efforts of Vietnamese, French and British officials to win over the United States to their position were not restricted to those Americans working in Vietnam, the most sustained attempts to secure American support took place in Saigon.¹³¹ Barely a day went by over the summer and autumn without a visitor dropping into the embassy to try and win over Heath and his colleagues. Figures from the Diem government complained to embassy officials about the activities of French colonial agents and General Hinh, while French critics, British officials and Diem's competitors inquired about the embassy's attitude towards the establishment of alternative forms of government.¹³²

¹²⁷ Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 122.

¹²⁸ Chapman, p. 60; p. 77.

¹²⁹ Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 75; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, p. 74; Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 121.

¹³⁰ Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 83.

¹³¹ Officials in Paris and Washington were also targeted. See, for example, Telegram 971 from Paris to Secretary of State, 3 September 1954, 751g.00/9-254, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Memorandum of Conversation, 'Conversation with prince Buu Hoi', 21 September 1954, 751g.00/9-2154, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹³² Foreign Service Despatch 25 from Saigon to Department of State, 'Nguyen Duong Don, Minister of National Education', 20 July 1954, 751g.00/7-2054, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 515 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 10 August 1954, 751g.00/8-1054, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59,

Of course, Heath was not the lone American in Vietnam with the power to shape U.S. policy and events on the ground in this period. Scholars have long recognised the importance of other Americans, particularly those working in the broader American mission in Vietnam. Historians have stressed the contribution of Edward G. Lansdale, a CIA operative who arrived in Vietnam in mid-1954 to establish the Saigon Military Mission (SMM), a second CIA station focused on psychological warfare and paramilitary activities. Lansdale enjoyed a direct line of communication to Secretary Dulles and his brother Allen, the CIA director, and established a close relationship with Diem. Lansdale emerged as one Diem's most fervent American advocates in this period, frustrating one of Hinh's coup attempts by arranging for some of his loyal lieutenants to be sent away on military business and using American funds to help win over Cao Dai General Trinh Minh Thé to Diem's cause. The head of the regular CIA station in Saigon, Paul Harwood, and Wesley Fishel, an academic from Michigan State University who befriended Diem in the early 1950s and became the prime minister's advisor in 1954, also busily occupied themselves with trying to stabilise the situation, strengthen Diem's regime and shape policy in Washington.¹³³

The ambassador was also not the only U.S. Foreign Service Officer in Saigon to pass judgment on Diem. With Heath absent at the Geneva Conference, the first opportunity fell to McClintock. As we saw earlier, the chargé expressed serious doubts over Diem's ability to succeed in producing a strong government worthy of American support and flirted with the use of American influence to replace Diem with a Vietnamese government more palatable to French tastes. On 2 July, before Diem even had chance to form his first cabinet, McClintock urged the State Department that 'if he [Diem] does not create a workable Cabinet soon we should give some thought to [the] possibility (possibly [the] utilization of [the] last remnant [of] French influence here) of bringing in a government headed by [Nguyen Van] Tam'.¹³⁴

Had Heath not returned from Geneva so swiftly, McClintock might well have given U.S. approval for a French-supported coup. Initially at least, Heath was much more willing to give Diem a chance to prove himself, refusing to entertain the idea of replacing Diem with an alternative. In July, the ambassador appeared impressed by Diem's early handling of the politico-religious groups and Hinh, as well as the prime minister's 'national reputation for sincerity,

USNA; Telegram 5072 from Paris to Secretary of State, 28 June 1954, 751g.00/6-2854, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 565 from Saigon to Department of State, 13 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 1939-1941; Telegram 1052 from Heath to Department of State, 16 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2033; Minute by Cable, 25 November 1954, in Stephenson to Tahourdin, 14 November 1954, FO 371/112030, TNA.

¹³³ Miller, *Misalliance*, pp. 77-81; Ahern, pp. 25-56; James M. Carter, *Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building, 1954-1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 47-60.

¹³⁴ Telegram 20 from McClintock to Department of State, 2 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1773.

nationalism and honesty'.¹³⁵ Heath stressed that there was 'no other man known to us or to [the] best French observers to replace, with any chance of success at this moment, Diem as head of [the] government'.¹³⁶ He also doubted that a government headed by the candidates put forward by French officials 'could be made solid in [the] relatively little time at its disposal', arguing that they 'would not enjoy [the] confidence of [the] masses'.¹³⁷ 'Support should be given [to the] Diem government in [the] absence [of] evidence [that] it [is] not able to meet [the] responsibilities required by [the] situation', Heath argued on 26 July.¹³⁸

Indicative of his early support for Diem, Heath urged Eisenhower to write a public letter to Diem stressing the continued U.S. commitment to providing aid to Vietnam and gave his support to the Department's instructions to Dillon to indicate U.S. support for the new prime minister with Mendès France.¹³⁹ Heath also resisted the attempts of Diem's rivals to win him over to the idea of a coup. When General Nguyen Thanh Phuong of the Cao Dai proposed a military government led by Hinh to replace Diem, Heath stressed that Diem 'enjoyed [a] high reputation for honesty in Vietnam' and a 'good reputation abroad', and that this was the moment to 'rally behind [the] government' and 'not [the] moment for [a] coup d'etat'.¹⁴⁰ Heath indicated that there would only be ground to agitate for a change of leadership if, after being given time, Diem had failed to achieve a government of national union. The ambassador also urged Diem to try to win over the Cao Dai to his government.¹⁴¹

As Heath pressed the Eisenhower administration to give Diem more time in late July, he received important news from Washington. Thanking Heath for his contribution in Vietnam, Secretary Dulles revealed that the time had come to make a change in the leadership of the Saigon embassy. Dulles wrote on 29 July: 'we feel that you should have a new assignment which we hope to work out shortly'.¹⁴² The decision was the culmination of months of discussion about Heath's position and the Eisenhower administration's gradual move towards a tougher approach with the French, as chapter five demonstrated, and had nothing to do with Heath's later criticism of Diem. While policymakers had forestalled a decision in the early spring, serious discussions

¹³⁵ Telegram 304 from Saigon to Department of State, 23 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1873.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Telegram 405 from Saigon to Department of State, 30 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1893.

¹³⁸ Telegram 327 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 26 July 1954, 751g.00/7-2654, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹³⁹ Telegram 304 from Saigon to Department of State, 23 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 1873-1874; Telegram 366 from Department of State to Paris, 28 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 1888-1889; Telegram 394 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 30 July 1954, 751g.00/7-3054, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁴⁰ Telegram 348 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 28 July 1954, 751g.00/7-2854, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁴¹ Telegram 370 from Saigon to Department of State, 29 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1890.

¹⁴² Dulles to Heath, 29 July 1954, Chronological File – July 1954 (1), Box 12, Chronological Subseries, Personnel Series, JFD Papers, DDEL.

over Heath's future in Saigon resumed in the weeks following Dien Bien Phu's fall, culminating in a State Department recommendation to Dulles in late May that 'Mr. Heath be recalled for reassignment'.¹⁴³

In mid-July, Dulles approved Heath's successor: Julian F. Harrington.¹⁴⁴ The consul-general at Hong Kong, the United States' most significant post for the observation of China, Harrington had enjoyed an eclectic diplomatic career, with postings in Canada, Mexico, Belgium and Ireland. He brought with him some experience of Asia, having spent a year in Manila (1951-52) alongside his two years of service in Hong Kong.¹⁴⁵ This experience in Manila was valuable, given the parallels that existed between the situation in the Philippines and Vietnam. In the Philippines, like in Vietnam, the U.S.-supported government was fighting a guerrilla war against communist insurgents. President Elpidio Quirino, who took power in 1946 following the American transfer of independence to the Philippines, shared with Diem a resistance to initiating the democratic and economic reforms that U.S. officials deemed necessary to beat back the insurgents.¹⁴⁶ A March 1954 State Department review of Harrington's performance in Hong Kong indicated that he had demonstrated 'unusual administrative ability', had experience in coordinating the activities of a large mission and had developed 'excellent relations' with key figures in the Hong Kong government.¹⁴⁷ With Harrington set for a promotion if he took the Saigon post, the reviewers believed that his 'performance at Hong Kong' had confirmed 'that is he is [of] ambassadorial calibre'.¹⁴⁸ Although a few reviewers held doubts about his aptitude, it seems the State Department were inclined to agree with Harrington's influential advocates like Admiral Raymond Spruance that he would be an effective ambassador.¹⁴⁹

By late September, after the news of Heath's departure had leaked to the press, Heath received confirmation of his next posting.¹⁵⁰ He would substitute the 'Paris of the East' in Saigon

¹⁴³ Smith to Morton, 26 May 1954, Subject File (Strictly Confidential) Chiefs of Mission – Status Reports (1), Box 3, Chiefs of Mission Subseries, Personnel Files, JFD Papers, DDEL.

¹⁴⁴ Memorandum for the File, 'Meeting on Chiefs of Mission', 20 July 1954, Subject File (Strictly Confidential) Chiefs of Mission – Status Reports (1), Box 3, Chief of Mission Subseries, Personnel Files, JFD Papers, DDEL.

¹⁴⁵ 'Harrington, Julian Fiske', in *The Department of State Biographic Register, 1955* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955), p. 240.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas B. Buell, *The Quiet Warrior: A Biography of Admiral Raymond A. Spruance* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1987), pp. 435-439.

¹⁴⁷ Memorandum, 'Performance of Julian F. Harrington, Minister and Consul General at Hong Kong', 8 March 1954, Evaluation of Chiefs of Mission (1), Box 1, Chief of Mission Subseries, Personnel Series, JFD Papers, DDEL.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ 'Harrington, Julian F. – Minister and Consul General at Hong Kong', Evaluation of Chiefs of Mission (2), Box 1, Chief of Mission Subseries, Personnel Series, JFD Papers, DDEL.

¹⁵⁰ Memorandum for the Record, 'Donald R. Heath, Ambassador to Lebanon', 23 September 1954, Chronological File – September 1954 (1), Box 13, Chief of Mission Subseries, Personnel Series, JFD Papers, DDEL. The article on Heath's departure quite accurately captured the administration's long-term

for the ‘Paris of the Middle East’ in Beirut, Lebanon, replacing the outgoing Raymond A. Hare. Heath would remain in Saigon for a few months, however. The State Department scheduled Harrington’s arrival in Saigon for November; Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Walter Robertson had need of him in Washington until then, meaning Heath was asked ‘to stay at his post until December 1, 1954’ before heading off on leave in early 1955.¹⁵¹ Despite his lame duck status, Heath would continue to play an important role in deciding Diem’s fate during the latter’s first few months in office.

By mid-August, having had a month to assess Diem’s leadership, Heath began to express more serious doubts about Diem’s longevity. Heath noted, ‘When I passed through Washington [a] month ago, I said I felt no certainty that Ngo Dinh Diem would be able to organize [a] strong government of national appeal. His performance after [a] month in office makes me more uncertain still’.¹⁵² While the ambassador continued to highlight Diem’s ‘integrity and sincerity as an asset’, Diem’s inability to convince influential nationalists to support him, despite the efforts of Diem’s foreign minister Tran Van Do to get Diem to reach out to them, left Heath concerned.¹⁵³ Hopeful that Do would ‘succeed in forming for Diem a strong government of national unity’ – a government, the ambassador believed that would ‘have more popular appeal than [a] government under any other of [the] aspirants now busily intriguing and combining to oust Diem’ – Heath nevertheless believed that time was running out.¹⁵⁴ With French officials, including Ély, critical of Diem and some encouraging plots to replace the prime minister, a coup did not look far away. The arrival of Raphael Leygues and Claude Cheysson, two close advisers to Mendés France, in Vietnam to assess the viability of the Diem regime heightened the tension.¹⁵⁵ In response, Heath pressed Ély to give Do more time ‘to rally [the] sects and form a strong government team’ for Diem before encouraging an ‘ouster movement’ and urged Diem to

concerns about Heath’s susceptibility to French influence and labelled Heath as ‘the American most closely identified with the French record of blunder and failure in Indo-China’. Jim Lucas, ‘U.S. Will Can Top Diplomat in Major Indo-China Shake-Up’, *Washington Post*, 1 September 1954, in Ambassador: Heath, Donald R. –U.S. [To Saudi Arabia], Box 116, Series II. News Clippings, Republican National Committee Papers, DDEL.

¹⁵¹ Memorandum for the Record, ‘Donald R. Heath, Ambassador to Lebanon’, 23 September 1954, Chronological File – September 1954 (1), Box 13, Chief of Mission Subseries, Personnel Series, JFD Papers, DDEL; Memorandum from Bonsal to Robertson, ‘Article in today’s *Washington News* regarding Ambassador Heath’, 1 September 1954, 751g.00/9-154, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 1675 from Heath to Department of State, 2 November 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 1, p. 2203.

¹⁵² Telegram 517 from Heath to Department of State, 10 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1932.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Telegram 420 from Paris to Secretary of State, 29 July 1954, 751g.00/7-2954, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 438 from Paris to Department of State, 30 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 1896-1898.

'hasten his negotiations with the sects and appoint a better government team with larger representation of [the] south'.¹⁵⁶

A week later, Heath informed Washington that 'Mendes-France[']s emissaries have determine[d] [that] Diem must be removed. That is not yet [the] official French view, but [it] may very soon be'.¹⁵⁷ With the French viewing Diem as an American protégé, Heath explained that French officials had set out to educate U.S. representatives in Vietnam on the 'ineptness and incompetence [of] Diem and [the] necessity [to] replace him'.¹⁵⁸ Ély described Diem's government as the 'most incapable government Vietnam had ever had'.¹⁵⁹ Given the progress of French efforts, Heath concluded that U.S. pressure might not be enough to prevent Diem's 'star' from being 'extinguished'.¹⁶⁰ Heath urged Washington on the need for a quick decision as 'to whether we wish to throw our weight behind Ngo Dinh Diem in [an] effort prolong his tenure of office or whether we will allow events [to] run their course and have him displaced in [the] near future'.¹⁶¹ Although the ambassador did not advise the State Department which decision to take, his cable stressed Diem's 'many faults and weaknesses' and suggested that Diem would need close American supervision if Washington decided to support him.¹⁶²

As August neared its end, the efforts of the politico-religious groups and the French to win Heath over to the idea of a coup started to show signs of success. Although Heath did not offer any encouragement to Hinh and his fellow conspirators at a cocktail party hosted by Leygues on 25 August, the 'remarkable degree of harmony among leaders of [the] confessional groups [politico-religious groups]' impressed the ambassador and his cables indicated a growing openness to French views.¹⁶³ He admitted that 'French and Vietnamese criticisms of [the] inefficiency and political ineptitude of Diem are unfortunately all too valid'.¹⁶⁴ Heath was critical of Diem's failure to offer sufficient concessions to entice the politico-religious groups to align themselves with his government and the tendency of Diem's followers to indulge 'in public irrational criticism of [the] French'.¹⁶⁵ His confidence in Diem's capacity to lead seemingly dwindling by the day, Heath advised the State Department to delay a message from Eisenhower to Diem indicating U.S. 'appreciation of the efforts of the Vietnamese Government and people in

¹⁵⁶ Telegram 517 from Heath to Department of State, 10 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1933; Telegram 565 from Saigon to Department of State, 13 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1940.

¹⁵⁷ Telegram 648 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 20 August 1954, 751g.00/8-2054, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Telegram 759 from Saigon to Department of State, 27 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1990.

¹⁶⁰ Telegram 648 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 20 August 1954, 751g.00/8-2054, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Telegram 751 from Saigon to Department of State, 26 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1985.

¹⁶⁴ Telegram 761 from Saigon to Department of State, 27 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1990.

