

Elections Balked

In July, 1955, under the provisions of the Geneva agreements, the two zones of Vietnam were to begin consultations on the elections scheduled for the next year.

But Premier Diem refused to talk with the Communists. And in July, 1956, he refused to hold elections for reunification. He asserted that the South Vietnamese Government had not signed the Geneva accords and therefore was not bound by them.

American scholars and government officials have long argued over whether the United States was responsible for Mr. Diem's refusal to hold the elections and therefore, in a sense, whether Americans had a role in turning the Communists from politics back to warfare.

Connivance by U.S. Denied

The Pentagon study contends that the "United States did not—as it is often alleged—connive with Diem to ignore the elections. U.S. State Department records indicate that Diem's refusal to be bound by the Geneva accords and his opposition to pre-election consultations were at his own initiative."

But the Pentagon account also cites State Department cables and National Security Council memorandums indicating that the Eisenhower Administration wished to postpone the elections as long as possible and communicated its feelings to Mr. Diem.

As early as July 7, 1954, during the Geneva conference, Secretary Dulles suggested that the United States ought to seek to delay the elections and to require guarantees that the Communists could be expected to reject.

In a secret cablegram to Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith, who filled in for him after he withdrew from the Geneva conference, Secretary Dulles wrote:

"Since undoubtedly true that elections might eventually mean unification Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh, this makes it all more important they should be only held as long after cease-fire agreement as possible and in conditions free from intimidation to give democratic elements best chance."

Following similar reasoning the National Security Council in May, 1955, shortly before consultations on the elections were supposed to begin, produced a draft statement, "U.S. Policy on All-Vietnam Elections."

According to the Pentagon study, it "held that to give no impression of blocking elections while avoiding the possibility of losing them, Diem should insist on free elections by secret ballot with strict supervision. Communists in Korea and Germany had rejected these conditions; hopefully the Vietminh would follow suit."

But on June 9, the account says, the Council "decided to shelve the draft statement. Its main features had already been conveyed to Diem."

Secretary Dulles's ambivalent attitude toward the Geneva accords is also reflected in a cablegram he sent to the United States Embassy in Saigon on Dec. 11, 1955, outlining Washington's position toward the International Control Commission.

Neither Help Nor Hindrance

"While we should certainly take no positive step to speed up present process of decay of Geneva accords," it said, "neither should we make the slightest effort to infuse life into them."

In May, 1956, in what the Pentagon account says is an "example of the U.S. ignoring" the Geneva accords, 350 additional military men were sent to Saigon under the pretext of helping the Vietnamese recover and redistribute equipment abandoned by the French.

This was "a thinly veiled device to increase the number of Americans in Vietnam," the Pentagon account says.

These men, who were officially designated the Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission or TERM, stayed on as a permanent part of the Military Assistance Advisory Group, the narrative says, to help in intelligence and administrative work.

Washington dispatched the TERM group, the Pentagon study discloses, "when it was learned informally that the Indian Government would instruct its representative on the I.C.C. to interpose no objection."

The I.C.C. is composed of representatives from Poland, India and Canada, with the Indian usually considered the neutral representative.

After the crisis with the sects in the spring of 1955 and the uneventful passing of the date for elections in 1956, American officials were hopeful that President Diem had succeeded.

"It seemed for a while that the gamble against long odds had succeeded," the Pentagon account says. "The Vietminh were quiescent; the Republic of Vietnam armed forces were

markedly better armed and trained than they were when the U.S. effort began; and President Diem showed a remarkable ability to put down factions threatening the GVN [Government of Vietnam] and to maintain himself in office."

The American aid effort, the study reports, was focused almost entirely on security. Eight out of every 10 dollars went to security, and much of what was intended for agriculture, education, or transportation actually went to security-directed programs.

For example, the account says, a 20-mile stretch of highway, built between Saigon and Bienhoa at the insistence of the MAAG commander, Gen. Samuel T. Williams, received more aid money than all the funds provided for labor, community development, social welfare, health and education from 1954 to 1961.

But despite American hopes and the aid effort, the insurgency in the countryside began to pick up again in 1957

and particularly in 1959. The number of terrorist murders and kidnappings of local officials rose dramatically, and enemy units began to attack in ever-increasing size.

As the insurgency grew, the small American intelligence network "correctly and consistently estimated" the nature of the opposition to President Diem and his own weaknesses, the Pentagon study says. The American intelligence estimates "were remarkably sound," it adds.

A special national intelligence estimate in August, 1960, for example, said that:

"In the absence of more effective Government measures to protect the peasants and to win their positive cooperation, the prospect is for expansion of the areas of Vietcong control in the countryside, particularly in the south-western provinces.

"Dissatisfaction and discontent with the Government will probably continue to rise.

"These adverse trends are not irreversible, but if they remain unchecked, they will almost certainly in time cause the collapse of Diem's regime."

However, the study relates, "the national intelligence estimates re Diem do not appear to have restrained the N.S.C. in its major reviews of U.S. policy" toward Vietnam.

The basic Eisenhower Administration policy papers on Southeast Asia in 1956, 1958 and 1960 repeated American objectives in "virtually identical" language, the Pentagon account reports.

Among the Goals of Policy

According to the 1956 paper by the National Security Council, these were among the goals of American policy toward Vietnam:

¶"Assist Free Vietnam to develop a strong, stable and constitutional government to enable Free Vietnam to assert an increasingly attractive contrast to conditions in the present Communist zone."

¶"Work toward the weakening of the Communists in North and South Vietnam in order to bring about the eventual peaceful reunification of a free and independent Vietnam under anti-Communist leadership."

¶"Support the position of the Government of Free Vietnam that all-Vietnam elections may take place only after it is satisfied that genuinely free elections can be held throughout both zones of Vietnam."

During the late nineteen-fifties, the

study relates, United States officials in Saigon were also optimistic in their public comments about the situation, despite the pessimistic secret reports they forwarded to Washington.

"While classified policy paper thus dealt with risks," the account says, "public statements of U.S. officials did not refer to the jeopardy. To the contrary, the picture presented the public and Congress by Ambassador Durbrow, General Williams and other Administration spokesmen was of continuing progress, virtually miraculous improvement, year in and year out."

Ambassador Elbridge Durbrow and General Williams for example, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the summer of 1959 that Vietnam's internal security was "in no serious danger" and that South Vietnam was in a better position than ever before to cope with an invasion from the North.

A Progress Report

The next spring General Williams wrote to Senator Mike Mansfield that President Diem was doing so well that the United States could begin a "phased withdrawal" of American advisers in 1961.

That was the situation that confronted President Kennedy when he took office early in 1961.

"The U.S. had gradually developed a special commitment in South Vietnam," writes the Pentagon analyst charged with explaining the problems facing President Kennedy. "It was certainly, not absolutely binding—but the commitment was there . . ."

"Without U.S. support," the analyst says, "Diem almost certainly could not have consolidated his hold on the South during 1955 and 1956.

"Without the threat of U.S. intervention, South Vietnam could not have refused to even discuss the elections called for in 1956 under the Geneva settlement without being immediately overrun by the Vietminh armies.

"Without U.S. aid in the years following, the Diem regime certainly, and an independent South Vietnam almost as certainly, could not have survived . . ."

In brief, the analyst concludes, "South Vietnam was essentially the creation of the United States."

An analysis of the Pentagon study, by Max Frankel, the Washington correspondent of The New York Times, will appear tomorrow.