

# The Geneva 'Disaster'

When the Geneva agreements were concluded on July 21, 1954, the account says, "except for the United States, the major powers were satisfied with their handiwork."

France, Britain, the Soviet Union, Communist China and to some extent North Vietnam believed that they had ended the war and had transferred the conflict to the political realm.

And, the study says, most of the governments involved "anticipated that France would remain in Vietnam." They expected that Paris would retain a major influence over the Diem regime, train Premier Diem's army and insure that the 1956 elections specified by the Geneva accords were carried out.

But the Eisenhower Administration took a different view, the Pentagon account relates.

In meetings Aug. 8 and 12, the National Security Council concluded that the Geneva settlement was a "disaster" that "completed a major forward stride of Communism which may lead to the loss of Southeast Asia."

The Council's thinking appeared consistent with its decision in April before the conference began, that the United States would not associate itself with an unsatisfactory settlement. Secretary Dulles had announced this publicly on several occasions, and in the end the United States had only taken note of the agreements.

## The Voices of Dissent

But before the Council reached a final decision in August on exactly what programs to initiate in Indochina, several dissenting voices rose inside the Government.

The national intelligence estimate of Aug. 3 warned that even with American support it was unlikely that the French or Vietnamese would be able to establish a strong government. And the National Intelligence Board predicted that the situation would probably continue to deteriorate.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had also objected to proposals that the United States train and equip the South Vietnamese Army.

In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on Aug. 4, the Joint Chiefs listed their preconditions for U.S. military aid to the Diem regime:

"It is absolutely essential that there be a reasonably strong, stable civil government in control. It is hopeless to expect a U. S. military training mission to achieve success unless the nation concerned is able effectively to perform those governmental functions essential to the successful raising and maintenance of armed forces."

The Joint Chiefs also called for the complete "withdrawal of French forces, French officials and French advisers from Indochina in order to provide mo-

tivation and a sound basis for the establishment of national armed forces."

Finally the Joint Chiefs expressed concern about the limits placed on American forces in Vietnam by the Geneva accords—they were restricted to 342 men, the number of American military personnel present in Vietnam when the armistice was signed.

Despite these arguments, the study says, Secretary of State Dulles felt that the need to stop Communism in Vietnam made action imperative.

## Dulle's Views Persuasive

In a letter to Secretary of Defense Wilson, he said that while the Diem regime "is far from strong or stable," a military training program would be "one of the most efficient means of enabling the Vietnamese Government to become strong."

In the end, the study recounts, Secretary Dulles's views were persuasive.

On Aug. 20 the President approved a National Security Council paper titled "Review of U.S. Policy in the Far East." It outlined a threefold program:

¶ Militarily, the United States would "work with France only so far as necessary to build up indigenous forces able to provide internal security."

¶ Economically, the United States would begin giving aid directly to the Vietnamese, not as before through the French. The French were to be dissociated from the levers of command."

¶ Politically, the United States would work with Premier Diem, but would encourage him to broaden his Government and establish more democratic institutions.

With these decisions, the account says "American policy toward post-Geneva Vietnam was drawn." The commitment for the United States to assume the burden of defending South Vietnam had been made.

"The available record does not indicate any rebuttal" to the warnings of the National Intelligence Board or the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the account reports. "What it does indicate is that the U.S. decided to gamble with very limited resources because the potential gains seemed well worth a limited risk."

## A Team Already Sent

Although this major decision for direct American involvement in Vietnam was made in August, the Pentagon account shows that the Eisenhower Administration had already sent a team of Americans to begin secret operations against the Vietminh in June, while the Geneva conference was still in session.

The team was headed by Colonel Lansdale, the C.I.A. agent who had established a reputation as America's leading expert in counter guerrilla warfare in the Philippines, where he had helped President Ramon Magsaysay suppress

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## The Series So Far

**Events before Tonkin incidents:** Study says American-run covert war against North Vietnam preceded Tonkin Gulf clashes by months.

**Planning the bombing:** After Tonkin clashes, and before 1964 Presidential election, Johnson Administration planners reached "general consensus" favoring air war against North. Sustained bombing began in March, 1965.

**Ground war begins:** U.S. decided on offensive ground role after month of bombing failed to impede enemy. President Johnson ordered decision kept secret.

**Kennedy years:** Kennedy Administration's approval of covert warfare against North Vietnam in 1961 and "complicity" in ouster of President Diem deepened American involvement in Vietnam.

**1965-66 troop build-up:** Study links force expansion with U.S. planners' failure to anticipate enemy build-up. Air war was widened despite intelligence warnings that Hanoi's will could not be broken by raids.

**Disillusion in 1966-67:** Defense Secretary McNamara urged bombing cutback in October, 1966, and favored accepting Saigon coalition in May, 1967, becoming leader of "disillusioned doves" who tried to reverse U.S. course.

**Turnabout, 1968:** Amid shock of enemy's Tet offensive—with military privately reporting sweeping damage—generals tried to force President Johnson into major mobilization and drive for victory. Resulting policy clash brought on U.S. decision to de-escalate.

the Communist-led Hukbalahap insurgents.

So extensive were his subsequent exploits in Vietnam in the nineteen-fifties that Colonel Lansdale was widely known as the model for the leading characters in two novels of Asian intrigue—"The Quiet American," by Graham Greene, and "The Ugly American," by William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick.

A carefully detailed 21,000-word report by members of Colonel Lansdale's team, the Saigon Military Mission, is appended to the Pentagon chronicle.