¹⁶⁵ Telegram 758 from Saigon to Department of State, 26 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1986.

the struggle for freedom and the readiness of the American people to continue to aid in this struggle'.¹⁶⁶ Heath and the embassy also facilitated Buu Hoi's visit to the United States for an academic conference, allowing one of Diem's chief rivals to call into the State Department to criticise Diem and urge policymakers to support a new regime.¹⁶⁷

However, Heath continued to feel that the United States should only countenance alternatives to the prime minister if 'Diem clearly demonstrates [an] incapacity to organize a solid, supported governmental structure'.¹⁶⁸ That moment, it seemed, had not yet arrived. Heath remained unconvinced by those men jockeying for Diem's position and stopped short of recommending to Washington that the U.S. acquiesce in Diem's removal.¹⁶⁹ Heath worried about the left-leaning tendencies of Buu Hoi, and doubted Tam's nationalist appeal.¹⁷⁰ He was particularly resistant to Hinh taking power, fearful that a VNA coup would set a bad precedent that would encourage the army to continue interfering in political matters in the future.¹⁷¹ In the long term, the ambassador hoped 'that, perhaps out of a national assembly, some real leader will develop'.¹⁷² But, in the here and now, Heath advised Washington to stick with Diem 'as an interim measure'.¹⁷³

Heath, therefore, continued to employ the dual approach that he had adopted since July, urging Diem to make concessions to the politico-religious groups while using his influence to ward off the coup plotters. Just as an agreement between Diem, the Cao Dai and one branch of the Hoa Hao appeared close at hand, Diem stalled, arguing that a final agreement with these groups must await a decision on Hinh's future as chief of the VNA.¹⁷⁴ Heath, however, enjoyed more success on the second front, believing that his interjection with Ély had temporarily stalled a coup. The State Department were appreciative of Heath's intervention, urging the ambassador to make further appeals to Ély about how a French-instigated coup will 'destroy [the] confidence

¹⁶⁶ Telegram 636 from Department of State to Saigon, 18 August 1954, 751g.00/8-1854, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 761 from Heath to Department of State, 27 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1991.

¹⁶⁷ Telegram 673 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 22 August 1954, 751g.00/8-2254, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Memorandum of Conversation, 'Conversation with Prince Buu Hoi', 21 September 1954, 751g.00/9-2154, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁶⁸ Telegram 758 from Saigon to Department of State, 26 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1986.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Telegram 1029 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 15 September 1954, 751g.00/9-1554, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 673 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 22 August 1954, 751g.00/8-2254, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 761 from Saigon to Department of State, 27 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1991.

¹⁷¹ Telegram 1036 from Heath to Department of State, 16 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2031.

¹⁷² Telegram 761 from Saigon to Department of State, 27 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1991.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Telegram 758 from Saigon to Department of State, 26 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 1986-1987.

[of the] Vietnamese in their true independence'.¹⁷⁵ Heath also refused to countenance French suggestions that Western diplomats force Diem to incorporate Tam into his government as minister of the interior, believing that it would harm the nationalist credentials of Diem's government and encourage Diem to adopt a more anti-French attitude.¹⁷⁶ Heath's explanation that a coup would have a damaging impact on the likelihood of continued U.S. assistance in Vietnam seemed also to have an effect on the leading representatives of the politico-religious groups plotting Diem's downfall.¹⁷⁷ Do reported that Bay Vien had 'gained [the] impression [that the] US [is] strongly backing Diem at this point and [the] General [is] therefore considering [the] terms under which cooperation with Diem will be possible'.¹⁷⁸ Heath's interventions with Vietnamese nationalists reveal the neo-colonial nature of the embassy's operation. 'This may sound a bit like lecturing but it is a lecture which needs to be repeated again and again', he reported after one such intervention.¹⁷⁹

Heath's doubts about Diem also did not prevent the ambassador from recommending that the United States extend further assistance to Diem's government in this period. The embassy played an important role as the United States considered increasing its assistance to Indochina in the aftermath of the Geneva Conference. U.S. officials had long hoped to establish direct relationships with the Indochinese governments, particularly in training the national armies. They were confident about the superiority of American military training and that they could succeed where the French had failed. During the summer, French officials exhibited greater openness to the idea of U.S. representatives playing a more active role with the VNA, including a formal request from Ély for the United States to work with France in early June. However, not all U.S. officials believed that it was wise for United States to increase its commitment. Some were reluctant to invest greater resources in Indochina, anxious that any attempt to form an effective VNA was doomed to failure, and concerned that moves to increase U.S. aid and the American diplomatic presence would violate the terms of the Geneva Accords and heighten international tension.¹⁸⁰ A returning embassy official joined the Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson and members of the JCS in stressing the unlikelihood of salvaging much from Indochina.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ Telegram 733 from Acting Secretary of State to Embassy in France, 28 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1994.

¹⁷⁶ Telegram 878 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 3 September 1954, 751g.00/9-354, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁷⁷ Telegram 796 from Saigon to Department of State, 29 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1996; Telegram 848 from Heath to Department of State, 1 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 2000-2001.

¹⁷⁸ Telegram 899 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 5 September 1954, 751g.00/9-554, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁷⁹ Telegram 842 from Heath to Department of State, 31 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1999.

¹⁸⁰ Spector, pp. 221-224.

¹⁸¹ On Wilson's pessimism and the concerns raised by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, see Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 629; Spector, pp. 221-224.

Lieutenant Robert C. Taber, a Saigon army attaché who had served on the U.S. delegation at Geneva, explained in his debrief at the Pentagon in July that ‘conditions had deteriorated beyond [any] hope of recovery’.¹⁸²

However, Eisenhower and Dulles, fearful of communist expansion and aware of the domestic imperatives of avoiding further setbacks in Asia, were convinced of the necessity of extending the U.S. commitment in Indochina. Heath and McClintock were among those who shared their thinking. The two most senior diplomats in Vietnam encouraged Eisenhower to deepen U.S. involvement in Indochina.¹⁸³ McClintock played a particularly critical role, returning to Washington in August to chair a multi-departmental special working group commissioned to assess the need for adjusting and redeploying American aid in Indochina prior to beginning his ambassadorship in Phnom Penh.¹⁸⁴ Initially focused on the relocation of Vietnamese fleeing the north, a programme that the committee advised Washington to support, McClintock’s committee recommended that the ‘U.S. should furnish direct, adequate economic, financial and military assistance to the three countries of Indochina’, including a MAAG takeover of the training of the VNA.¹⁸⁵ McClintock asserted that the U.S. policy of assistance to the French had failed and, therefore, ‘a new policy for U.S. direct aid to Vietnam must be established’ in which aid ‘should be conditioned upon [the] performance by the three countries in instituting needed reforms’.¹⁸⁶ Land reform, the creation of a government of national union and the reconstruction of the VNA were three of the key areas that McClintock suggested the Vietnamese government would need to demonstrate progress in to ensure the flow of American aid.¹⁸⁷ However, McClintock argued that the formation of an effective, stable government should not be a prerequisite for the introduction of new U.S. aid. In fact, McClintock believed ‘that the question of whether or not Vietnam has a stable government will depend a good deal on an available [and] effective Vietnamese armed force, and to be effective the armed forces of Vietnam must depend heavily on the U.S. for assistance’.¹⁸⁸

The Eisenhower administration canvassed Heath’s views too, asking the ambassador and O’Daniel to assist the working group by providing their recommendations ‘for [the] most

¹⁸² Memorandum from Lydman to Hoey, ‘Pentagon Debriefing of Lt. Col. Taber, former Assistant Military Attache, July 7, 1954’, 8 July 1954, 751g.00/7-854, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁸³ Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 75.

¹⁸⁴ Telegram 491 from Secretary of State to Saigon, 7 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1924.

¹⁸⁵ Memorandum from McClintock to Smith, ‘A U.S. Policy for Post-Armistice Indochina’, 12 August 1954, 751g.00/8-1254, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Memorandum of Discussion at the 218th Meeting of the National Security Council, 22 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2156; Substance of Discussions of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting at the Pentagon, 20 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1963.

effective use of US economic[,] financial and military aid' in early August.¹⁸⁹ While Heath favoured a more limited assistance role for the United States than some other Americans, he advocated increased and more direct U.S. assistance to South Vietnam during his last few months in Saigon.¹⁹⁰ 'US assistance would definitely create [a] public and official reaction beneficial to US interest[s]', particularly if channelled directly, Heath noted.¹⁹¹ He urged Washington, despite the poor political and military situation in South Vietnam, to 'increase substantially our economic assistance to remaining Vietnam' to prevent the Viet Minh from 'capitalizing on local social and economic instability' and identified the continuation of end item assistance and military budget support as other areas where the United States could aid South Vietnam directly.¹⁹² Confident in his belief in the 'superiority of American methods and [the] willingness of Vietnam[ese] forces to take [on] American training as opposed to French instruction', Heath also urged the need for U.S. involvement in the training of the VNA.¹⁹³ On 29 July, following a request filed by the Diem government, Heath endorsed the need for the 'US [to] take over [the] entire training program for [the] Vietnamese National Army'.¹⁹⁴ The restrictions on foreign advisers, Heath noted, could be circumvented by rotating out other military officials in favour of those who could train the VNA, ensuring that MAAG personnel remained at the same number.¹⁹⁵

On the back of advice received from Heath and other U.S. officials, the Eisenhower administration moved ahead with plans to provide direct assistance to Diem's government. On 5 August, they announced that the United States would assist the refugees fleeing the north.¹⁹⁶ US Navy task force 90, led by Rear Admiral Lorenzo S. Sabin, began work on 16 August; U.S. transports moved over 300,000 people from North Vietnam to South Vietnam between August 1954 and May 1955.

In an effort to buttress Diem's position further, but reluctant to pledge long-term aid to South Vietnam given Hinh's continued disloyalty to Diem, Eisenhower tapped Heath and O'Daniel for ideas on a short-term U.S. aid programme in late October. The administration

¹⁸⁹ Telegram 491 from Secretary of State to Saigon, 7 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1924.

¹⁹⁰ Telegram MG 3024 (Army Message) from Saigon to Secretary of State, 8 August 1954, 751g.00/8-854, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 439 from Heath to Department of State, 3 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 1900-1901.

¹⁹¹ Telegram 439 from Heath to Department of State, 3 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1901.

¹⁹² Telegram 405 from Heath to Department of State, 30 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1892; Telegram 439 from Heath to Department of State, 3 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1901; Telegram 668 from Heath to Department of State, 22 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 1966-1967.

¹⁹³ Telegram 366 from Heath to Department of State, 29 July 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1890.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1889.

¹⁹⁵ Telegram 301 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 24 July 1954, 751g.00/7-2454, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 496 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 8 August 1954, 751g.00/8-854, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

¹⁹⁶ Telegram 491 from Secretary of State to Saigon, 7 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 1921.

ordered Heath and O'Daniel to set 'in motion a crash program designed to bring about an improvement in the loyalty and effectiveness of the Free Vietnamese forces' so that 'longer range programs can be decided upon with a reasonable expectation of success'.¹⁹⁷ 'The details of "how" are left in the hands of the Ambassador and General O'Daniel', the State Department instructed.¹⁹⁸ The diplomat and the general responded five days later, providing a list of recommendations that included imbedding seven MAAG officials into the Vietnamese defence bureaucracy; this request was met in full.¹⁹⁹ The Joint Chiefs of Staff dropped their opposition to a direct U.S. training programme in South Vietnam in mid-October, after Dulles and other State Department figures made clear the overriding importance of political considerations, and in February 1955 MAAG took on formal responsibility for advising, training and equipping the VNA.²⁰⁰

Stepped up American assistance did little to ease political tension in South Vietnam. The situation worsened in September when Diem provoked a confrontation with Hinh. Diem had long doubted the wisdom of Heath's suggestions about broadening his government, preferring a 'divide-and-conquer strategy' in which he would 'seek the support of certain leaders and factions as a means to isolate and weaken his most formidable opponents'.²⁰¹ Building on his earlier efforts to isolate Hinh and Bay Vien through courting Hoa Hao and Cao Dai commanders, Diem launched the next stage of his strategy in early September. He arrested two of Hinh's subordinates, dismissing Hinh and ordering him to leave the country for six months. When Hinh refused, barricading himself in his house and disseminating anti-Diem propaganda from the VNA's radio station, Heath feared that a coup was imminent.²⁰² However, the situation eased slightly after a few days, and a couple of weeks later Heath's efforts to convince Diem of the wisdom of reaching out to his opponents appeared to be bearing fruit.²⁰³ On 24 September, Diem announced that he had reshuffled his cabinet to include a number of Cao Dai and Hoa Hao figures. Pleased by this news, Secretary Dulles equated the move as 'largely due to U.S. influence'.²⁰⁴ Diem was certainly motivated to make these changes, at least in part, by his hope of temporarily reducing the American pressure on him to broaden his government.²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁷ Telegram 1679 from Acting Secretary of State to Embassy in Vietnam, 22 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2161.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Telegram 1609 from Heath to Department of State, 27 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2189; Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 126.

²⁰⁰ Spector, p. 229; Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 109.

²⁰¹ Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 101.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 101-103; Telegram 971 from Heath to Department of State, 11 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2020.

²⁰³ Telegram 992 from Heath to Department of State, 13 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2023.

²⁰⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, 'Faure-Ely-La Chambre Talks', 26 September 1954, 751g.00/9-2654, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²⁰⁵ Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 103.

The intervention of Bao Dai ratcheted the tension up again, however. A 1 October letter instructing Diem to incorporate Hinh, Bay Vien and Hinh ally Nguyen Van Xuan into his government followed rumours in late September that Bao Dai had granted Xuan and Bay Vien mandates to set up their own governments.²⁰⁶ With Bao Dai's doubts about Diem's capacity to lead clear, Hinh announced his intention to force Diem from office within forty-eight hours if Diem did not comply with Bao Dai's orders.²⁰⁷ Heath took immediate action to prevent the escalation of the situation, making clear U.S. support for Diem to the French and the prime minister's domestic rivals. The ambassador travelled to Binh Xuyen headquarters to warn Bay Vien personally against initiating an alleged assassination plot against Diem and sent O'Daniel, Lansdale and an embassy representative to stress to Hinh the U.S. belief that Diem remained South Vietnam's best chance of achieving 'strength and security'.²⁰⁸ These efforts seemed to have some effect. Hinh asserted to U.S. officials that he and his supporters 'agree reluctantly to having Diem to remain as President only because of US insistence'.²⁰⁹

Heath's diplomatic interventions, accompanied by financial inducements offered by Lansdale, also contributed to Diem's success in winning over Cao Dai generals Phuong and Thé, and Hoa Hao commander Tran Van Soai to the government in late September. The attempts of the diplomat and the spy to assist Diem were, as historian David Anderson notes, often 'complementary'.²¹⁰ Despite their differing approaches to the situation and Lansdale's more enthusiastic embrace of Diem, Rufus Phillips, a member of the SMM, recalled that Heath 'was very supportive of Lansdale'.²¹¹ For his part, Lansdale described the mission meetings hosted by Heath as 'friendly gatherings with much open discussion'.²¹² Heath's actions were important in ensuring that Diem remained in power in late September and early October, buying the prime

²⁰⁶ Telegram 1286 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 1 October 1954, 751g.00/10-154, Box 3682, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 1213 from Heath to Department of State, 24 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 2054-2055; Telegram 1118 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 19 September 1954, 751g.00/9-1954, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. Nguyen Van Xuan was a politician and military official who occupied a number of key positions in southern Vietnamese governments during the late 1940s, resigning his position as president of the provisional government in South Vietnam in 1949 when Bao Dai returned to Vietnam. He had been given French citizenship and married a French woman. Christopher Goscha, 'Nguyen Van Xuan', *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War (1945-1954)*, <<https://indochine.uqam.ca/en/historical-dictionary/1074-nguyn-vn-xuan-18921989.html>> [accessed 30 May 2018].

²⁰⁷ Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 104.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 105; Telegram 1250 from Heath to Department of State, 27 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2076.

²⁰⁹ Telegram 1269 from Heath to Department of State, 29 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2092.

²¹⁰ Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, p. 85.

²¹¹ Author's Interview with Rufus Philips, 29 April 2013.

