

Neutralizing Indochina

The 1954 Geneva Conference and China's
Efforts to Isolate the United States

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The Geneva Conference from April to July 1954 ended the war between France and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), which to a great extent was a proxy war between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the United States. As active participants in the Indochina War, both China and the United States played significant roles in the conference, which led to the Geneva Agreements on Indochina. Yet few works have analyzed the conference from the perspective of U.S.-Chinese relations.

Based on declassified documents and memoirs from the PRC, Russia, and Vietnam, as well as sources from the United States and Great Britain, this article interprets China's actions at the Geneva talks in relation to the United States from a multilateral perspective. The article places China's diplomacy in the broader context of Chinese relations with Western countries and explains the PRC's policy in the context of its relations with its Communist allies, the Soviet Union and the DRV. The article elucidates Chinese leaders' goals in Geneva, the tactics they adopted there to realize their objectives, the perceptions among Chinese officials of U.S. policy toward the conference, and the impact all of this had on Chinese policymaking.

The article shows that the PRC aimed to neutralize Indochina to forestall direct U.S. intervention there, which would endanger China's southwestern flank. Chinese leaders sought to exploit the differences between the United States and its allies the United Kingdom and France, to pressure U.S. officials to agree to end the war in Indochina and thus forgo further U.S. involvement. The PRC also tried to prevent the United States from taking advantage of differences within the Communist camp. To that end, they pursued a united front with the Soviet Union and the DRV, which shared Chinese leaders' anxiety about U.S. intervention and urged North Vietnamese leaders to make necessary concessions to bring about peace in Indochina.

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PRC Policy in Geneva

The decision to hold the Geneva Conference was made in Berlin in early 1954, when the foreign ministers of the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and France met to discuss the German question. But Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov proposed a five-power conference, with the addition of the PRC, to discuss the issue of relaxing tensions in Asia. Although the United States opposed talking to the PRC, Molotov won the support of British and French leaders, and finally the Berlin meeting decided to hold the Geneva Conference to discuss the Korean and Indochinese issues. The participants included China and all other related states, but the U.S. government declared the conference was not a “five-power” gathering because the PRC was not a sponsor and the U.S. agreement to sit down with Chinese leaders did not mean diplomatic recognition of the Communist regime.¹ Moreover, U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles declared that “the Chinese Communist regime will not come to Geneva to be honored by us, but rather to account before the bar of world opinion.”²

To a great extent, the Geneva Conference resulted from the well-coordinated “peace offensive” the Communists had launched after Iosif Stalin’s death in March 1953.³ The new Soviet premier, Georgii Malenkov, declared at Stalin’s funeral that “[t]here are no contested issues in U.S.-Soviet relations that cannot be resolved by peaceful means.”⁴ As a first step the Soviet Union moved with the PRC to conclude the Korean armistice.⁵ Then, in September, the Soviet government suggested holding a five-power conference to discuss

1. The statement is transcribed in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954*, Vol. XVI, p. 415 (hereinafter cited as FRUS with appropriate year and volume numbers).

2. Robert F. Randle, *Geneva 1954: The Settlement of the Indochinese War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 48.

3. The latest works on the Soviet “peace offensive” include Klaus Larres and Kenneth Osgood, eds., *The Cold War after Stalin’s Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); and Geoffrey Roberts, “A Chance for Peace? The Soviet Campaign to End the Cold War, 1953–1955,” CWIHP Working Paper No. 57, Washington, DC: Cold War International History Project, 2011.

