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Geneva and Indo-China

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The war in Indochina is in its eighth year. The offensive, though harassed and stalled, is still with the Viet Minh. Expert observers tell us that the French cannot win a substantial victory in less than two years, and unless something happens to galvanize their spirit and effort, final military victory may be impossible. Meanwhile, the political opposition to the French Government's policy in Paris is growing more vehement and their demands for a cease-fire have resulted in the convening of the Geneva Conference. They have plucked the Korean Truce as a precedent upon which to base their arguments that an armistice with the Vietminh is compatible with French honor. This, of course, ignores the fact that the French have consistently held that the war in Indochina is a "civil insurrection" which precludes UN interference while the war in Korea was against a recognized aggressor invading an independent state. It is said that the French Government hopes the Geneva Conference will be a silencer of its opposition; that the intransigence of the Communists will convince their countrymen that there is no possible settlement outside of military victory. On the other hand, it may also happen that the failure to bring results from Geneva may topple the Laniel regime, placing Mendes-France and his group - who would be pledged to terminate the hostilities even to the extent of withdrawing French troops - in a more commanding position.

At this date, it has not been determined whether representatives from the Associated States will participate in Geneva. To many Vietnamese, Geneva, in its larger measure, represents a betrayal of their nationalist movement. They ask: what has France to give in "give and take" negotiations. They answer: compromise with Ho Chi Minh by offering a coalition or partial recognition -- a move whereby those Vietnamese whose resistance has been consistent and determined would be fatally undercut.
Mr. President, next month the United States will sit down with Communist China, and other countries in a conference at Geneva. The subject of the conference presumably is the situation in Korea. There is every indication, however, that discussion will focus on the situation in Indo-China.

The Geneva Conference is the result of the Berlin meeting a few weeks ago and represents the price paid by us for French solidarity at the Berlin conference. It seems to me to be a partial Soviet diplomatic victory since it will, de facto, give a degree of recognition to the Chinese Communist government. The Soviet Union has wanted that; we have not. Mr. Molotov made it clear at Berlin that the Soviet Union wanted two things; the defeat of the European Defense Community and recognition for Red China.

The decision to meet with the Communists in Geneva was made by the administration solely on its own responsibility; there was no prior consultation with members on this side of the aisle. And judging by the reaction of the distinguished majority leader, Mr. Knowland, when he heard the announcement of the conference, the other side of the aisle must have also been kept in the dark.

Be that as it may, the United States is now committed to a conference with the Communists on the Far East. We cannot reverse the decision even though it may not have been a wise one. We have to make the best of it. The only way we can do so is to make certain that the free nations enter the conference with their strongest foot forward.

Secretary Dulles faces, in Geneva, the most difficult task of his career. The Conference there may well influence the outcome of the European Defense Community in the near future and the nature of events in Asia for decades to come.

The Secretary of State knows that he will face dangerous pitfalls, that his job will be extremely delicate and that he will need the greatest understanding
and the greatest possible bi-partisan support to succeed. I would not be honest if I did not say that, as an individual Senator, I am somewhat apprehensive about Geneva. I would not be honest, either, if I did not say that while we can and should raise questions, offer suggestions and give advice, we should also give to our Secretary of State as much encouragement and support as is possible.

It has been said many times but it bears repeating: the only way to negotiate successfully with the Communists is to negotiate from strength.

Will this be the case at the coming conference in Geneva? Has the administration exercised American leadership wisely to see that we will be negotiating from strength? Has it made certain that the free nations will go into the conference in unison and at full strength? Or are we drifting towards Geneva? Each country in its own way, without adequate preparation, without "Think-through", without a clear-cut sense of destination?

As I said before, it is too late to reverse the decision to hold this conference. It is not too late, however, to question the preparations for it.

And it is for this purpose that I wish to address myself briefly to the Indo-China situation. I want to make certain that with respect to this aspect of the coming conference, the United States sees eye to eye with friendly countries. I want to make certain that the free nations do not abandon the vital perimeter of Southeast Asia for a false peace of appeasement at Geneva.
Let me make clear that I am not opposed to a peaceful settlement of this or any other problem. If the conflict in Indo-China can be brought to a close without surrendering the area sooner or later to totalitarian communism, I shall welcome such a settlement. Anyone in their right mind would favor putting an end to bloodshed, if it can be done without appeasement of totalitarianism, without loss of freedom, without, in the long run jeopardizing the safety of this country and other free nations.