²¹² Edward G. Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia* (New York: Harper Row, 1972), p. 203.

minister greater time and leading British officials to label Heath as ‘an ardent supporter’ of Diem.²¹³

However, the ambassador’s most significant intervention was with Bao Dai. Although scholars have acknowledged the importance of U.S. interventions with Bao Dai in scuppering French efforts to remove Diem, there has been less recognition of Heath’s role in driving the U.S. approach to the Vietnamese chief of state.²¹⁴ Heath had been aware of Bao Dai’s likely intervention in the Diem-Hinh dispute for some time. On 13 September, Ély informed Heath that Bao Dai was thinking of changing the Diem government. Believing that Diem was close to adopting the measures necessary to placate opposition elements in Vietnam and convinced that there ‘is still some promise of making something out of [the] Diem government’, Heath urged U.S. representatives in Paris to register his concern to Bao Dai about removing Diem.²¹⁵ As the threat to Diem’s government rose in late September, Heath suggested that he intervene personally with Bao Dai.²¹⁶ Despite Bao Dai’s absence from Vietnam, Heath and his staff continued to see him as ‘the key to the situation’.²¹⁷

Heath faced a bureaucratic battle in his attempt to force a U.S. intervention with Bao Dai; his eventual victory provided an important boost to Diem’s position. Ambassador Dillon in Paris was the chief opponent to the move. Dillon was fearful that U.S. efforts to pressure Bao Dai would undermine the United States’ own attempts to limit French interference in Vietnamese internal affairs.²¹⁸ The State Department initially sided with Dillon. They informed Heath that U.S. pressure on Bao Dai ‘would have so little affect [...] that to intervene at this time in such terms would constitute a dissipation of U.S. influence’.²¹⁹ However, just over a week later, after news reached them that Bao Dai was encouraging Bay Vien and Xuan to set up their own governments and that French officials were informing Diem’s rivals that the Americans now backed a change of government, the State Department altered their position.²²⁰ U.S. officials

²¹³ Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 103; Minute from Cloake, in Graves to Allen, 2 October 1954, FO 371/112027, TNA.

²¹⁴ Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 126; Miller, *Misalliance*, pp. 104-105. Anderson is one of the few historians to highlight Heath’s success in this bureaucratic battle, see Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, pp. 81-82.

²¹⁵ Telegram 995 from Saigon to Department of State, 13 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2025.

²¹⁶ Telegram 1270 from Heath to Department of State, 29 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2093.

²¹⁷ Substance of Discussions of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting at the Pentagon, 1 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2108.

²¹⁸ Telegram 1090 from Paris to Secretary of State, 14 September 1954, 751g.00/9-1454, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²¹⁹ Telegram 1038 from Department of State to Saigon, 15 September 1954, 751g.00/9-1554, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²²⁰ Telegram 1150 from Heath to Department of State, 21 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2042; Telegram 1074 from Department of State to Paris, 23 September 1954, in Footnote 5, Telegram 1063

feared that the rumours of American receptiveness to the idea of removing Diem would disrupt the prime minister's efforts to win over Hoa Hao and Cao Dai representatives to his government and encourage a move to overthrow Diem on the eve of important Franco-American talks in Washington.²²¹ The talks marked an attempt to address the widening gulf between the two Western powers on Vietnam; previous American efforts to confront the French government on their encouragement of Diem's opponents and to gain their support in assisting Diem's government had proved unsuccessful.²²² Department officials were concerned that if Diem fell now it 'would immeasurably complicate matters and endanger the ability of the United States to provide aid' to South Vietnam.²²³

Following the State Department's success in securing a French commitment to support Diem's government at the Washington talks and Heath's affirmation that a policy of support for Diem remained workable, the State Department sent Heath to see Bao Dai at Cannes.²²⁴ Bedell Smith gave the ambassador considerable freedom in how he dealt with Bao Dai because of Heath's 'extensive knowledge [of] what makes Bao Dai tick'.²²⁵ 'In your talks with Bao Dai, we] recommend [that] you follow [the] line which in your opinion will be [the] most rewarding in achieving his support [of] Diem and [in] neutralising the active opposition of [the] Binh Xuyen and Hinh', Smith cabled.²²⁶ However, by the time Heath saw Bao Dai on 3 October, the chief of state had already received the message. Heath's talk with Nguyen De, Bao Dai's close advisor, on the ambassador's arrival in France and the intervention of Ély, armed with the joint instructions to support Diem agreed in Washington, had left their mark on Bao Dai. In his meeting with Heath, Bao Dai expressed that he had 'no objections to Diem's remaining in office' and dressed up his letter demanding Diem incorporate Hinh, Bay Vien and Xuan into his cabinet

from Acting Secretary of State to Embassy in France, 23 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2053; Telegram 1213 from Heath to Department of State, 24 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2055.

²²¹ Telegram 1168 from Heath to Department of State, 22 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 2045-2046.

²²² Telegram 997 from Acting Secretary of State to Embassy in France, 17 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2034.

²²³ Telegram 1074 from Department of State to Paris, 23 September 1954, in Footnote 5, Telegram 1063 from Acting Secretary of State to Embassy in France, 23 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2053.

²²⁴ Telegram 1240 from Acting Secretary of State to Embassy in Vietnam, 28 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 2080-2081; Telegram 1270 from Heath to Department of State, 29 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2093; Telegram 1194 from Acting Secretary of State to Embassy in France, 1 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2109.

²²⁵ Telegram 1194 from Acting Secretary of State to Embassy in France, 1 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2110.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 2109-2110.

as a simple “drafting error”.²²⁷ Nonetheless, that Heath had travelled all the way to Cannes to make this appeal in person demonstrated to Bao Dai the seriousness of U.S. support for Diem. On 7 October, reports from Saigon revealed that Bao Dai had telegraphed Bay Vien and Xuan, ordering them to cooperate with Diem.²²⁸

Although some figures in the U.S. government were concerned by the degree of freedom that Washington had given Heath in determining ‘whether or not [to] give all-out support to Diem’ (Admiral Radford described it as ‘like “throwing the football into the grandstand”’), policymakers in the Eisenhower administration were generally impressed by the firm line Heath had taken with Diem’s opponents and French authorities by late September.²²⁹ Revealing his previous belief that ‘Heath had been too long in his position [and] was too close to the French’, Secretary Dulles praised Heath for ‘standing up to them’, and said that ‘the deterioration in South Vietnam is not ascribable to any weakness of Heath’s’.²³⁰

Heath’s improved standing with senior officials in the Eisenhower administration in September, the highest that it had been in 1954, was down to more than just the ambassador’s tougher stance with the French. It helped, too, that Heath’s views on Diem and his rivals largely fit with those of other influential figures in Washington during September. Secretary Dulles, regarded as one of Diem’s most ardent supporters, expressed many of the same doubts that Heath did about Diem but like the ambassador believed that Diem’s nationalist reputation and the paucity of other candidates meant that he should retain the prime ministership.²³¹ Senator Mike Mansfield, whose views took on increasing importance for the Eisenhower administration in the autumn because of his academic expertise on Asia and Democratic Party affiliation, also shared much of Heath’s thinking at this time. Several scholars use Mansfield’s report indicating that Diem represented the only hope in South Vietnam and Heath’s later recommendation that the United States explore other options to Diem to highlight the variance of American opinion on the prime minister.²³² However, Mansfield’s report from Vietnam, a report that provided a considerable fillip to Diem’s chances of survival and helped to shore up Washington’s support for the prime minister, bore striking similarities to Heath’s reporting from Saigon in September

²²⁷ Telegram 1413 from Dillon to Department of State, 4 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 2115-2117.

²²⁸ Telegram 1361 from Cameron to Department of State, 7 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2118.

²²⁹ Substance of Discussions of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting at the Pentagon, 1 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2108.

²³⁰ Memorandum of Discussion at the 215th Meeting of the National Security Council, 24 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2059. Ten days earlier, Dulles had complained vociferously about Heath on the phone to Congressman Walter Judd. See Lloyd C. Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam: From World War II through Dienbienphu* (New York: Norton, 1989), p. 324.

²³¹ Telegram 610 from Secretary of State to Embassy in France, 18 August 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 1957-1958.

²³² For example, see Chapman, pp. 82-83; Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, pp. 83-84.

and the direct imprint of the ambassador.²³³ Heath accompanied the senator on calls to see Diem, Do and leading French representatives in early September, placing the comments of these officials in perspective for his visitor.²³⁴ Despite his frustrations with Diem, Heath explained to Mansfield that ‘if Diem goes, there is no replacement for him in sight’.²³⁵ The view expressed by Heath, and other Americans on the spot, that Diem remained the last chance for the United States in South Vietnam became the core part of Mansfield’s report that he presented to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 15 October. When Mansfield recommended that the administration consider withdrawing its aid to Vietnam and the French if Diem was removed, he was echoing a cable sent by Heath in mid-September, where the ambassador argued that removing Diem would create a situation in which ‘it would be useless for us to continue our heavy investment and effort here’.²³⁶

Heath’s September and early October interventions only momentarily eased the political situation in South Vietnam. A few days after he returned to Vietnam from seeing Bao Dai, Heath reported that the situation had ‘become exceedingly critical in Saigon’.²³⁷ News of the abduction of a palace guard by VNA officers and Hinh’s pledge to launch a coup on 11 October convinced the ambassador that a coup was looming.²³⁸ Although Heath blamed Hinh for the outbreak of the latest crisis, the ambassador’s confidence in Diem’s ability was shaken further by Diem’s failure to come to a compromise with the rebellious general by late October.²³⁹ While Heath enjoyed some influence with the politico-religious groups (he believed his and Ély’s intervention with Hinh temporarily eased the situation again on 13 October), he generally enjoyed less success with Diem.²⁴⁰ Diem refused to heed Heath’s advice that he incorporate Xuan and Binh Xuyen elements into his government, as Bao Dai had earlier ordered, and to allow Hinh to remain in post until Diem had time to win the support of influential officers in the VNA.²⁴¹ In ignoring his advice, Heath argued, Diem had wasted forty days in which the government ‘should have [been] employed in establishing its authority over [the] provinces, extirpating Viet Minh infiltration and

²³³ Chapman, p. 82.

²³⁴ Telegram 884 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 3 September 1954, 751g.00/9-254, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²³⁵ Heath quoted in Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 627.

²³⁶ Telegram 1029 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 15 September 1954, 751g.00/9-1554, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²³⁷ Telegram 1405 from Heath to Department of State, 11 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2131.

²³⁸ *Ibid*; Telegram 1401 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 10 October 1954, 751g.00/10-1054, Box 3682, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²³⁹ Telegram 1052 from Heath to Department of State, 16 September 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2032.

²⁴⁰ Telegram 1434 from Heath to Department of State, 13 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2138.

²⁴¹ Telegram 1387 from Heath to Department of State, 9 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 2126-2127.

terrorism, and winning [over the] rural population'.²⁴² Arguing that 'there has been every reason to have upheld Diem to date since he does represent an ideal and he enjoys certain prestige and confidence among [the] masses of [the] population', Heath felt that recent evidence had convinced the embassy 'that Diem cannot organize and administer [a] strong government'.²⁴³ Heath mused about limiting Diem's involvement by getting him to take on the role of a 'constitutional European president without direct control over [the] day to day operations of government'.²⁴⁴ By November, Heath posited that Diem 'may not be up to [the] job' and appeared more optimistic that an 'acceptable successor can be found [if] given a little time'.²⁴⁵

Contrary to Heath's perception that Diem was wasting time, the prime minister was busily at work to ensure the maintenance of his government. Diem had his own ideas on how to tackle Hinh. As Edward Miller has shown, these efforts were crucial in pushing Bao Dai to call Hinh to France and relieve him of his duties in November.²⁴⁶ The threats of Heath and other Americans might have brought Diem time with his rivals, temporarily averted coup attempts and eased the tension at points, but, as Heath himself admitted, the threat 'of cutting off American aid [...] has not so far deterred influential elements of [the] officer corps from making common cause with Hinh'.²⁴⁷ Insistent that Hinh be forced out, Diem used clandestine tactics to win over the VNA officer corps and neutralise the general. Once again, Diem employed his brothers. Can and Nhu worked to recruit members of the VNA officer corps to Diem's Can Lao Party and spread pro-Diem propaganda to VNA personnel. Pro-Diem VNA mutinies in October and November revealed the success of these moves. Diem also sent Luyen to intervene with Bao Dai, where he depicted Hinh as unfit for command to Bao Dai and suggested that the VNA chief was colluding with the Viet Minh.²⁴⁸

In October, French officials again sniffed a chance to win Heath over, believing that the American ambassador was implementing a policy of support for Diem that did not fit with his own perceptions of the situation.²⁴⁹ At a dinner on 23 October, Heath reported that Ély and Guy La Chambre, the minister for the Associated States, tried 'to convert me to the thesis that the Diem experiment was at an end and we must look for someone else'.²⁵⁰ Heath refused to take the

²⁴² Telegram 1536 from Heath to Department of State, 22 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2151.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 2152.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ Telegram 1756 from Heath to Department of State, 7 November 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2221.

²⁴⁶ Miller, *Misalliance*, pp. 105-107.

²⁴⁷ Telegram 1536 from Heath to Department of State, 22 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 2151-2152.

²⁴⁸ Miller, *Misalliance*, pp. 106-108.

²⁴⁹ La Chambre told Dillon that he believed 'that in recent instances Heath had received instructions to take action which was not what he might have done on his own'. Telegram 1835 from Dillon to Department of State, 30 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2197.

²⁵⁰ Telegram 1560 from Heath to Department of State, 24 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2170.

bait. Despite his increasing doubts about Diem, Heath backed down from his earlier suggestion of finding an alternative, continued to implement steps to shore up Diem's position and to hold out hope that Diem could yet prove a success. The arrival of a cable from Washington reaffirming the administration's decision to support South Vietnam under Diem's leadership an hour and forty-five minutes after he had sent his pessimistic reading of Diem in the other direction convinced him that he 'must tell the French that Diem must be given a real chance'.²⁵¹ Heath delivered the Department's instructions to protest what the Americans saw as lukewarm French support for Diem. He also gave Diem a letter from Eisenhower in which the president offered direct U.S. aid in return for improved governmental performance.²⁵² British officials reported that Heath was defying the objections of several of his own staff in implementing U.S. policy.²⁵³

On the eve of his departure from Saigon, Heath, despite his assertion in late October that making a success out of the Diem regime would be a 'herculean' task, informed the State Department that 'there is a good possibility that under Diem, with French and American unity and support, [a] government can be formed which will enjoy authority and loyalty in free Vietnam'.²⁵⁴ Heath argued that supporting Diem was 'a risk [...] [that] I am inclined to take'.²⁵⁵ Following the end of his tenure in Saigon, Heath continued to advocate U.S. support for Diem's government. He advised Washington against making aid to Diem's government contingent on his performance. 'The fear that a fiscal commitment of over \$300 million plus our national prestige would be lost in a gamble on the retention of Free Viet-Nam is a legitimate one, but the withholding of our support at this juncture would almost inevitably have a far worse effect', Heath concluded in December.²⁵⁶

Heath's Successor Arrives and the Resolution of the Diem-Hinh Crisis

On 1 November, Heath received important news from Washington. Rather than send Harrington to Saigon just yet, Eisenhower had appointed General J. Lawton Collins, the former

²⁵¹ Telegram 1679 from Acting Secretary of State to Embassy in Vietnam, 22 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 2161-2162; Heath to Young, 28 October 1954, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1954, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

²⁵² Telegram 1553 from Heath to Department of State, 23 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2164; Telegram 1559 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 24 October 1954, 751g.13/10-2454, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA. For the content of Ike's letter to Diem, see President Eisenhower to Diem, undated, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 2166-2167.

²⁵³ Graves to Allen, 2 October 1954, FO 371/112027, TNA.

²⁵⁴ Heath to Young, 28 October 1954, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1954, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 1756 from Heath to Department of State, 7 November 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2221.

²⁵⁵ Telegram 1553 from Heath to Department of State, 23 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2164.