4. Vladislav Zubok, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 155.

5. On the Soviet role in ending the Korean War, see Shen Zhihua, “The Sino-Soviet Decision to End the Korean War,” in Zhang Baijia and Niu Jun, eds., *Lengzhan yu Zhongguo* [The Cold War and China] (Beijing: Shijiezhishi Chubanshe, 2002), pp. 182–215. See also Yang Kuisong, *Mao Zedong yu Mosike de Enen Yuanyuan* [Love and Hate between Mao Zedong and Moscow] (Nanchang: Jianxi Renmin Chubanshe, 2005), pp. 415–418. For the Soviet perspective, see Kathryn Weatherby, “Stalin, Mao and the End of the Korean War,” in Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 90–116.

tensions in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.⁶ The Soviet proposal was readily endorsed by PRC leaders, who declared that “all international disputes can be solved through peaceful negotiation.” Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai immediately proposed a political conference to solve the Korean problem permanently. Soon the PRC invited North Korean leaders to Beijing, and the two countries made a comprehensive proposal for the political conference.⁷

Meanwhile, the Communists started to call for a peaceful settlement in Indochina. Immediately after the Soviet Union again took the initiative, PRC leaders declared their support.⁸ In private, Chinese leaders tried to convince their Vietnamese comrades to consider a diplomatic solution. Mao Zedong sent a telegram to Ho Chi Minh on 23 November 1953 urging him to take diplomatic action:

Currently the pressure from French people’s quest to end the Vietnam War is increasing. Some members of the French ruling class also believe the invasion of Vietnam does not deserve the costs and advocate peace talk. [The French Premier Joseph] Laniel also twice formally expressed willingness for negotiation. But the American imperialists have tried to expand the invaders’ war in Vietnam since the end of the Korean War, and forced the French imperialists to fight to the end. In this circumstance, it is necessary and timely for the government of the Vietnamese Democratic Republic to formally express its willingness to end the Vietnam War through peaceful negotiations. Only in doing so can we take the banner of peace into our hands, encourage the struggle of the French people and all peace-loving people all over the world, and expose the lie of the French reactionaries who blame Vietnam for not wanting peace, and thus shift the responsibility for the war onto Vietnam. And only in so doing can we exploit and increase the contradictions between France and the United States.⁹

6. The Soviet proposal was published in *Pravda*, 30 September 1953, p. 1, quoted in Ilya Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954–1963* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 13.

7. Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, pp. 330–331, 333–336.

8. For the Soviet press reports about China’s proposals for a peaceful settlement of the Indochina war, see Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The Diplomatic Struggle as Part of the People’s National Democratic Revolution (1945–1954),” Vol. 2, pp. 13–15. This extremely important Vietnamese document was acquired by Christopher Goscha and translated by Merle L. Pribbenow for the CWIHP workshop on the Geneva Conference, Washington, DC, 17–18 February 2006. The document was drafted in 1976, before the deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations. Hence, its description of the DRV’s relations with China is fairly reliable. The available documents do not indicate whether or how the Soviet Union was involved in the Chinese proposal to the DRV. On Soviet policy toward Indochina before Geneva, see Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, pp. 1–14; and Mari Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations and the Role of China, 1949–1964* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 13–27.

9. Pang Xianzhi et al., *Mao Zedong Zhuan* [A Biography of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2003), pp. 552–553; and Wen Zhuang, “Wo Suo Jingli de Rineiwa Huiyi” [The Geneva Conference as I Experienced] in *Dangshi Bolan* [General review of the history of the Chinese

Mao seemed to convince DRV leaders, who, according to declassified Vietnamese documents, had also realized the limit of their strength and, like the Chinese, were worried about U.S. intervention. Although their confidence in negotiation may not have been as high as that of the Chinese, DRV leaders wanted to demonstrate their good will and separate the United States from its allies.¹⁰ Three days after Mao's message, Ho Chin Minh declared: "if the French government has drawn a lesson in this war, wanting to reach a truce in Vietnam via negotiations and solve the Vietnam problem through peaceful means, then the Vietnamese people and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam government are ready to respond to that wish."¹¹ A month later, Ho repeated his willingness to negotiate with the French at the seventh anniversary of the beginning of the war.¹² The Vietnam position was readily supported by Chinese and Soviet leaders, who urged peace talks on Vietnam and demanded "further detente" in Asia.¹³