To achieve such a settlement on Indo-China at the conference table, however, requires the marshalling of the full potential of the free countries. It requires us, further, to be prepared to carry on the struggle to a successful conclusion in the event the Communists turn down a just and honorable settlement.

As the Senate knows, I have been deeply interested in the Indo-Chinese situation for some time. I believe that it is one of the key areas in the defense of freedom in the world. I believe the decision as to whether or not we will have, one day, to defend our own shores may very well be made on those distant shores. I would remind the Senate that Pearl Harbor was not attacked until after Indo-China was firmly in enemy hands.

Last fall I visited the three Associated Indo-Chinese states of Laos, Cambodia, and Viet Nam. At that time, I crossed paths in India with the distinguished majority leader who I know is fully cognizant of the importance of Indo-China. A few weeks ago the distinguished majority leader and I entered into a colloquy on the floor of the Senate on this very subject. It was at the time that the Administration announced that American aviation technicians were being sent to Indo-China. If I am not mistaken, we found ourselves in substantial agreement. If my recollection is correct, we felt that while the United States should make a contribution to the defense of Indo-China, we should not commit American forces to the fighting there.
I think that the distinguished majority leader would agree that three factors are essential if Indo-China is to be kept free of totalitarian domination whether by victory over the Communist-led forces of Ho Chi Minh or by negotiation. First, the French who are making profound sacrifices in Indo-China must continue for a while longer their great military effort in defense of the three Indo-Chinese states. And they must also continue their political effort to bring genuine national independence to these states. Second, the Indo-Chinese nationalist leaders must be able to rally their people to fight for their independence against communist domination. Third, military aid must be continued by the United States but American forces must not become involved in the conflict.

This three-pronged approach remains the key to a satisfactory solution of the Indo-China problem. It is necessary if the negotiations which are about to open in Geneva are to be successful. It is imperative if those negotiations fail. Unless it is followed, we may very well have to examine the whole premise of our policy with respect to Indo-China.

Is the Administration following this three-pronged approach? Certainly, the administration is interested in it. But what is being done to further it? Is the necessary American leadership being brought to bear? Or is the Administration just drifting? Drifting in Indo-China and drifting towards appeasement at Geneva?

We continue to receive optimistic reports from the Administration about eventual victory in Indo-China. I regret to say that reports from practically every other source indicate a stalemate of indefinite duration in Indo-China.

From Paris comes word that the French want to quit the struggle, almost at any price. I certainly sympathize with the situation in which the French find themselves. They have made great sacrifices to prevent the Communists from strangling the independence of the three Indo-Chinese states at birth. They are weary after eight long years of war. The drain of Indo-China seriously compromises
the role which the French should be playing in Europe. Nevertheless, the continued effort of the French in Indo-China is essential if this area is not to fall to the Communists. Has the Administration made clear to France the vital importance of her mission to Indo-China to freedom? Has the Administration done everything possible to encourage the French to continue? I believe it has.

Reports from Indo-China indicate that the local nationalist leaders, particularly in Viet Nam, are not proving very successful in rallying their people to defend the independence of the three states. These reports indicate that Ho Chi Minh effectively conceals his communism in the cloak of nationalism and remains the symbol of anti-colonial patriotism to many inhabitants of Viet Nam.

Why is this the case? Are the nationalist leaders too complacent? Are they not sufficiently representative of their people or responsive to their needs? When I returned from Indo-China last fall I reported on this matter to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the following terms:

> The basic problem which confronts all three governments and particularly that of Vietnam is to put down firm roots in their respective populations.

I said further that these governments must deal with the basic social and economic problems of their countries, that they must develop armed forces devoted to the national interest and that they must combat corruption. I warned, that
failure in these basic responsibilities of self-government will result in the achievement of the shadow rather than the substance of independence.

And that

It could also mean the rapid reduction of the three nations to chaos and the subsequent intrusion of some new form of foreign domination from close at hand.