²⁵⁶ Memorandum by Heath to Robertson, 'Comments on Saigon Telegram 2303', 17 December 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2392.

army chief of staff, as a special representative of the president instead.²⁵⁷ Collins's Saigon mission was scheduled to last sixty to ninety days. As late as 26 October, the administration had intended for Harrington to replace Heath as planned. A 30 October appointment had been set up for Harrington to pay his respects to the president before his departure for Saigon; the meeting never took place.²⁵⁸ That same day, Ike met with Secretary Dulles and other senior advisors to discuss U.S. personnel in Vietnam. Confused by the situation in Vietnam, Dulles recommended that the administration 'send a high-ranking U.S. official in whom the President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and Governor Stassen would have full confidence'.²⁵⁹ Eisenhower liked the idea, and proposed Collins's name.²⁶⁰ As Heath explained to the new British ambassador in Saigon, Hugh Stephenson, who replaced Hubert Graves in October, Collins would not technically succeed him 'as Ambassador and the Embassy will be under a Chargé d'Affaires [Kidder] until the arrival of the new Ambassador'.²⁶¹ The task of implementing the crash-programme outlined by Heath and O'Daniel would now fall to Collins, whom Eisenhower instructed to 'assist in stabilizing and strengthening the government of Prime Minister Diem'.²⁶² The decision brought Heath's planned departure date, originally 1 December, forward to mid-November, and delayed the start of Harrington's ambassadorial tenure in Saigon until the completion of Collins's mission.

It is difficult to say if concerns about Heath's short-lived openness to considering an alternative to Diem expedited the decision to bring Heath's departure forward. Secretary Dulles made no mention of Heath's performance in discussing the change in personnel, simply indicating that 'Ambassador Heath has been due for replacement in the very near future, and that this is well advanced'.²⁶³ However, Dulles had been impressed by the views of Admiral Felix Stump, commander in chief, Pacific, whom urged the administration to break the "'long history of U.S. officials in Indochina being duped by the French'".²⁶⁴ After informing Heath of the news, Dulles expressed his 'sincere gratitude for your unselfish and effective dedication to the

²⁵⁷ Telegram 1807 from Secretary of State to Embassy in Vietnam, 1 November 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2200. Collins had enjoyed a successful military career, commanding troops during the D-Day landings and serving as army chief of staff during the Korean War. He enjoyed a close friendship with Eisenhower, whom he had worked under in World War II. Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, p. 87.

²⁵⁸ Memorandum from Simons to Stephens, 26 October 1954, Box 136, White House Central Files, Official File, 1953-1961, DDE Papers, DDEL.

²⁵⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, by McArthur, 30 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 2194-2195.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 2195.

²⁶¹ Stephenson to Tahourdin, 14 November 1954, FO 371/112030, TNA.

²⁶² Spector, p. 232.

²⁶³ Memorandum of Conference at Residence of Secretary of State, 31 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2198.

²⁶⁴ Spector, pp. 231-232.

immensely difficult task that has confronted you and, on behalf of the Government, to thank you for a hard job done well'.²⁶⁵

Collins's appointment was a response to French suggestions that Franco-American cooperation in Vietnam might be improved by investing greater authority in French and American representatives on the ground.²⁶⁶ In a message that Dulles sent to French representatives, the secretary directly referenced this French request in his communication about Collins's selection.²⁶⁷ Collins also had a good relationship with Ély and brought with him experience of Vietnam, having visited Indochina first in the 1930s and more recently in 1951.²⁶⁸ Collins's appointment was the latest example of the Eisenhower administration's inclination to employ military officials in civilian positions in Indochina. Admiral James Shoemaker and General Wilbur McReynolds had both held leadership roles in the U.S. economic mission in Vietnam, and Ike had considered sending General James Van Fleet and General Graves B. Erskine to replace Heath as ambassador in early 1954.

The initial response in France to Collins's appointment was positive. On 9 November, Dillon reported that the 'General tenor [of] [French news] articles [are] to [the] effect [that] Collins's mission [is the] possible forerunner [of a] modification [of the] present US policy [of] support [for the] Diem Government'.²⁶⁹ Ély, however, concerned that Collins's appointment gave the impression of a U.S. takeover in Vietnam, greeted the news with greater reserve.²⁷⁰ Indeed, British diplomats noted that lower-level French officers began to refer to Collins 'as the new Governor-General'.²⁷¹ Ély's mood did not improve once he learned that Collins's directive 'called so explicitly for [the] support of Diem'.²⁷² 'He had hoped', Collins reported, 'that we might consider [the] problem together and have greater liberty [to] consider [a] different course

²⁶⁵ Telegram 1807 from Secretary of State to Embassy in Vietnam, 1 November 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2200.

²⁶⁶ On 30 October, La Chambre suggested to Dillon in Paris that one way to better coordinate Franco-American activities in Vietnam would be by delegating 'a greater degree of authority to the top U.S. and French representatives in Saigon'. Telegram 1835 from Dillon to Department of State, 30 October 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2197.

²⁶⁷ Telegram 1608 from Secretary of State to Embassy in France, 1 November 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2200.

²⁶⁸ On Collins and Ély's close relationship, see Telegram 1686 from Heath to Department of State, 3 November 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2204; Spector, p. 126.

²⁶⁹ Telegram 1985 from Paris to Secretary of State, 9 November 1954, 751g.00/11-954, Box 3682, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²⁷⁰ Telegram 1686 from Heath to Department of State, 3 November 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2204.

²⁷¹ Stephenson to Tahourdin, 4 December 1954, FO 371/112031, TNA.

²⁷² Telegram 1794 from Heath to Department of State, 10 November 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2233.

of action'.²⁷³ Reflective of this mood, Ély chose not to meet Collins, as was custom, on his arrival.²⁷⁴

The mixed reaction of French officials to Collins's arrival was married with sadness at the news of Heath's departure. French Deputy Commissioner-General in Indochina Jean Daridan referred to Heath as a 'martyr' who had battled valiantly to combat the missionary zeal of U.S. personnel in other agencies, while André Saint-Mleux, La Chambre's principal assistant, outlined that Heath's 'long experience and familiarity with Indochina problems was [...] a priceless asset which it would be difficult to replace'.²⁷⁵ Ély, too, was sad to see Heath go, particularly having seen Heath become more pessimistic about Diem's vitality as prime minister over the past month.²⁷⁶ Ély suspected 'that the United States was replacing Ambassador Heath "because his realism had caused him to oppose the State Department in defending positions which were very close to ours"'.²⁷⁷ Although British officials had expressed frustration at Heath's implementation of Washington's policy of support for Diem throughout the autumn, they recognised that the ambassador shared many of their doubts about the prime minister's capacity to succeed.²⁷⁸ Collins, however, would prove himself a far more willing ally than Heath to French and British officials bent on deposing Diem.

Although Diem expressed regret at Heath's departure to U.S. officials, the Vietnamese prime minister likely greeted the news more positively in private.²⁷⁹ Heath's insistence that the Vietnamese accept partition at Geneva and rumours about Heath's cooperation with French plotters had angered Diem, convincing him to press for Heath's removal on two occasions. On the second occasion in mid-October, Diem used Lansdale to pass the request to Allen Dulles, with Lansdale suggesting that General Lucius Clay, the former governor of the U.S. zone in Germany, or General Van Fleet would prove worthy successors to Heath. Ultimately, the Dulles brothers decided against passing Diem's letter to Eisenhower and informed Lansdale that the United States could not act on an informal request of this sort from Diem.²⁸⁰ Unsurprisingly, given the directive that Collins had been granted to support Diem, the prime minister reacted

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Spector, p. 237.

²⁷⁵ Memorandum of Conversation from Gibson to Dillon, 30 November 1954, in Dillon to Merchant, 3 December 1954, 751g.00/12-354, Box 3682, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Telegram 1881 from Paris to Secretary of State, 3 November 1954, 751g.00/11-354, Box 3682, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²⁷⁶ Telegram 1881 from Paris to Secretary of State, 3 November 1954, 751g.00/11-354, Box 3682, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

²⁷⁷ Spector, pp. 236-237.

²⁷⁸ Record of Conversation between H. M. Ambassador and Mr. Donald Heath on Saturday 13 November, in Stephenson to Tahourdin, 14 November 1954, FO 371/112030, TNA.

²⁷⁹ Telegram 1675 from Heath to Department of State, 2 November 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2203.

²⁸⁰ Memorandum from Lydman to Hoey, 'Telephone Conversation with Wesley Fishel, July 24', 26 July 1954, 751g.00/7-2654, Box 3680, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA; Ahern, pp. 47-48. Lansdale did not, as some scholars suggest, initiate Heath's removal.

positively to the news of Heath's successor, expressing his appreciation for the 'President's desire to help Vietnam in its present precarious situation' and explaining his delight at the 'thorough knowledge of [the] problems of [the] Far East' that Collins brought with him.²⁸¹

Personnel changes in the U.S. diplomatic mission in Vietnam were not the only thing that Diem had to be pleased about. On 19 November, following orders from Bao Dai, Hinh left for France. Ten days later, the Vietnamese chief of state formally relieved Hinh of his command, resigning the general to a life in exile during which he re-joined the French air force and fought for the French in Algeria.²⁸²

This chapter challenges the view that U.S. officials saw no viable alternatives to Diem in the weeks building up to his appointment. While it confirms American interest in applying U.S. influence to shape the form and personnel of the Vietnamese government in mid-1954 (and, therefore, the embassy's increasing neo-colonial character), the chapter shows that the target of the most explicit attempt to intervene in domestic politics was Tri and not Diem. For many American officials in the embassy and elsewhere in Indochina, Tri was the last great hope for Vietnam. His administrative talent, fervent anti-communism and ability to maintain a nationalist reputation while working with the French ensured he found himself at the top of the American mission's list of potential Third Force saviours. Washington's willingness to give Bao Dai another chance, the continued influence of French actors in Vietnam after Dien Bien Phu and the decision to divide Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel stymied the mission's efforts to throw American support behind Tri. Nevertheless, the embassy's interest in Tri, the efforts of McClintock and others to promote his appointment, and the lack of any comparable evidence indicating a direct U.S. intervention on Diem's behalf suggests that Diem's appointment owed more to domestic forces than American patronage. Had Bao Dai's decision hinged solely on who could assure U.S. support and work well with the Americans, Tri appeared the better bet. Diem's superior domestic campaigning was pivotal to his emergence as prime minister over Tri and his other rivals.

The chapter also identifies that Heath's criticism of Diem had little to do with his removal as ambassador. The Eisenhower administration's decision to end Heath's tenure in Vietnam was made in the aftermath of the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, and not in the autumn, as the president and his advisors sought to find an envoy capable of adopting a tougher stance with the French. Furthermore, despite Heath's growing pessimism about Diem during the

²⁸¹ Telegram 1675 from Heath to Department of State, 2 November 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, p. 2203.

²⁸² Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 107; Christopher Goscha, 'Nguyen Van Hinh', *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War (1945-1954)*, <<https://indochine.uqam.ca/en/historical-dictionary/1051-nguyn-vn-hinh-19152004.html>> [accessed 10 August 2017].

autumn, the ambassador's stock actually rose with senior policymakers in his final few months in Saigon. They applauded his efforts to adopt a more forceful position with the French over Diem and shared much of Heath's thinking about the strengths and weaknesses of the prime minister. While scholars are right to draw attention to Heath's criticism of Diem and the interest he, at times, expressed in finding an alternative leader, historians must be careful not to overlook Heath's contribution to American efforts to sustain Diem's position. Heath ultimately refused to be seduced by the attempts of French and Vietnamese plotters to the idea of a coup, used the carrot of American aid to buy Diem time in dealing with his domestic opponents and often led the way in encouraging Washington to take actions to shore up Diem's position and commit further assistance to South Vietnam. In not following through on his concerns about the prime minister and in employing considerable energy to preserve Diem, Heath must bear some responsibility, therefore, for the American decision to hitch its hopes of preserving a non-communist government in South Vietnam on a deeply flawed and uncooperative American ally. Although the U.S. commitment to Diem had not yet been set in stone by November 1954, Heath's efforts to sustain the prime minister in late 1954 made it more difficult for his successors to reorient policy around an alternative figure. His role in extending the U.S. commitment in South Vietnam also made it more difficult for later Americans to extricate the United States from the struggle.

Conclusion

This thesis provides the first detailed assessment of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon during the latter half of the Franco-Viet Minh War. It highlights how the American diplomatic post in Saigon transformed from a previously small and unimportant post on the periphery of the French empire to a large diplomatic mission at the centre of an American effort to prevent the spread of communism in Indochina following the 1950 decision to support France's war. The dissertation reveals that American diplomats in the Saigon post believed that the increased American commitment had given them 'action responsibilities', a status requiring them to play a more active role in trying to influence the outcome of the war and the pace and shape of decolonisation in Vietnam. The attempt to formalise this new status, what one diplomat referred to as 'middle ground relations', in which the U.S. legation and other American agencies in Vietnam would take on responsibilities between routine diplomatic contacts and a complete American takeover, however, proved unsuccessful. Concerns about aggravating Franco-American relations prevented Washington applying the necessary pressure on the French, who were resistant to the idea of the U.S. mission assuming such a role.

Nevertheless, the Saigon post was upgraded to an embassy in mid-1952 in an effort to strengthen the U.S. commitment further and demonstrated activist and neo-colonial tendencies in its interactions with both the French and the Indochinese throughout the early 1950s, applying diplomatic pressure and using American aid to try to influence the behaviour of its allies. As French influence started to decline following their defeat at Dien Bien Phu, American diplomats began to discuss direct embassy intervention in the makeup of the Vietnamese government.

The staffing and culture of the embassy strengthened the Saigon post's neo-imperial identity. American diplomats sent to work at the Saigon embassy were largely unfamiliar with Southeast Asia and brought with them the same kind of ethnocentric and racist ideas about the Vietnamese held by French colonial officials. This was despite the belated and unsuccessful attempt of State Department officials to begin cultivating a corps of Southeast Asian experts in the U.S. Foreign Service in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The social habits, linguistic deficiencies and living arrangements of Saigon embassy officials during the early 1950s meant that the inaccurate stereotypes that Americans brought with them about Vietnamese emotionalism, naivety and laziness persisted, exacerbating the tendency of American diplomats in Vietnam to treat the indigenous people more like colonial subjects than Cold War allies and to insist on the need for an American role in directing decolonisation in Indochina.

Notwithstanding the Saigon post's elevated status and neo-imperial behaviour, this thesis highlights that the embassy struggled to consistently influence the actions of the French and Indochinese. Although financially reliant on the United States, French and Indochinese actors demonstrated a considerable degree of independence from their superpower patron, regularly ignoring the advice of embassy officials and pursuing their own priorities and visions for

postcolonial Vietnam. The threat of removing American aid if Indochinese nationalists refused to fall into line with U.S. Cold War policies did little to quell Indochinese desires for further political concessions from the French. The embassy's efforts with the French met with similar frustration. The U.S. mission never enjoyed the influence over French military decisions and the development of the Vietnamese government that they desired. The U.S. hope that the FEC would continue fighting in Indochina and that the French would support U.S. policies in Europe reduced American leverage with their European ally, allowing French officials to resist the U.S. mission's efforts to establish a more powerful position in Vietnam decision-making.

The embassy's struggle to shape the direction of the war and decolonisation during the early 1950s was compounded by divisions within the Saigon post as to how U.S. policy should best be pursued. Disagreements over where the stress of U.S. policy should be, greater support of the French military or Vietnamese anti-communist nationalism, and how the United States should apply its leverage with its allies in Indochina reignited the debates that had raged within the State Department between 'liberals' and 'conservatives' in the 1940s. Donald Heath's more pro-French stance came into conflict with the more pro-Vietnamese position of Edmund Gullion, Robert Blum and numerous American visitors to Indochina. This thesis provides a more complete picture of these clashes within the embassy and the ways in which Heath tried, often successfully, to minimise the ability of his subordinates to reorient policy. However, the contradictory sounds that came from within the embassy and the broader U.S. mission in Vietnam made it very difficult for the United States to talk with one voice, limiting American leverage with its allies; French and Vietnamese officials could always search out American diplomats more sympathetic to their position.

