

Chinese Communists' Position On a Neutralized Indochina

Cablegram from Under Secretary of State Bedell Smith at Geneva to Secretary Dulles, July 18, 1954.

Following despatch given us in advance by Topping of Associated Press apparently represents official Chinese Communist position and was given Topping in order that we would become aware of it. It begins:

QUOTE

The Communist bloc has demanded that the United States guarantee the partition peace plan for Indochina and join in an agreement to neutralize the whole country, a responsible Chinese Communist informant said today.

The informant, who reflects the views of Red China Premier Chou En-lai, said the Communists are hopeful of a cease-fire agreement by next Tuesday's deadline if the Western powers agree to 'bar all foreign military bases from Indochina and keep the three member states out of any military bloc.'

The informant said the Communists are pressing for the stamp of American approval on the armistice agreement—already okayed in principle by Britain and France—which would divide Vietnam between Communist leader Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh and Bao Dai's pro-Western regime.

'We believe that the US as a member of the conference should and is obligated to subscribe to and guarantee any settlement. Morally, there is no reason for the US to avoid this obligation.'

But the informant did not (repeat not) rule out the chance of an Indochina cease-fire even if the US refuses to okay the armistice agreement.

The Eisenhower administration has told France and Britain that they can go ahead with their plan for an Indochina settlement based on partition of Vietnam. But Washington has made it clear that it is not (repeat not) ready to associate itself formally with the plan which would sanction putting millions of Vietnamese under Red rule.

The Communist informant said the 'crucial issue' now in the Geneva peace negotiations revolves around whether the Western powers will agree effectively to neutralize Indochina.

'Refusal to join in such a guarantee,' the informant said, 'could seriously deter a final settlement. On other important points in the negotiations we are in agreement or close to it. We are hopeful and we believe that there is time to reach a settlement by July 20.'

French Premier Pierre Mendes-France

has promised to resign with his Cabinet if he fails to end the bloody eight-year-old war by next Tuesday. Fall of the French Government probably would doom the Geneva negotiations. The informant declared that American efforts to organize a Southeast Asia Treaty organization (SEATO) is a 'threat to any possible Indochina agreement.'

'Success or failure of the Geneva Conference may depend on the attitude of the American delegation in this regard,' he added.

END QUOTE

The above seems to me extremely significant, particularly in view of the fact that in my discussion with Eden last night he expressed pessimism, which he said was now shared for the first time by Krishna Menon. Latter had begun to feel, as I do, that Molotov wishes to force Mendes-France's resignation. Eden remarked that Molotov had now become the most difficult and intransigent member of Communist delegation. You will note obvious intention to place on shoulders of US responsibility for failure of Geneva Conference and fall of French Government if this occurs.

Molotov is insisting on a meeting this afternoon which French and British are trying to make highly restricted as they are apprehensive of what may occur. If such a meeting is held and if demands are made for US association in any agreement, I will simply say that in the event a reasonable settlement is arrived at which US could "respect", US will probably issue a unilateral statement of its own position. If question of participation Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam in security pact is raised, I will reply that this depends on outcome of conference.

Eden has already told Molotov that security pact is inevitable, that he himself favored it some time ago and that he would not (repeat not) withdraw from that position, but he made the mistake of saying that no consideration had been given to inclusion of Laos and Cambodia.

This final gambit is going to be extremely difficult to play and I do not (repeat not) now see the moves clearly. However, my opinion as expressed to you before leaving, i.e., that Molotov will gain more by bringing down Mendes Government than by a settlement, has grown stronger.