In discussing the internal situation in Indo-China I do not wish to indulge in personalities. I have met many of the leading figures in the governments there and it would be inappropriate for me to measure one against the other. I do not think it inappropriate, however, for the Administration which has committed this country to the tune of over a billion dollars a year in Indo-China to look deeply into the internal situation there. Has the Administration sought to find out why popular support has not gathered more effectively behind the Viet Namese government? What does the Administration propose to do about it? Something needs to be done if the resistance of the Indo-Chinese people to communism is to be keyed to the requirements of the situation. Something needs to be done if local armies are to be trained as effective instruments of freedom.

Has consideration been given to the possibility, by France, of issuing additional public assurances to the Indo-Chinese states of full independence within or without the French Union as a means of rallying support to the Nationalist governments?

Has consideration been given to the appointment, by the United States, of three separate Ambassadors to the three Associated States as a mark of our confidence in their future?

Has consideration been given to the use of United States technical personnel - battalion company, - platoon commanders - to work under the French high command, to speed up the training of local troops in Indo-China? I understand that a new French Training Command has been established and that two United States officers
have been assigned to that Command. This indicates that the French might be changing their attitude in this respect. I am not calling for the despatch of fresh forces from the United States. But this country already has more than 750 training technicians on the Island of Formosa. They have been training the Chinese Nationalist armies for years. Isn’t it possible that at least a part of this highly-skilled United States contingent might be reassigned to Indo-China? Would they not have a more immediate utility in the latter area? The Communists could hardly take retaliatory measures against this type of assistance by the United States inasmuch as Red China already has more than 6,000 "advisers" in Indo-China. With this kind of assistance, the Vietnamese will feel, I am sure, that an indigenous army can be trained in two or three years, at most.

It is clear to most observers what would happen were the French to leave the scene immediately. A vacuum would result which the Communists would fill overnight. The above proposal would require the French to remain in military strength for two, perhaps three, years until trained Vietnamese could replace their troops. In reply to such an American position, Paris might well ask why French troops should continue fighting a war, even for two years, if there is no promise of eventual gain to the French. In reply to this, four points can be made:

1. The United States is most anxious to implement the French desire to stop the drain both on St. Cyr - the French West Point - and its treasury.

2. A definite proposal to withdraw French forces from Indo-China within a specified time - already suggested by the distinguished majority leader - would tend to stabilise France's political situation and help restore its position in Europe.

3. Such a proposal would give meaning to the French declarations about their intentions in regard to Vietnamese independence. With that kind of assurance, both parties could work more freely in defining the French Union and there is good reason to believe that Vietnam would be greatly encouraged to continue its voluntary association with France within the Union.

4. France has an historical obligation toward the Associated States. After many decades of colonial rule, France could be expected to continue its military commitment for two or three years so as to assure Vietnam's successful transition from a colony to an independent state.
One of the keys to the problem of Indo-China in many ways is the obscureress of the French position. The concept of the French Union is still so muddied that it can neither be bought nor sold. Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia recognize the values of a continued association with France but naturally want to forge that bond as independent nations. This proposal might help clarify the political, as well as the military position of France. It would certainly help to disavow the growing feeling among the Vietnamese and other Asians that the United States is principally interested in supporting France, whatever the cost, instead of assisting the Indo-Chinese peoples in finding freedom.

I do not know whether positive measures such as I have been discussing are practical. The Administration has not taken the Senate into its confidence and only the Administration has the facts on which to base action. I do know, however, that unless something is done, the free nations will drift into the Geneva Conference already defeated on the Indo-China question. I do know that unless there is unity of purpose and a willingness on the part of all concerned to make sacrifices and to rise to the realities of the situation, the only settlement which will be reached will be a settlement of appeasement.

And if no settlement on Indo-China is achieved at Geneva, what then? Is the free world condemned to continue indefinitely this wasting struggle in the jungles and rice paddies? Are the French to continue to lose the cream of their military manhood in the swamps of Indo-China? Is the genuine nationalist sentiment which stirs the fine people of the three Associated States condemned to bitter and endless frustration? Are we in this country to resign ourselves to an outlay of a billion dollars or more every year over the indefinite future to support this never-ending war in Indo-China?

This need not be the result. There is still time to end the drift.
There is still time, even before the Geneva Conference opens, to rally the forces of freedom to meet the situation in Indo-China. There is still time to assert a positive, purposeful leadership. There is still time, but it is running short. Will we make use of it before it is too late?