Nonetheless, this thesis reveals that the embassy retained an important role in shaping and implementing U.S. policy. To ignore the role of diplomats in Saigon, as the scholarship largely does, is to underestimate the significant place the embassy occupied in U.S. policymaking towards Indochina in the 1950s. Washington applauded embassy staff for their informative reporting from Saigon and regularly sought out the recommendations of their diplomats in Vietnam. The embassy played a crucial role in hosting and briefing the long-list of American visitors to Indochina and in coordinating the activities of the U.S. mission in Vietnam. Washington also valued the embassy's contacts, taking advantage of the close relationships that Saigon representatives formed with key figures in Indochina to pursue their diplomatic aims. Policymakers made particular use of the embassy in this regard as part of American efforts to press Vietnamese leaders to stay the course at the Geneva Conference. The involvement of Heath and other diplomats from the Saigon post at Geneva also demonstrates the fallacy of claims that the increasing regularity of summit meetings and international conferences resulted in the decline of the diplomatic post's importance in international affairs. Alongside its contribution at Geneva, the embassy played important preparatory and participatory roles at other high-level meetings during this period. The more frequent interactions between heads of state and foreign ministries,

therefore, did not spell the end of the importance of embassies; rather, it created new work for them alongside the traditional activities of reporting, representation and policy implementation.

There were areas where the embassy had less influence, however. In particular, the Saigon embassy found itself side-lined during the first half of 1954 as Washington constructed contingency plans in case of a French collapse. Embassy representatives were not consulted by the working groups that were formed, despite the protestations of the PSA office, and, as the French position worsened at Dien Bien Phu, were left out of government deliberations on U.S. intervention. The increased engagement of top-level officials on Indochina, concerns in Washington about Heath's performance, and the lack of real attention the Eisenhower administration gave to securing Vietnamese support for an intervention limited the embassy's role in these discussions. There is scope here for further research. An examination of the role of other embassies in similar crises during the Eisenhower administration would allow us to draw broader conclusions about the place that resident diplomatic posts occupied in Eisenhower's management of Cold War crises.

Much of the dissertation has focused on Donald Heath. In providing the first sustained analysis of Heath's ambassadorial tenure in Saigon, this dissertation adds to scholarly understanding of Heath's time in Vietnam in a number of ways. Firstly, it sheds new light on Heath's appointment and departure from Vietnam, challenging existing scholarship on the subject. Although a number of factors were important in Heath's selection for the Saigon post, the dissertation shows that Heath's most crucial qualification was the experience he had gathered in his previous posting in Bulgaria. The State Department were impressed by the way Heath had managed to uphold American prestige in a hostile diplomatic environment and believed him well placed, therefore, to manage the delicate diplomatic atmosphere in Saigon.

The dissertation also dispels the notion that Heath's tenure in Saigon was brought to an end because of the concerns he held about Ngo Dinh Diem. At most, the pessimism Heath expressed about Diem shortened his tenure by only a few weeks. The decision to replace Heath had little to do with Diem and was made long before Heath had revealed his more serious doubts about the Vietnamese prime minister. The thesis reveals, too, that Heath devoted considerable energy to preserving the Vietnamese prime minister's position during the autumn. The ambassador intervened with opposition elements in Vietnam, Bao Dai and the French to ease up their pressure on Diem, winning him the applause of Secretary Dulles. Policymakers in Washington had decided in the spring and early summer of 1954 that Heath should be replaced. Heath's removal had much more to do with longer-term concerns in Washington about his Francophile tendencies, the Eisenhower administration's gradual move towards adopting a tougher position with the French in the early part of 1954, and the four years he had spent in a hardship post.

Second, this thesis provides a much fuller picture of Heath's attempts to ease Franco-American relations in Indochina and maintain the FEC's commitment to the fight than previous

studies. Although scholars have pointed to some of Heath's efforts in this regard, this dissertation highlights Heath's near constant pre-occupation with this task and reveals the extent of his interventions in much greater depth. In doing so, this dissertation highlights the difficult job ambassadors had in maintaining cordial diplomatic relations in the 1950s as the number of agencies in overseas missions multiplied, visitors from Washington stopped by with increasing regularity, and the forces of the Cold War and decolonisation collided.

One of Heath's most important contributions in this area was with the American press. Contrary to the view put forward in the existing scholarship, the dissertation shows that the U.S. government were, even at this early stage of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, deeply concerned about the ability of American journalists to undermine U.S. policy. Heath and other American diplomats in Indochina played a key role in trying to manage the press, intervening with influential editors like Henry Luce, briefing the mission's staff and American visitors on the line to take with American journalists, pressing newsmen to drop harmful stories, and attempting to convince the French of the benefits of a liberal press policy that might produce more favourable coverage in the American media. The dissertation shows that press management formed an important part of the embassy's, and more broadly the United States', effort to sustain France's war. Although the embassy's efforts were broadly successful, the thesis highlights its failure to prevent the publication of a small number of stories that cast doubt on official optimism about the progress made by the French, aggravated Franco-American relations, and deepened the apprehension of U.S. officials that the war in Indochina could be lost in the pages of American newspapers and news magazines.

Thirdly, the dissertation provides a more nuanced assessment of Heath's ambassadorial tenure. He should neither be understood as having done a fairly effective job in implementing a difficult balancing act in Indochina or as unsuited for his diplomatic assignment in postcolonial Southeast Asia. The reality lies somewhere in between these two interpretations. Indeed, while Heath enjoyed significant success in keeping the French happy and fighting, his actions failed to markedly increase U.S. influence with the French, and inhibited the construction of an anti-communist government in Vietnam that could draw political support away from the DRV.

French officials often praised Heath's performance in Saigon, particularly for his efforts in restraining what French diplomats regarded as the more naïve and troublesome elements of the U.S. mission. Although a broad range of factors, including Indochina's importance to the rest of the French empire, the colony's economic value, and American financial assistance were all critical in keeping the French fighting in Vietnam until 1954, Heath's success in handling Franco-American disputes in Indochina was also noteworthy. Indeed, the thesis demonstrates the multifaceted nature of the American effort to preserve France's war effort; it represented much more than a military and economic aid programme and Heath occupied a central role in its implementation. His efforts prevented tense episodes from escalating into serious diplomatic crises that could have threatened the French commitment in Vietnam. U.S. officials were full of

praise, too, for Heath's efforts in smoothing diplomatic relations given the priority that both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations put on keeping the French going in Vietnam. Heath was, in many ways, the right man for the job, as Washington saw it, at this particular moment in U.S. policy towards Vietnam.

However, as important as Heath's actions were in diffusing incidents of Franco-American diplomatic tension in Vietnam, he was unable to do much to resolve the core disagreements between the two Western powers on the nature of the war and how the war should be fought. Neither was he able to slow the building opposition to the conflict in France. Instead, Heath's role was limited to that of a firefighter, reacting to the latest flashpoint in Franco-American tension but unable to do much to resolve the structural differences between the French and Americans that caused these incidents to manifest. He was also less successful in using the goodwill he built with French officials in Indochina to increase American influence in Vietnam. His pro-French approach did not leave French officials noticeably any more open to the idea of allowing the United States a greater say in the development of French military strategy and in political matters. In fact, Heath's refusal to countenance placing strings on American aid helped to reduce American leverage with the French. In focusing primarily on keeping the French in the fight, Heath's actions also limited the development of a truly independent anti-communist government that could challenge the DRV's legitimacy and win over anti-communist fence-sitters to its cause.

Heath was by no means a French lackey; he was occasionally critical of the French, pressed them to make concessions to the Indochinese when he felt the time was suitable, and authorised covert activities behind their backs. He had a pragmatic streak that belies the simplistic pro-French label that many scholars have given him. However, he played an important role in maintaining a U.S. policy which placed greater stress on sustaining the French war effort over Vietnamese nationalism. Heath contested the more pessimistic reports sent by other Americans with optimistic cables asserting the viability of the U.S. policy he had been sent to implement and moved to limit the ability of these more pessimistic voices to be able to force changes in Washington. On the ground, Heath used his position to intervene with Indochinese nationalists when he felt their actions threatened the continuation of French involvement. These interventions increased Heath's stock with the French, but damaged American prestige with the Indochinese, who were disappointed by the lack of support they received from the Americans, particularly the embassy, and angry at the forceful tactics the ambassador applied. Heath's actions made the already difficult task of uniting a diverse set of anti-communist nationalists against the DRV more complex and did little to improve Vietnamese perceptions of the United States. The U.S. policy favoured, sustained and implemented by Heath in this period failed to create a strong anti-communist government and, ultimately, to sustain a French commitment in

Indochina. As Heath's deputy Robert McClintock noted, 'we tried to hit two birds with one stone and missed both'.¹

Heath's instructions, experience and approach to diplomacy caused him to prioritise the French and pushed him to try to sustain this policy. Although the majority of Americans viewed the Indochinese through an ethnocentric lens, lacked language skills and sparingly interacted with the indigenous community, Heath was one of the worst culprits. His cables frequently employed the terms 'naïve', 'childlike' and 'emotional' to describe Indochinese nationalists, whom Heath believed incapable of self-rule without Western guidance, and expressed disbelief at their inability to unite to fight communism. These assumptions were fed by Heath's lack of familiarity with the developing world, his experience working in countries under authoritarian rule in Europe, and the tendency of diplomats from his generation to prepare their reports from the confines of the European-American diplomatic community and to prioritise Western sources.

Finally, the thesis underlines Heath's role in expanding the U.S. commitment in Vietnam in this period. During Heath's tenure in Saigon, the United States became much more heavily invested in preserving an anti-communist government in Vietnam. Although the future course of U.S. involvement remained open, American decisions in the early 1950s (including the huge amounts of economic and military aid the United States gave to its allies in Vietnam and its support of the Diem government) narrowed the options available for those U.S. officials who would handle the situation in Vietnam in the future.² By 1954, a considerable amount of American treasure and prestige had been invested in Vietnam, making it difficult for the United States to extricate itself without a loss of face. To do so would be to admit that U.S. efforts to date had been in vain and to harm the political fortunes of the figures who had made this commitment.³

Heath does not bear responsibility for this alone. After all, it was senior officials in the Truman and Eisenhower administrations that made the decisions that brought the United States deeper into Vietnam. Nevertheless, Heath was complicit in the extension of the American commitment in Indochina; this was the most consequential legacy he left. Although Heath tried at times to fight off aggressive attempts by other Americans to establish a larger U.S. presence in Vietnam in the hope of allaying French concerns about American interventionism, he was a vocal advocate of enlarging the U.S. commitment throughout his four-and-a-half year stay in Saigon. Heath frequently led the calls for further extensions of military equipment and aid to the French, contested the arguments of those who expressed concerns about further commitments and – despite the doubts he expressed about Diem and his awareness of the potency of the enemy – urged Washington to commit greater assistance to Diem's government as his tenure came to an

¹ McClintock quoted in Statler, *Replacing France*, p. 122.

² Statler, 'Eisenhower, Indochina, and Vietnam', p. 494.

³ Logevall, *Embers of War*, pp. 646-647.

end. Heath, too, pressed Cambodian officials to hold out for an agreement at Geneva that left open the possibility of an increased U.S. role there. Never did he doubt the importance of the struggle to U.S. national security or seriously question the capacity of the United States to succeed in Indochina. Had Heath's reports cast greater doubt on the Cold War importance of Indochina or questioned the wisdom of injecting further American capital into a spluttering war effort might Washington officials have paused for thought before committing the United States more deeply? Perhaps. But he did not. Heath was a true believer in the U.S. policy he was implementing and had few regrets. As he reflected as his time in Saigon neared its end:

While criticism may be made of certain details and incidents of our policy and operations here in Indochina, I think that it cannot be denied that had we failed to follow a policy of increasing military assistance and support to [the] forces of [the] French Union and [the] Associated States, [the] whole of Indochina would have long since been taken over by communism and its march on southeast Asia would have been well advanced.⁴

Instead, therefore, policymakers received a steady stream of reports from their ambassador in Saigon indicating that the United States and its allies could succeed if Washington gave it more time and invested slightly more American resources. For Heath, the light at the end of the tunnel always seemed to be nearing into view. Like his successors in Saigon, however, he found that it remained frustratingly out of reach.

⁴ Telegram 936 from Saigon to Secretary of State, 9 September 1954, 751g.00/9-954, Box 3681, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

Epilogue

J. Lawton Collins arrived in Saigon on 8 November 1954 to start his new job as Eisenhower's special representative in Vietnam. Heath met Collins on his arrival, eating dinner with the general that evening and accompanying him in the days after on visits to see Diem, Do and Daridan.¹ After attending dinners thrown in his honour by Diem and Kidder on 10 and 13 November, Heath left Vietnam on 14 November, stopping off in Rangoon, Delhi and Rome before reaching Paris.² Before he left, he expressed thanks to the PSA office for their 'phenomenal backstopping of his mission', and described his tenure in Saigon as 'certainly the most interesting assignment I ever have had or could hope for'.³ While in France, he examined the latest cables from Saigon and offered Collins his approval of the general's actions so far.⁴ Heath thought Collins 'a very nice guy, keen and decisive' and argued, with the optimism he had generally exhibited about U.S. policy in Indochina, that 'the chances of success of his mission are good'.⁵ During his stopover in France, Heath also met with Bao Dai, delivering a State Department message to the Vietnamese chief of state that 'there was no change in U.S. policy toward Vietnam' and 'that Diem received our support because he represented [the] nationalist and anti-communist elements and because of his personal honesty'.⁶ Heath arrived back in the United States on 13 December aboard the Italian liner SS *Andrea Doria*.⁷

Although Heath was keen for a break after four-and-a-half years in a hardship post – 'I haven't had enough vacation to put in your hat for the last thirteen years plus and I could use a bit', he told the State Department – he responded positively to the Department's request for his assistance in the weeks after his return to the United States.⁸ Following his work in the State Department, Heath spent the final six years of his career in the Foreign Service in the Middle

¹ 8 November, Oct. 31-Nov. 22, 1954, Box 25, J. Lawton Collins Papers, DDEL; Telegram 1788 from Heath to Department of State, 10 November 1954, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 2229-2230.

² 10 November, Oct. 31-Nov. 22, 1954, Box 25, J. Lawton Collins Papers, DDEL; Activity of 13 November, Daily Activity Book, Oct. 31-Nov. 22, 1954, Box 25, J. Lawton Collins Papers, DDEL; Tillman Durdin, 'Hope for Reform in Vietnam Rises: General's Leaving for France Will Give Premier Chance to Improve Regime', *NYT*, 15 November 1954, p. 7; Heath to Young, 9 November 1954, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1954, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

³ Heath to Young, 9 November 1954, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1954, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

⁴ Heath to Collins, 2 December 1954, 'H', Box 28, J. Lawton Collins Papers, DDEL.

⁵ Heath to Young, 9 November 1954, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1954, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA.

⁶ Telegram 2290 from Paris to Secretary of State, 1 December 1954, 751g.00/12-154, Box 3682, CF 1950-1954, RG 59, USNA.

⁷ 'U.S. Envoy to Vietnam Back', *NYT*, 14 December 1954, p. 40. Eighteen months later, the boat sunk near the coast of Nantucket after colliding with the MS *Stockholm*.

⁸ Heath to Young, 9 November 1954, lot 58 D207, Viet-Nam Correspondence 1954, Box 3, PSA Director, RG 59, USNA; 'U.S. Envoy to Vietnam Back', *NYT*, 14 December 1954, p. 40.