According to that report, in the form of a diary from June, 1954, to August, 1955, the team was originally instructed "to undertake paramilitary operations against the enemy and to wage political-psychological warfare."

"Later," it adds, "after Geneva, the mission was modified to prepare the means for undertaking paramilitary operations in Communist areas rather than to wage unconventional warfare."

One of Colonel Lansdale's first worries was to get his team members into Vietnam before the Aug. 11 deadline set by the Geneva agreements for a freeze on the number of foreign military personnel. As the deadline approached, the report says, it appeared that the Saigon Military Mission "might have only two members present unless action was taken."

It adds that Lieut. Gen. John W. O'Daniel, chief of the United States Military Assistance Advisory Group, "agreed to the addition of 10 S.M.M. members under MAAG cover, plus any others in the Defense pipeline who arrived before the deadline. A call for help went out. Ten officers in Korea, Japan and Okinawa were selected and rushed to Vietnam."

While it says that the team members were given cover by being listed as members of MAAG, the report also points out that they communicated with Washington through the C.I.A. station in Saigon.

#### A Member of the C.I.A.

Colonel Lansdale himself is identified as a member of the C.I.A. in a memorandum on the actions of the President's Special Committee on Indochina, written Jan. 30, 1954, by Maj. Gen. Charles H. Bonesteel 3d. [See text, Eisenhower committee's memo.]

The memorandum, which is appended to the Pentagon study, lists Colonel Lansdale as one of the C.I.A. representatives present at the meeting. Allen W. Dulles, Director of Central Intelligence, also attended the meeting.

In the fall of 1954, after all the members had arrived in Vietnam, the report says, the team's activities increased.

Under Colonel Lansdale, "a small English-language class [was] conducted for mistresses of important personages at their request."

This class provided valuable contacts for Colonel Lansdale, enabling him to get to know such people as the "favorite mistress" of the army Chief of Staff, Gen. Nguyen Van Hinh, the report recounts.

When the Oct. 9 deadline for the French evacuation of Hanoi approached, the team sought to sabotage some of Hanoi's key facilities.

"It was learned that the largest printing establishment in the north intended to remain in Hanoi and do business with the Vietminh," the report relates. "An attempt was made by S.M.M. to destroy the modern presses, but Vietminh security agents already had moved into the plant and frustrated the attempt."

It was the mission's team in Hanoi that spent several nights pouring contaminant in the engines of the Hanoi bus company so the buses would gradually be wrecked after the Vietminh took over the city.

At the same time, the mission's team carried out what the report calls "black

psywar strikes"—that is, psychological warfare with materials falsely attributed to the other side. The team printed what appeared to be "leaflets signed by the Vietminh instructing Tonkinese on how to behave for the Vietminh take-over of the Hanoi region in early October, including items about property, money reform and a three-day holiday of workers upon take-over." The attempt to scare the people worked.

"The day following the distribution of these leaflets," the report adds, "refugee registration [of those wishing to flee North Vietnam] tripled. Two days later Vietminh currency was worth half the value prior to the leaflets."

"The Vietminh took to the radio to denounce the leaflets; the leaflets were so authentic in appearance that even most of the rank-and-file Vietminh were sure that the radio denunciations were a French trick."

#### Some Help From the Stars

In the South, the team hired Vietnamese astrologers—in whose art many Asians place great trust—to compile almanacs bearing dire predictions for the Vietminh and good omens for the new Government of Premier Diem.

To carry out clandestine operations in North Vietnam after the team evacuated Hanoi, the report adds, Maj. Lucien Conein, an officer of S.M.M., recruited a group of Vietnamese agents under the code name of Binh.

"The group was to be trained and supported by the U.S. as patriotic Vietnamese," the report says, "to come eventually under Government control when the Government was ready for such activities. Thirteen Binhs were quietly exfiltrated through the port of Haiphong . . . and taken on the first stage of the journey to their training area by a U.S. Navy ship."

Until Haiphong was finally evacuated in May, 1955, Civil Air Transport, the Taiwan-based airline run by Gen. Claire Chennault, smuggled arms for the Binh team from Saigon to Haiphong.

In exchange, the report says, the Lansdale Mission got C.A.T. the lucrative contract for flying the thousands of refugees out of North Vietnam.

As the report describes the team's actions, "Haiphong was reminiscent of our own pioneer days as it was swamped with people whom it couldn't shelter. Living space and food were at a premium, nervous tension grew. It was a wild time for our northern team."

Another team of 21 agents, code-named the Hao group, were recruited in Saigon, smuggled out on a U.S. Navy ship while disguised as coolies, and taken to a "secret site" for training, the report goes on.

Arms for the Haos were smuggled into Saigon by the United States Air Force, the report says, adding that S.M.M. brought in eight and a half tons of equipment. This included 14 radios, 300 carbines, 50 pistols, 300 pounds of explosives and 100,000 rounds of ammunition.

#### Hancuffed to a Leper

The Lansdale team's report does not tell what kinds of intelligence or sabotage activities the Binh and Hao groups carried out in North Vietnam. But it does recount that one Binh agent was mistakenly picked up by Premier Diem's troops on his return to South Vietnam.

"He was interrogated by being handcuffed to a leper, both beaten with the same stick to draw blood, told he would now have leprosy, and both locked up in a tiny cell together," it says "S.M.M. was able to have him released."

For fiscal year 1955, the report shows, expenses for the Saigon Military Mission ran to \$228,000. This did not include salary for the American officers or costs of weapons drawn from American stocks.

The largest item, \$123,980, was listed as payment for operations, including pay and expenses for agents, safe-houses and transportation.