East, beginning in Lebanon (1955-1958) and ending in Saudi Arabia (1958-1961). Heath's move to the Middle East coincided with growing tension in the region as the Cold War superpowers, former European colonial powers and regional actors struggled for control of the area's vast petroleum reserves, strategic positions, and the hearts and minds of its indigenous communities.⁹ A short stint as a senior adviser to the U.S. delegation at the tenth U.N. General Assembly in 1955 punctuated his service in Lebanon.¹⁰

As Heath got used to life away from Vietnam, the Saigon embassy was adapting to a new chief of mission. Like the French and the Vietnamese, American diplomats working in the embassy greeted news of Collins's appointment with interest. Officials were curious about what impact the short-term appointment of a military official with close relations to Eisenhower would have on the embassy's operation and influence. According to William Cunningham, Eisenhower's decision to send a military officer rather than a professional diplomat to replace Heath was regarded by some in the embassy as 'very much out of the ordinary' and there were doubts among certain staff that a military official would be able to grasp the subtleties of the situation in Vietnam.¹¹ British reports suggest that U.S. diplomats, fearful that the appointment of a special representative might relegate the embassy to secondary importance, received Collins warily. Gordon Etherington-Smith, first secretary in the British Embassy in Saigon, told the Foreign Office that the American 'embassy cannot relish having a super-ambassador imposed upon it'.¹² For some of the embassy's staff, Eisenhower's decision to send such a close friend and figure of stature to Vietnam created the impression 'that something was going to happen'.¹³

They were right; Collins's sixth month stay in Vietnam was eventful. During his brief stint in Saigon, the general came close to doing what Heath had failed to do in his final few weeks: gain Washington's authorisation to initiate Diem's removal as prime minister. Collins had become convinced that Diem must go after the prime minister resisted the general's advice on the makeup of his government and the reforms he felt were necessary for South Vietnam's survival and success. Diem's ability to ignore these suggestions is reflective of the embassy's broader inability to influence the actions of its principal allies during the 1950s. Just as Collins appeared to have convinced policymakers that Diem must go in spring 1955, the outbreak of hostilities in Saigon between VNA troops loyal to Diem and the Binh Xuyen (and Diem's victory in this fight) forced Washington to reconsider.

⁹ David A. Nichols, *Eisenhower 1956: The President's Year of Crisis: Suez and the Brink of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2011), p. 15.

¹⁰ 'Donald R. Heath, 87, Dies', *Washington Post*, 17 October 1981, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1981/10/17/donald-r-heath-87-dies/59b11903-e15d-4061-9da1-a25e2111ea3f/?utm_term=.f3a6d31e1bd5> [accessed 25 October 2017].

¹¹ Author's Interview with William J. Cunningham, 21 August 2012.

¹² Etherington-Smith to Tahourdin, 8 November 1954, FO 371/112030, TNA.

¹³ Author's Interview with William J. Cunningham, 21 August 2012.

To some scholars, Collins's efforts to gain Washington's support for Diem's removal were undermined by the actions and reporting of other influential Americans in Vietnam, particularly Edward Lansdale.¹⁴ Although evidence suggests that Diem, aware of the rumours that the United States planned to abandon his government and confident in his tactical approach to neutralising his enemies, took the decision to attack the Binh Xuyen independently, Miller notes that 'Lansdale may have helped turn the internal bureaucratic battle in Diem's favor'.¹⁵ The classified status of some of Lansdale's cables makes this difficult to confirm. However, Lansdale's attempts to undermine Collins's efforts to eject Diem was another demonstration of how the expansion of the U.S. mission and the existence of several independent lines of communication in Saigon during the 1950s threatened the embassy's position as the United States' chief interpreter on the ground. It also reveals the extent to which U.S. officials in the mission disagreed on the best tactics to employ in Vietnam. STEM's Robert Blum used his own line to criticise and question the more pro-French policy recommendations of Heath in 1951, while Lansdale communicated Diem's desire to remove Heath as ambassador through his own private channel to Allen Dulles in 1954. Collins found, like Heath before him, that the addition of the SMM, USOM, the Michigan State University Group and other agencies who had their own means of contacting Washington removed the embassy's monopoly over reporting and provided an additional challenge to the embassy's attempts to shape policy in Washington.

By the time Collins left Vietnam in May 1955, U.S. policy had swung firmly behind Diem.¹⁶ While Diem continued to face internal threats and the future of his government was far from certain, his victory over Binh Xuyen forces in Saigon proved his legitimacy for senior American officials in Washington.¹⁷ Following the culmination of Collins's mission in spring 1955, control of the embassy went back to the U.S. Foreign Service. Julian Harrington never made it to Vietnam; he was posted to Panama instead. G. Frederick Reinhardt, a diplomat with considerable experience in Europe, was appointed instead.¹⁸ Over the next eight years, Reinhardt, his successors in the Saigon embassy and other American agencies in Vietnam would be charged with trying to build up Diem's government into a viable rival to the DRV. During this period, the embassy almost doubled in size. The embassy's thirty-six members, including military attachés,

¹⁴ Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, pp. 111-113.

¹⁵ Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 122.

¹⁶ Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 646.

¹⁷ Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 124.

¹⁸ Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, p. 98; Reinhardt presented his diplomatic credentials to Diem on 28 May 1955. Tillman Durdin, 'Bao Dai Ignored by New U.S. Envoy: Reinhardt Gives Credentials to the Premier Without Naming Chief of State', *NYT*, 29 May 1955, p. 2; 'Julian F. Harrington Named Envoy to Panama', *Chicago Tribune*, 19 July 1955, p. 10; Memorandum from Adams to Tait, 13 July 1955, Box 136, White House Central Files, Official File, 1953-1961, DDE Papers, DDEL.

in July 1955 became sixty-three by April 1963.¹⁹ Just as the Saigon post's rise to legation status stood as a symbol to the initial American commitment to Vietnam, the swollen size of the embassy by 1963 was indicative of the extent to which the United States had become committed to ensuring the maintenance of an anti-communist state in Vietnam by the early 1960s. Its place as a key symbol of American intervention in Vietnam grew after Diem's removal in a U.S.-sponsored coup in 1963 and as U.S. troops entered the fray in 1965, encouraging the Vietcong to target it. Following an explosion outside of the embassy in 1965, the Saigon post relocated from the position it had occupied on boulevard de Somme since 1950 to a fortress-like site at 4 Thong Nhat in 1967.²⁰ A few months later, the embassy came under attack again during the 1968 Tet offensive; the images of the hole in the wall of the embassy's compound and of dead Vietcong soldiers in the grounds were some of the most iconic images of that dramatic military engagement. It is apt that the pictures of helicopters evacuating Americans and Vietnamese from the embassy's rooftop resonate so strongly in popular memory of the eventual failure of the U.S. effort in Vietnam in 1975. The U.S. attempt to strengthen and sustain an anti-communist Vietnamese government ended, at least symbolically, where it had begun twenty-five years earlier.

¹⁹ *Foreign Service List, July 1955* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955), p. 65; *Foreign Service List, April 1963* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), p. 52.

²⁰ Tim Doling, 'In Search of Saigon's American War Vestiges', *Historic Vietnam: Tim Doling's Heritage Portal*, <<http://www.historicvietnam.com/us-vestiges/>> [accessed 8 November 2017].

Appendix 1 – Key Personalities

United States

U.S. Legation (1950-1952)/Embassy in Saigon (1952-1954)

Donald R. Heath, Minister (1950-1952); Ambassador (1952-1954)

Edmund A. Gullion, Chargés d'affaires (1949-1950); Counselor (1950-1952)

Robert M. McClintock, Counselor (1953-1954); Ambassador in Phnom Penh (1954-1956)

Howard R. Simpson, Press Officer (1952-1954)

William Leonhart, Second Secretary; Counselor (1950-1952)

Lieutenant Colonel Robert C. Taber, Assistant Army Attaché (1952-1954)

J. Lawton Collins, Special Representative of the President (1954-1955)

U.S. Consulate in Hanoi

Wendell Blancke, Consul (1950-1952)

Paul Sturm, Consul (1952-1954)

Turner Cameron, Consul (1954)

Thomas J. Corcoran, Consul (1954-1955)

U.S. Diplomatic Mission in Indochina

Robert Blum, Chief of Special Technical and Economic Mission (1950-1951)

James P. Hendrick, Special Representative of the Mutual Security Agency in Northern Vietnam (1953)

General Thomas J. Trapnell, Chief of Military Assistance Advisory Group (1952-1954)

General John W. O'Daniel, Chief of Military Assistance Advisory Group (1954-1955)

Edward Lansdale, Head of the Saigon Military Mission (1954-1957)

Washington

Harry S. Truman, President of the United States (1945-1953)

Dean G. Acheson, Secretary of State (1949-1953)

Dean Rusk, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (1950-1952)

John Allison, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (1952-1953)

Phillip Bonsal, Director of the Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, Department of State (1952-1954)

Dwight D. Eisenhower, President of the United States (1953-1961)
John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State (1953-1959)
Allen Dulles, Director of the CIA (1953-1961)
Walter S. Robertson, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (1953-1959)
Douglas MacArthur II, Counselor in the State Department (1953-1956)
Walter Bedell Smith, Under Secretary of State (1953-1954)
Richard M. Nixon, Vice President of the United States (1953-1961)
Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (1953-1957)
Mike Mansfield, Senator from Montana (1953-1977)

Other Significant Americans

John F. Melby, Head of the Joint State-Defense MDAP Survey Mission (1950)
Major General Graves B. Erskine, Head of the Joint State-Defense MDAP Survey Mission (1950)
Chester Bowles, U.S. Ambassador in India (1951-1953)
William J. Donovan, U.S. Ambassador in Thailand (1953-1954)
David E. Bruce, U.S. Ambassador in France (1949-1952)
James Clement Dunn, U.S. Ambassador in France (1952-1953)
C. Douglas Dillon, U.S. Ambassador in France (1953-1957)
Julian F. Harrington, U.S. Consul-General in Hong Kong (1952-1954)

France

Leon Pignon, French High Commissioner in Indochina (1948-1950)
Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, Commander-in-Chief and High Commissioner in Indochina (1950-1952)
Jean Letourneau, Minister for Relations with the Associated States (1950-1953); High Commissioner in Indochina (1952-1953)
Raoul Salan, Commander-in-Chief in Indochina (1952-1953)
Maurice Dejean, Commissioner General in Indochina (1953-1954)
Henri Navarre, Commander-in-Chief in Indochina (1953-1954)
Georges Bidault, Minister of Foreign Affairs (1953-1954)
Rene Mayer, Prime Minister of France (1953)
Joseph Laniel, Prime Minister of France (1953-1954)
Pierre Mendès France, Prime Minister of France (1954-1955)

Paul Ély, Commissioner-General and Commander-in-Chief in Vietnam (1954-1955)

Vietnam

State of Vietnam

Bao Dai, Chief of State (1950-1955)

Tran Van Huu, Prime Minister (1950-1952)

Nguyen Van Tam, Prime Minister (1952-1954)

Buu Loc, Prime Minister (1954)

Ngo Dinh Diem, Prime Minister (1954-1955); President (1955-1963)

Nguyen Huu Tri, Governor of North Vietnam (1950-1951; 1952-1954)

General Nguyen Van Hinh, Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese National Army (1952-1954)

Bay Vien, Leader of the Binh Xuyen

Colonel Trinh Minh Thé, Cao Dai Leader

Ngô Đình Nhu, Brother of Ngô Đình Diệm

Ngô Đình Can, Brother of Ngô Đình Diệm

Ngô Đình Luyện, Brother of Ngô Đình Diệm

Democratic Republic of Vietnam

Ho Chi Minh, President of the DRV

Vo Nguyen Giap, Supreme Commander of DRV Forces

Cambodia

Norodom Sihanouk, King

Penn Nouth, Prime Minister (1953; 1954)

Britain

Hubert Graves, British Minister in Saigon (1951-1954); British Ambassador in Saigon (1954)

John C. Cloake, Vice-Consul and Third Secretary in the British Legation in Saigon (1951-1954);
Second Secretary in the British Legation in Saigon (1952-1954)

Winston Churchill, Prime Minister (1951-1955)

Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary (1951-1955)

Appendix 2 – Oral History Consent Forms



CONSENT FORM (*Version 1*)

Study title: An Imperial Command Centre: The U.S. Embassy to Saigon and the Construction of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1950-57

Researcher name: Alex Ferguson
Staff/Student number: 221608873
ERGO reference number: 4852

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected

I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.

Name of participant (print name)..... GEORGE B. LAMBRAKIS

Signature of participant..... G.B. Lambakis

Date..... 15/12/12

CONSENT FORM (Version 1)

Study title: The U.S. Embassy to Saigon and the Construction of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1950-57

Researcher name: Alex Ferguson
Staff/Student number: 221608873
ERGO reference number: 4852

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.



I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study



I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected



I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.

Name of participant (print name).....

Signature of participant.....

Date.....

CONSENT FORM (Version 1)

Study title: An Imperial Command Centre: The U.S. Embassy to Saigon and the Construction of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1950-57

Researcher name: Alex Ferguson
Staff/Student number: 221608873
ERGO reference number: 4852

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the Information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected

I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.

Name of participant (print name).....

BOEUS PHILLIPS

Signature of participant.....

[Handwritten signature]

Date.....

04/29/2013

CONSENT FORM (Version 1)

Study title: The U.S. Embassy to Saigon and the Construction of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1950-57

Researcher name: Alex Ferguson
Staff/Student number: 221608873
ERGO reference number: 4852

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

 JK

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study

 JL

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected

 JL

I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.

Name of participant (print name)..... JOHN C. CLOAKE.....

Signature of participant..... J.C. Cloake.....

Date..... 21.2.2014.....

CONSENT FORM (Version 1)

Study title: An Imperial Command Centre: The U.S. Embassy to Saigon and the Construction of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1950-57

Researcher name: Alex Ferguson
Staff/Student number: 221608873
ERGO reference number: 4852

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

WJF

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study

WJF

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected

WJF

I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.

Name of participant (print name)

William J Cunningham

Signature of participant

William J Cunningham

Date

December 13, 2012

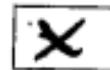
CONSENT FORM (Version 1)

Study title: An Imperial Command Centre: The U.S. Embassy to Saigon and the Construction of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1950-57

Researcher name: Alex Ferguson
Staff/Student number: 221608873
ERGO reference number: 4852

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.



I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study



I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected



I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.

Name of participant (print name).....John Gunther Dean.....

Signature of participant.....John Gunther Dean.....

Date.....31 December 2012.....

Donald r Heath jr

Alan Heath [alanh2723@aol.com]

To:
Ferguson A.D.

Actions

Hi Alex,

20 September 2017 18:09

I am the son of Donald. I was going thru his computer when I came across an email from you to him. Unfortunately my father passed away on march 26 of 2017. I believe that my father would be okay with using the letter how you see fit. Good luck on your book

Alan Heath
Independent Associate for Legal Shield
<http://www.legalshield.com/hub/atheath64>
510-367-0847

CONSENT FORM (Version 1)

Study title: "Between Scylla and Charybdis": The U.S. Embassy in Saigon and the American Effort to Chart a Course Between the Cold War and Decolonization in Vietnam, 1950-54

Researcher name: Alex Ferguson
Staff/Student number: 221608873
ERGO reference number: 4852

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

WVH

I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study

WVH

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected

WVH

I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this study. All files containing any personal data will be made anonymous.

Name of participant (print name) WILLIAM J. VANDEN HEUVEL

Signature of participant William J. vanden Heuvel

Date May 3, 2016

Bibliography

Archival Sources

Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library (DDEL), Abilene, Kansas

J. Lawton Collins Papers

Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers

Ann Whitman File

White House Central Files, 1953-1961

John Foster Dulles Papers

Personnel Series

Telephone Conversation Series

White House Memoranda Series

National Security Staff Papers

Republican National Committee Papers

Harry S. Truman Presidential Library (HSTL), Independence, Missouri

Dean G. Acheson Papers

James P. Hendrick Papers

John F. Melby Papers

Psychological Strategy Board Files

Theodore Tannenwald, Jr. Papers

Harry S. Truman Papers

White House Central Files

Liddell Hart Military Archives, Kings College, London

Minutes of Meetings of the National Security Council: First Supplement, 1947-1956

National Archives Records Administration II (USNA), College Park, Maryland

Record Group 59

General Records of the Department of State, 1910-1963, Central File

Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs: Office of Southeast Asian Affairs; Subject Files

Records of the Director, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs

Records of the Philippine and Southeast Asian Division, 1949-1952

Records Relating to the Mutual Security Assistance Program (Far East), 1949-1954

Record Group 84

Vietnam, U.S. Consulate, Hanoi, Classified General Records, 1949-1954

Vietnam, U.S. Embassy & Consulate, Saigon, Classified General Records, 1946-1963

Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, General Records, 1936-1963

Vietnam, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, Supplemental Classified Records, 1950-1955

Record Group 469

Office of the Director, Mission to Vietnam

The National Army Museum, Chelsea, London

Lt Col Arthur Geoffrey Trevor-Wilson Papers

Letters of Brigadier T. H. Spear

The National Archives (TNA), Kew, London

FO 371, Foreign Office: Political Departments: General Correspondence from 1906-1966

FO 474, Foreign Office: Confidential Print Indo-China, 1947-1973

FO 959, Foreign Office: Consulates, French Indo-China: Various Papers, 1945-1959

Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

Robert Blum Papers

Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Joseph Mark Lauinger Memorial Library,
University of Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

Graham Greene Papers

Walston-Greene Papers

Online Primary Source Collections

The American Presidency Project, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>> [accessed 31 May 2018]

Central Intelligence Agency Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room

Declassified Document Reference System, University of Oxford

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946. The Far East, Volume VIII, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946)

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950. East Asia and Pacific, Volume VI, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950)

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951. Asia and the Pacific, Volume VI, Part 1, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1951)

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. General: Economic and Political Matters, Volume I, Part 2, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952-1954)

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. Africa and South Asia, Volume XI, Part 2, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952-1954)

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. East Asia and Pacific, Volume XII, Part 1, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952-1954)

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. East Asia and Pacific, Volume XII, Part 2, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952-1954)

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. Indochina, Volume XIII, Part 1, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952-1954)

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. Indochina, Volume XIII, Part 2, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952-1954)

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954. The Geneva Conference, Volume XVI (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952-1954)

Printed Primary Sources

Foreign Service List, July 1955 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955)

Foreign Service List, April 1963 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963)

The Department of State Biographic Register, 1955 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955)

The Pentagon Papers: The Defense History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam, Volume 1, Gravel Edition (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971)

Who's Who in America: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Living Men and Women, Vol. 26, 1950-51 (Two Years) (Chicago, IL: The A. N. Marquis Company, 1951)

Oral Histories

British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, Churchill College, Cambridge

John C. Cloake

Frontline Diplomacy: The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Oscar Vance Armstrong

Robert R. Bowie

Christian A. Chapman

Scott Cohen

Merritt N. Cootes

Thomas J. Corcoran

John Gunther Dean

Robert F. Franklin

Kingsley W. Hamilton

Hosley G. Handyside

Kempton B. Jenkins

Charlotte Loris

Douglas MacArthur II

Richard C. Matheron

L. Michael Rives

Albert L. Seligmann

Howard R. Simpson

Albert Stoffel

William D. Wolle

Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri

David K. E. Bruce

John F. Melby

John H. Ohly

Theodore Tannenwald, Jr.

Interviews and Correspondence with the Author

Ian Day Adams

John C. Cloake

William J. Cunningham

John Gunther Dean

Donald Heath, Jr.

George B. Lambrakis

Rufus Phillips

William J. vanden Heuvel

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts

Edmund Gullion

Jimmy C. Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia

John Gunther Dean

The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas

Dorothy Reese Bloomfield

Newspapers and Magazines

Army Times

Chicago Tribune

Department of State Bulletin

Life

New York Times

St. Petersburg Times

Stanford Daily

Tuscaloosa News

Washington Post

Memoirs and Diaries

Acheson, Dean, *Present at the Creation* (New York: Norton, 1969)

Allen, George W., *None So Blind: A Personal Account of the Intelligence Failure in Vietnam* (Chicago, IL: Iva R. Dee, 2001)

Allison, John, *Ambassador from the Prairie or Allison Wonderland* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1973)

Bidault, Georges, *Resistance: The Political Autobiography of Georges Bidault*, trans. by Marianne Sinclair (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967)

Bodard, Lucien, *The Quicksand War: Prelude to Vietnam* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967)

Colby, William, with James McCargar, *Lost Victory: A Firsthand Account of America's Sixteen-Year Involvement in Vietnam* (Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books, 1990)

Cooper, Chester L., *In the Shadows of History: Fifty Years Behind the Scenes of Cold War Diplomacy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005)

Davies, John Paton, *China Hand: An Autobiography* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012)

Dewey, Thomas, *Journey to the Far Pacific* (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1952)

Diem, Bui, with David Chanoff, *In the Jaws of History* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1987)

Douglas, William O., *North of Malaya: Adventure on Five Fronts* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1953)

Elliott, Duong Van Mai, *The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

- Fall, Dorothy, *Bernard Fall: Memories of a Soldier-Scholar* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2006)
- Flood, Danielle, *The Unquiet Daughter: A Memoir of Betrayal and Love* (Portsmouth, NH: Piscataqua Press, 2016)
- Graham, Andrew, *Interval in Indo-China* (London: Macmillan and Co Ltd, 1956)
- Greene, Graham, *Ways of Escape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980)
- Ferrell, Robert H., ed., *The Diary of James C. Hagerty: Eisenhower in Mid-Course, 1954-1955* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983)
- Honaker, Keith, *The Eagle Weeps* (Knoxville, TN: K and W Publishers, 1994)
- Johnson, U. Alexis, *The Right Hand of Power: The Memoirs of an American Diplomat* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984)
- Ky, Nguyen Cao, *How We Lost the Vietnam War* (New York: Stein and Day, 1978)
- Lansdale, Edward G., *In the Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia* (New York: Harper Row, 1972)
- Lewis, Norman, *A Dragon Apparent* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1951)
- Lodge, Henry Cabot, *The Storm Has Many Eyes: A Personal Narrative* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973)
- McClintock, Robert M., *The Meaning of Limited War* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1967)
- Mecklin, John, *Mission in Torment: An Intimate Account of the U.S. Role in Vietnam* (New York: Doubleday, 1965)
- Millar, T.B., ed., *Australian Foreign Minister: The Diaries of R. G. Casey, 1951-60* (London: Collins, 1972)
- Nixon, Richard M., *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1978)
- Phillips, Rufus, *Why Vietnam Matters: An Eyewitness Account of Lessons Not Learned* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008)
- Reisman, Marty, *The Money Player: The Confessions of America's Greatest Table Tennis Champion and Hustler* (New York: Morrow, 1974)
- Richmond, Yale, 'Nation Building in Laos', *Foreign Service Life*, December 2011, <http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2012/0106/life/richmond_laos.html> [accessed 23 March 2018]

- Rowland, John, *Two Transitions: Indochina 1952-1955, Malaysia 1969-1972* (Nathan, Queensland: Centre for the Study of Australia-Asia Relations, Division of Asian and International Studies, Griffith University, 1992)
- Rusk, Dean, *As I Saw It* (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 1990)
- Shirer, William L., *Berlin Diary: The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent, 1934-1941* (Aylesbury: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1941)
- Sihanouk, Norodom, as relayed to Wilfred G. Burchett, *My War with the CIA: Cambodia's Fight for Survival* (London: Penguin Books, 1973)
- Simpson, Howard R., *Bush Hat, Black Tie: Adventures of a Foreign Service Officer* (Washington, D.C.; London: Brassey's, 1998)
- , *Tiger in the Barbed Wire: An American in Vietnam, 1952-1991* (Washington, D.C., Brassey's Inc., 1992)
- Smith, Russell Jack, *The Unknown CIA: My Three Decades with the Agency* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1989)
- Sulzberger, C. L., *A Long Row of Candles: Memoirs and Diaries, 1939-1954* (London: Macdonald & Co, 1969)
- Taylor, Maxwell D., *Swords and Ploughshares* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972)
- Topping, Seymour, *On the Front Lines of the Cold War: An American Correspondents Journal from the Chinese Civil War to the Cuban Missile Crisis and Vietnam* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2010)

Published Secondary

- Ennis, Thomas E., *French Policy and Developments in Indochina* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1936)
- Greene, Graham, *The Quiet American* (New York: Bantam Books, 1957)
- Lederer, William J., and Eugene Burdick, *The Ugly American* (London: Transworld Publishers, 1958)
- Shaplen, Robert, *A Forest of Tigers* (New York: Knopf, 1956)
- Thompson, Virginia, *French Indo-China* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1937)

Websites

'Donald Read Heath', Office of the Historian, State Department, <<https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/heath-donald-read>> [accessed 29 November 2017]

'The Economic Cooperation Authority', <<https://www.marshallfoundation.org/marshall/the-marshall-plan/history-marshall-plan/economic-cooperation-authority/>> [accessed 25 May 2018]

A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, By Country, Since 1776: Vietnam, Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State, <<http://history.state.gov/countries/vietnam>> [24 August 2017]

'History of Southeast Asia Studies at Yale', <<http://cseas.yale.edu/history-southeast-asia-studies-yale>> [accessed 4 September 2017]

Secondary Sources

Adamson, Michael R., 'Ambassadorial Roles and Foreign Policy: Eldridge Durbrow, Frederick Nolting, and the U.S. Commitment to Diem's Vietnam, 1957-1961', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 32 (June 2002), 229-255

Adas, Michael, 'A Colonial War in a Postcolonial Era: The United States' Occupation of Vietnam', in *America, the Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and International Perspectives*, ed. by Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner and Wilfried Mausbach (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 2003), pp. 27-42

Ahern, Thomas L., Jr., *The House of Ngo: Covert Action in South Vietnam, 1954-63* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 2000)

Almquist, Leann Grabavoy, *Joseph Alsop and American Foreign Policy: The Journalist as Advocate* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993)

Alwood, Edward, *Dark Days in the Newsroom: McCarthyism Aimed at the Press* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2007)

Ambrose, Stephen E., *Eisenhower: The President, Volume 2, 1952-1969* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984)

Anderson, David L., 'J. Lawton Collins, John Foster Dulles, and the Eisenhower Administration's "Point of No Return" in Vietnam', *Diplomatic History*, 12 (April 1988), 127-148

———, *Trapped by Success: The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953-1961* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991)

- Appy, Christian G., *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and National Identity* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016)
- Arnold, James R., *The First Domino: Eisenhower, the Military and America's Intervention in Vietnam* (New York: Morrow, 1991)
- Asselin, Pierre, 'The Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the 1954 Geneva Conference: A Revisionist Critique', *Cold War History*, 11 (2011), 155-195
- Baritz, Loren, *Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us into Vietnam and Made Us Fight the Way We Did* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1985)
- Bartholomew-Feis, Dixee R., *The OSS and Ho Chi Minh: Unexpected Allies in the War Against Japan* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006)
- Bass, Thomas A., *The Spy Who Loved Us: The Vietnam War and Pham Xuan An's Dangerous Game* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009)
- Beisner, Robert L., *Dean Acheson: Life in the Cold War* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)
- Bernhard, Nancy E., *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947-1960* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- Berridge, G. R. and John W. Young, 'Conclusion', in *The Washington Embassy: British Ambassadors to the United States, 1939-77*, ed. by Michael F. Hopkins, Saul Kelly and John W. Young (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 229-234
- , *Embassies in Armed Conflict* (New York: Continuum, 2012)
- Biggs, David Andrew, *Quagmire: Nation-Building and Nature in the Mekong Delta* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2010)
- Billings-Yun, Melanie, *Decision against War: Eisenhower and Dien Bien Phu, 1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988)
- Bischof, Günther, and Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: A Centenary Assessment* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1995)
- Blair, Anne E., *Lodge in Vietnam: A Patriot Abroad* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1995)
- Blight, James G., *Virtual JFK: Vietnam if Kennedy Had Lived* (Lanham, MD; Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009)
- Boot, Max, *The Road Not Taken: Edward Lansdale and the American Tragedy in Vietnam* (London: Head of Zeus, 2018)

- Boxer, Andrew, 'Winthrop Aldrich, 1953-57', in *The Embassy in Grosvenor Square: American Ambassadors to the United Kingdom, 1938-2008*, ed. by Alison Holmes and J. Simon Rofe (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), pp. 117-134
- Bradley, Mark Philip, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill, NC; London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000)
- Bradley, Mark Philip, 'Making Sense of the French War: The Postcolonial Moment and the First Vietnam War, 1945-1954', in *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, ed. by Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 16-41
- Brown, Anthony Cave, *The Last Hero: Wild Bill Donovan* (New York: Times Books, 1982)
- Brown, J. F., *Bulgaria Under Communist Rule* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1970)
- Bryson, Shareen Blair, *Resisting Hitler: Mildred Harnak and the Red Orchestra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000)
- Buell, Thomas B., *The Quiet Warrior: A Biography of Admiral Raymond A. Spruance* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1987)
- Burke, John P., and Fred I. Greenstein, *How President's Test Reality: Decisions on Vietnam 1954 & 1965* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1989)
- Buttinger, Joseph, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled, Vol. II Vietnam at War* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967)
- , *Vietnam: A Political History* (London: Deutsch, 1969)
- Cables, James, *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000)
- Campomenosi III, Louis, 'The "New York Times" Editorial Coverage of the American Involvement in Vietnam, 1945-1965: A Case Study to Test the Huntington Thesis of the Existence of an Oppositional Press in the United States' (unpublished PhD Dissertation, Tulane University, 1994)
- Carter, James M., *Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building, 1954-1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008)
- Casey, Steven, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- Catton, Philip E., *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002)

——, “‘It Would Be a Terrible Thing if We Handed These People over to the Communists’”: The Eisenhower Administration, Article 14(d), and the Origins of the Refugee Exodus from North Vietnam’, *Diplomatic History*, 39 (2015), 331-358

Cenerelli, Pierre, ‘Revisions of Empire: The French Media and the Indochina War, 1946-1954’ (unpublished PhD Dissertation, Brandeis University, 2000)

Cesari, Laurent, ‘The Declining Value of Indochina: France and the Economics of Empire, 1950-1955’, in *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, ed. by Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 176-195

——, ‘The French Military and U.S. Participation in the Indochina War’, in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954-1955*, ed. by Lawrence S. Kaplan, Denise Artaud and Mark R. Rubin (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1990), pp. 49-54

Chandler, David, ‘Paul Mus (1902-1969): A Biographical Sketch’, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 4:1 (Winter 2009), 149-191

Chapman, Jessica M., *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 2013)

Clymer, Kenton, *The United States and Cambodia, 1870-1969: From Curiosity to Confrontation* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004)

Coleman, Kevin, *A Camera in the Garden of Eden: The Self-Forging of a Banana Republic* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2016)

Colman, Jonathon, ‘Lost Crusader? Chester L. Cooper and the Vietnam War, 1963-68’, *Cold War History* 12 (2012), 429-449

Cooper, Chester L., *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1970)

Cosmas, Graham A., *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967* (Washington, D.C: Center of Military History, 2006)

Currey, Cecil B., *Edward Lansdale, The Unquiet American* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1988)

Daddis, Gregory A., *Westmoreland’s War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

Daurer, Richard P., *A North-South Mind in an East-West World: Chester Bowles and the Making of United States Cold War Foreign Policy, 1951-1969* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005)

Devillers, Philippe, and Jean Lacoutre, *End of a War, Indochina, 1954*, trans. by Alexander Lieven and Adam Roberts (New York: Praeger, 1969)

- Doling, Tim, 'In Search of Saigon's American War Vestiges', Historic Vietnam: Tim Doling's Heritage Portal, <<http://www.historicvietnam.com/us-vestiges/>> [accessed 8 November 2017]
- Dommen, Arthur J., *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001)
- Dorman, Shawn, *Inside a U.S. Embassy: How the Foreign Service Works for America* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books Inc., 2009)
- Duiker, William J., *U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994)
- Dunlop, Richard, *Donovan, America's Master Spy* (Chicago, IL: Randy McNally, 1982)
- Elkind, Jessica, *Aid Under Fire: Nation Building and the Vietnam War* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016)
- Engerman, David C., Nils Gilman and Mark H. Haefele, eds., *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003)
- Ernst, John, *Forging a Fateful Alliance: Michigan State University and the Vietnam War* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1998)
- Fall, Bernard B., *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 2002)
- , *Street Without Joy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972)
- Ferguson, Alex, 'Press Management and U.S. Support for France in Indochina, 1950-1954', *Diplomatic History*, 42 (April 2018), 228-253
- Fineman, Daniel, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947-1958* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1997)
- Fisher, James T., *Dr. America: The Lives of Thomas A. Dooley* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997)
- Ford, Eugene, *Cold War Monks: Buddhism and America's Secret Strategy in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017)
- Frankum, Ronald B., *Operation Passage to Freedom: The United States Navy in Vietnam, 1954-1955* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2007)
- Futrell, Robert F., *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The Advisory Years to 1965* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1981)
- Gardner, Lloyd C., *Approaching Vietnam: From World War II through Dienbienphu* (New York: Norton, 1989)

- Gelb, Leslie H., and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1979)
- Gibbons, William Conrad, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part 1: 1945-1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986)
- Gilman, Nils, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory and Cold War America* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2003)
- Goldstein, Gordon M., *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* (New York: Times Books, 2008)
- Goscha, Christopher E., 'Courting Diplomatic Disaster? The Difficult Integration of Vietnam into the Internationalist Communist Movement (1945-1950)', *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 1:1-2 (February/August 2006), 59-103
- , *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War (1945-1954)*
 <<https://indochine.uqam.ca/en/historical-dictionary.html>> [accessed 25 May 2018]
- , *The Penguin History of Modern Vietnam* (London: Allen Lane, 2016)
- Greene, Daniel P. O'C., 'John Foster Dulles and the End of the Franco-American Entente in Indochina', *Diplomatic History*, 16 (October 1992), 551-572
- Guillemot, François, *Dai Viet, Indépendance et Revolution au Viêt-Nam: L'échec de la Troisième Voie, 1938-1955* (Paris: Indes Savantes, 2012)
- Gurman, Hannah, "'Learn to Write Well": The China Hands and the Communist-ification of Diplomatic Reporting', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45 (April 2010), 430-453
- Halberstam, David, *The Best and Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972)
- Hammer, Ellen J., *The Struggle for Indochina: 1940-1955* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1954)
- Hammond, William M., *Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998)
- Haney, Patrick Jude, *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises: Presidents, Advisers, and the Management of Decision Making* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997)
- Harr, John Ensor, *The Professional Diplomat* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969)
- Harrison, Benjamin T., and Christopher L. Moscher, 'John T. McNaughton and Vietnam: The Early Years as Assistant Secretary of Defense, 1964-1965', *History*, 92 (2007), 496-514
- , 'The Secret Diary of McNamara's Dove: The Long-Lost Story of John T. McNaughton's Opposition to the Vietnam War', *Diplomatic History*, 35 (June 2011), 505-534

- Herring, George C., *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York: Wiley, 1979)
- , and Richard H. Immerman, 'Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu: "The Day We Didn't Go to War" Revisited', *The Journal of American History*, 71 (September 1984), 346-363
- , 'Franco-American Conflict in Indochina, 1950-1954', in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954-1955*, ed. by Lawrence S. Kaplan, Denise Artaud and Mark R. Rubin (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1990), pp. 29-48
- , "'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. by Richard H. Immerman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 213-233
- Herzstein, Robert E., *Henry R. Luce, Time, and the American Crusade in Asia* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. by Walter Shewring (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998)
- Hoopes, Townsend, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles* (London: Deutsch, 1974)
- Hopkins, Michael F., Saul Kelly and John W. Young, 'Introduction', in *The Washington Embassy: British Ambassadors to the United States, 1939-77*, ed. by Michael F. Hopkins, Saul Kelly and John W. Young (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 1-13
- Hunt, Michael H., and Steven Levine, *Arc of Empire: America's Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012)
- Immerman, Richard H., *John Foster Dulles: Piety, Pragmatism, and Power in U.S. Foreign Policy* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999)
- Jacobs, Seth, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia* (London: Duke University Press, 2004)
- , *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America's War in Vietnam* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006)
- , *The Universe Unraveling: American Foreign Policy in Cold War Laos* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 2012)
- Jennings, Eric, *Imperial Heights: Dalat and the Making and Undoing of French Indochina* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011)
- Jian, Chen, 'China and the Geneva Conference of 1954', *The China Quarterly*, 129 (March 1992), 103-122

- Kaiser, David, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000)
- Karnow, Stanley, *Vietnam: A History, The First Complete Account* (New York: Viking Press, 1983)
- Kinnard, Douglas, *The Certain Trumpet: Maxwell Taylor and the American Experience in Vietnam* (New York: Brassey's, 1991)
- Klein, Christina, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow, 1945-1961* (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 2003)
- Kolko, Gabriel, *Vietnam: Anatomy of War, 1940-1975* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986)
- Kurlantzick, Joshua, *The Ideal Man: The Tragedy of Jim Thompson and the American Way of War* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2011)
- LaFeber, Walter, 'Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina: 1942-1945', *American Historical Review*, 80 (1975), 1277-1295
- Lancaster, Donald, *The Emancipation of French Indochina* (New York: Octagon Books, 1974)
- Langguth, A. J., *Our Vietnam: The War 1954-1975* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000)
- Latham, Michael E., *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill, NC; London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000)
- , *Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010)
- Lawrence, Mark Atwood, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005)
- , 'Explaining the Early Decisions: The United States and the French War, 1945-1954', in *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National and Transnational Perspectives*, ed. by Mark Philip Bradley and Marilyn B. Young (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 28-45
- , 'Transnational Coalition-Building and the Making of the Cold War in Indochina, 1947-1949', *Diplomatic History*, 26 (July 2002), 453-480
- Lee, Steven Hugh, *Outposts of Empire: Korea, Vietnam and the Origins of the Cold War in Asia, 1949-1954* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995)
- LePage, Jean-Marc, and Elie Tenenbaum, 'The Unquiet Allies: French and American Intelligence Relations during the First Indochina War, 1950-54', *Studies in Intelligence*, 55:3 (September 2011), 25-37

- Lewy, Guenter, *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978)
- Lind, Michael, *Vietnam, The Necessary War: A Reinterpretation of America's Most Disastrous Military Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1999)
- Logevall, Fredrik, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999)
- , *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012)
- , 'Vietnam and the Question of What Might Have Been', in *Kennedy: The New Frontier Revisited*, ed. by Mark J. White (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998), pp. 19-62
- Lords, Carnes, *Proconsuls: Delegated Political-Military Leadership from Rome to America Today* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012)
- MacDonald, J. Fred, *Television and the Red Menace: The Video Road to Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1985)
- MacDonald, Peter G., *Giap: The Victor in Vietnam* (London: Warner, 1994)
- MacKinnon, Stephen R., and Oris Frieson, *China Reporting: An Oral History of American Journalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987)
- Marolda, Edward J., *The U.S. Navy in the Vietnam War: An Illustrated History* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2002)
- Mayers, David, *The Ambassadors and America's Soviet Policy* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)
- , *FDR's Ambassadors and the Diplomacy of Crisis: From the Rise of Hitler to the End of World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013)
- McKenzie, Brian A., *Remaking France: Americanization, Public Diplomacy, and the Marshall Plan* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005)
- McMahon, Robert J., *Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994)
- , *The Limits of Empire: The United States and Southeast Asia since World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005)
- McMaster, H. R., *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997)
- Melanson, Richard A., and David Mayers, eds., *Reevaluating Eisenhower: American Foreign Policy in the Fifties* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987)

- Melby, John F., 'Vietnam – 1950', *Diplomatic History*, 6 (January 1982), 97-110
- Miller, Edward, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013)
- Miller, Robert Hopkins, *Inside an Embassy: The Political Role of Diplomats Abroad* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, 1992)
- , *The United States and Vietnam, 1787-1941* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1990)
- Miller, William J., *Henry Cabot Lodge: A Biography* (New York: Heinemann, 1967)
- Milne, David, *America's Rasputin: Walt Rostow and the Vietnam War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008)
- Montague, Ludwell Lee, *General Walter Bedell Smith as Director of Central Intelligence, October 1950-February 1953* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992)
- Morgan, Joseph G., *The Vietnam Lobby: The American Friends of Vietnam, 1955-1975* (Chapel Hill, NC; London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997)
- Morgan, Ted, *Valley of Death: The Tragedy of Dien Bien Phu that Led America into the Vietnam War* (New York: Random House, 2010)
- Moskin, J. Robert, *American Statecraft: The Story of the U.S. Foreign Service* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2014)
- Moyar, Mark, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006)
- Nach, James, *A History of the U.S. Consulate, Saigon, 1889-1950* (unpublished study kindly provided to author by Mr. Nach)
- Nashel, Jonathon, *Edward Lansdale's Cold War* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005)
- Newman, Robert P., *The Cold War Romance of Lillian Hellman and John Melby* (Chapel Hill, NC; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989)
- Ngo, Binh N., 'The Vietnamese Language Learning Framework, Part One: Linguistics', <<http://www.seasite.niu.edu/jsealt/past%20issues/volume%2010/VN%20LLF%20Part%20I.pdf>> [accessed 23 March 2018]
- Nichols, David A., *Eisenhower 1956: The President's Year of Crisis: Suez and the Brink of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2011)
- Oberdorfer, Don, *Senator Mansfield: The Extraordinary Life of a Great Statesman and Diplomat* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2003)

- Osgood, Kenneth, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006)
- Pemberton, Gregory James, 'Australia, the United States, and the Indochina Crisis of 1954', *Diplomatic History*, 13 (January 1989), 45-66
- Pereze, Robert C., and Edward F. Willett, *Clarence Dillon: A Wall Street Enigma* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1995)
- Porter, Gareth C., *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 2005)
- Prados, John, 'Assessing Dien Bien Phu', in *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, ed. by Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 226-231
- , *Operation Vulture* (New York: Ibooks, 2004)
- , *William Colby and the CIA: The Secret Wars of a Conventional Spymaster* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2009)
- Preston, Andrew, *The War Council: McGeorge Bundy, The NSC, and Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006)
- Prochnau, William, *Once Upon a Distant War: Reporting from Vietnam* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1996)
- Protheroe, Gerald J., 'Limiting America's Engagement: Roger Hilsman's Vietnam War, 1961-1963', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 19 (2008), 262-288
- Rand, Peter, *China Hands: The Adventures and Ordeals of the American Journalists Who Joined Forces with the Great Chinese Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995)
- Randle, Robert F., *Geneva 1954: The Settlement of the Indochinese War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969)
- Rice-Maximin, Edward, *Accommodation and Resistance: The French Left, Indochina, and the Cold War, 1944-1954* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1986)
- Richardson, John H., *My Father the Spy: An Investigative Memoir* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005)
- Rotter, Andrew J., *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947-1964* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000)
- , *The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987)
- Roy, Jules, *The Battle of Dienbienphu*, trans. by Robert Baldrick (London: Faber & Faber, 1965)

- Ruane, Kevin, 'The Hidden History of Graham Greene's Vietnam War: Fact, Fiction and *The Quiet American*', *The Journal of the Historical Association*, 97 (July 2012), 431-452
- Rubin, Barry, *Secrets of State: The State Department and the Struggle over U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987)
- Rust, William J., *Before the Quagmire: American Intervention in Laos, 1954-1961* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2012)
- , *Eisenhower and Cambodia: Diplomacy, Covert Action, and the Origins of the Second Indochina War* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016)
- Schaffer, Howard B., *Chester Bowles: New Dealer in the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993)
- , *Ellsworth Bunker: Global Troubleshooter, Vietnam Hawk* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003)
- Schmidt, Hans, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995)
- Schrecker, Ellen, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston, MA: Little Brown and Company, 1998)
- Scigliano, Robert, and Guy H. Fox, *Technical Assistance in Vietnam: The Michigan State University Experience* (New York: Praeger, 1965)
- Shaplen, Robert, *The Lost Revolution: Vietnam, 1945-1965* (London: Deutsch, 1966)
- Sheehan, Neil, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1988)
- Sherry, Norman, *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume 2, 1939-1955* (New York: Viking, 1994)
- Simpson, Howard R., *Dien Bien Phu: The Epic Battle America Forgot* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's Inc., 1994)
- Smith, Jean Edward, *Eisenhower in War and Peace* (New York: Random House, 2012)
- Sorley, Lewis, *Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011)
- Spector, Ronald H., *Advice and Support: The Early Years of the U.S. Army in Vietnam, 1941-1960* (New York: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1985)
- Statler, Kathryn C., 'Eisenhower, Indochina, and Vietnam', in *A Companion to Dwight D. Eisenhower*, ed. by Chester J. Pach (Chichester: Wiley, 2017), pp. 494-516

- , *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2007)
- Stewart, Geoffrey C., 'Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.: An American Proconsul in Diem's Vietnam', in *Diplomats at War: The American Experience*, ed. by Simon J. Rofer and Andrew Stewart (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Republic of Letters, 2013), pp. 231-250
- Tarling, Nicholas, *Status and Security in Southeast Asian States* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2013)
- Taylor, John M., *An American Soldier: The Wars of General Maxwell Taylor* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 2001)
- , *General Maxwell Taylor: The Sword and the Pen* (New York: Doubleday, 1989)
- Thomas, Martin, *Britain, France, and their Roads from Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)
- , 'French Imperial Reconstruction and the Development of the Indochina War, 1945-1950', in *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, ed. by Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 130-151
- Thomas, Teresa Fava, *American Arabists in the Cold War Middle East, 1946-75: From Orientalism to Professionalism* (London; New York: Anthem Press, 2016)
- Tønnesson, Stein, *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began* (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 2010)
- Tucker, Spencer C., *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History*, 2nd edn (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011)
- Waite, James, 'Contesting "the Right Decision": New Zealand, the Commonwealth, and the New Look', *Diplomatic History*, 30 (November 2006), 893-917
- , *The End of the First Indochina War: A Global History* (New York; London: Routledge, 2012)
- Walker, Ben, 'Demanding Dictatorship? US-Philippine Relations, 1946-1972 (unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Manchester, 2016)
- Wall, Irwin M., *The United States and the Making of Postwar France, 1945-1954* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)
- Waller, Douglas C., *Wild Bill Donovan: The Spymaster who Created the OSS and Modern American Espionage* (New York: Free Press, 2012)
- Warner, Geoffrey, 'Britain and the Crisis of Dien Bien Phu, April 1954: The Failure of United Action', in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954-1955*, ed. by

- Lawrence S. Kaplan, Denise Artaud and Mark R. Rubin (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1990), pp. 555-577
- Western, Jon, *Selling Intervention and War: The Presidency, the Media, and the American Public* (Baltimore, MD; London: John Hopkins University Press, 2005)
- Wevill, Richard, *Britain and America after World War II: Bilateral Relations and the Beginning of the Cold War* (New York; London: I.B.Tauris, 2012)
- Whelan, Richard, *Robert Capa: A Biography* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985)
- Windrow, Martin, *The Last Valley: Dien Bien Phu and the French Defeat in Vietnam* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2004)
- Winters, Francis X., *The Year of the Hare: America in Vietnam, January 25, 1963-February 15, 1964* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999)
- Witlow, Robert H., *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Advisory and Combat Assistance Era, 1954-1964* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division of U.S. Marine Corps, 1977)
- Wyatt, Clarence R., *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993)
- Young, John W., *David Bruce and Diplomatic Practice: An American Ambassador in London, 1961-69* (New York; London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014)
- , ‘David Bruce and LBJ’s War: Vietnam Viewed from London, 1963-1968’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 22 (March 2011), 81-100
- Young, Marilyn B., ‘“The Same Struggle for Liberty”: Korea and Vietnam’, in *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, ed. by Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 196-214
- , *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991)
- Zervoudakis, Alexander, ‘“Nihil mirare, nihil contemptare, omnia intelligere”: Franco-Vietnamese Intelligence in Indochina, 1950-1954’, in *Knowing Your Friends: Intelligence inside Alliances and Coalitions from 1914 to the Cold War*, ed. by Martin S. Alexander (London; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1998), pp. 195-229