Molotov's proposal in Berlin was a continuation of the Communist efforts. When Soviet leaders called for the five-power conference, their expectations were not high because they knew the United States would resolutely oppose the idea. But the proposal was designed to appeal to France and Britain, both of which were seeking a diplomatic settlement of the Indochina War, and thus to give the Soviet Union a political victory over the United States by advocating peace through diplomacy despite U.S. opposition. Contrary to Soviet expectations, however, the United States ultimately agreed—after being cajoled by the British and French—to take part in the conference.¹⁴

Communist Party], December 2005, pp. 18–23. Wen Zhuang, a Chinese adviser working in North Vietnam, was the DRV delegation's interpreter during the Geneva Conference. The existing literature does not explore Ho Chi Minh's initiative for diplomacy, but Chinese sources reveal China's possible influence on Ho. On France's willingness to negotiate with the DRV, see Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Diplomatic Struggle," p. 6. On the PRC's relations with the DRV after 1949, see Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 10–59.

10. Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Diplomatic Struggle," pp. 16–17.

11. Unpaginated primary sources included in Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), "New Evidence on the 1954 Geneva Conference on Indochina," Document Reader, Washington, DC, 17–18 February 2006 (hereinafter referred to as CWIHP Document Reader).

12. Pierre Asselin, "The Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the 1954 Geneva Conference: A Revisionist Critique," *Cold War History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (May 2011), pp. 161–163.

13. King Chen, *Vietnam and China, 1938–1954* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 282.

14. The Soviet strategy was so successful that U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had to admit: "If we had vetoed the resolution regarding Indochina, it would have probably cost us French membership in EDC [European Defense Community] as well as Indochina itself." See the transcription of his comments in *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. 13, pp. 1080–1081. For an evaluation of the actions of the United States and its allies in Berlin, see Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 17.

Soviet leaders had kept the Chinese informed about these developments throughout the five-power meeting. After agreement was reached to hold a Geneva Conference, the Soviet Union immediately asked the Chinese to push DRV leaders to attend.¹⁵

PRC leaders hailed the decision as “a move toward peace” and declared that China would attend the conference despite obvious U.S. opposition to negotiations and the fact that the PRC was not put on an equal footing with the “Four Powers,” which Soviet officials had worried would displease the PRC. According to Zhou Enlai, China attached great importance to the Geneva Conference and wanted to attain positive results.¹⁶ Within two weeks after the Berlin meeting, the PRC government had prepared a plan for the conference. At the same time, PRC leaders suggested to the USSR that a partition line along the 16th parallel in Indochina would be “a very advantageous proposal for Ho Chi Minh.” Meanwhile, Zhou made the same proposal to Ho and encouraged him to seek a ceasefire through “diplomatic struggle.”¹⁷ Why were Chinese leaders so enthusiastic about the Geneva Conference? Why did they so eagerly want a ceasefire in Indochina? Why was Zhou confident that China’s diplomacy would work in Geneva, given Washington’s aversion to the conference and hostility toward the PRC?

The scholarly literature on the PRC’s foreign policy has long stressed the significance of the Geneva Conference in boosting the PRC’s international position, but until recently scholars had not explored China’s policy at the conference in depth. The latest studies diverge on such important issues as the PRC’s goals, motivations, and tactics in Geneva. For example, Shu Guang Zhang believes that “through actively participating in multilateral diplomacy,

15. The Soviet Union provided the Chinese government with documents (from 23 January to early March 1954) about every development of the meeting in Berlin. See the list of documents provided in Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives (CFMA), Doc. No. 109-00396-01, esp. pp. 1–34.

16. Xiong Huayuan, *Zhou Enlai Chudeng Shijie Wutai* [Zhou Enlai’s first appearance on the world stage] (Shenyang: Liaoning Renmin Chubanshe, 1999), pp. 5–6.

17. Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, pp. 355–358; “Preliminary Opinions on the Assessment of and Preparation for the Geneva Conference,” 2 March 1954, in CWIHP Document Reader; Telegram, Zhou Enlai to Ho Chi Minh, 11 March 1954, in CWIHP Document Reader; and Telegram, Chinese ambassador in Moscow to Beijing, 6 March 1954: quoted in Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 17. The question of who first proposed the 16th parallel is not answered by the available documents. According to Chinese sources, Zhou first put forward the 16th parallel in his telegram to the DRV on 2 March. See Xiong Huayuan and Liao Xinwen, *Zhou Enlai Zongli Shengyua* [Zhou Enlai’s career as premier] (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1997), pp. 74–75. Gaiduk believed that as early as late January Soviet diplomats had tested French and British reactions to a partition along the 16th parallel, although he claimed that Soviet diplomats did so without approvals from Moscow’s allies. See Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 18. As early as late 1951, according to British sources, PRC leaders were contemplating the partition of Vietnam. See Nông Văn Dân, *Churchill, Eden and Indo-China, 1951–1955* (New York: Anthem Press, 2010), p. 54.

the Chinese leaders expected to construct an image of a 'normal state' and play a leading role in normalizing international politics in Asia."¹⁸ Chen Jian stresses the domestic orientation of China's policy: Chinese leaders, he argues, believed that negotiating with the big powers would raise the PRC's international prestige and bolster Chinese citizens' support for the regime.¹⁹ Although both Zhang and Chen touch on China's concerns over U.S. military intervention in Indochina, they do not further explore the impact of these concerns on China's policy, focusing not on U.S.-China relations but on the PRC's policy toward the Geneva Conference in general.

However, the PRC's policy was not made in a vacuum, and Chinese leaders could not go to Geneva without analyzing the policies of their opponents; in particular, their primary enemy, the United States. Therefore, from the perspective of Sino-American relations, the existing literature leaves unanswered some important questions, such as how Chinese leaders perceived U.S. policy toward the conference and China, and how that perception shaped Chinese policy in turn. That is, were the Chinese leaders reacting to the United States, or were they acting on their own initiative.

My scrutiny of documents from the PRC, the DRV, and the Soviet Union corroborates Qiang Zhai's argument that PRC leaders wanted to bring about peace in Indochina in order to preclude U.S. intervention by separating the United States from its allies.²⁰ I draw on recently released Chinese sources to go beyond Zhai's analysis, showing in detail how the PRC's perceptions of the U.S. threat and its relations with its allies influenced China's actions in Geneva and exploring more accurately the relationships among the Communist states. My study finds that relations among the PRC, DRV, and Soviet Union were cooperative and coordinated rather than beset by differences or conflicts, as Qiang Zhai and much of the existing literature on the Indochina War and Geneva argue.²¹

18. Shu Guang Zhang, "Constructing 'Peaceful Coexistence': China's Diplomacy toward the Geneva and Bandung Conferences, 1954-55," *Cold War History*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (November 2007), pp. 509-528.

19. Chen Jian, "China and the Indochina Settlement at the Geneva Conference of 1954," in Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall, eds., *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 240-262.

20. Qiang Zhai, "China and the Geneva Conference of 1954," *The China Quarterly*, No. 129 (March 1992), pp. 103-122.

21. Richard Immerman stresses U.S. leaders' speculations about the differences between the Soviet, Chinese, and Viet Minh leaders, although he does not believe that this perception inspired U.S. actions. See Richard Immerman, "The U.S. and the Geneva Conference of 1954: A New Look," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Winter 1990), pp. 43-66.

The PRC's policy was basically a reaction to the threat Chinese leaders perceived from the United States. Since the outbreak of the Korean War, officials in Beijing had felt pressure from U.S. military deployments in Korea and Taiwan, but in early 1954 they believed the possibility of direct U.S. intervention in Indochina was increasing. They noticed that the United States had publicly supported the French war effort. In January, U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles declared that China's military and technical assistance to the North Vietnamese would lead to "grave consequences which might not be confined to Indochina" and that the United States would "retaliate, instantly, by means and at places of our choosing," a doctrine that came to be known as "massive retaliation."²² Dulles soon called for "united action" in Indochina.²³ In April, he publicly warned that China's aggression in Indochina might lead to retaliation against the Chinese mainland. Shortly after that, U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon told journalists that U.S. troops might be sent to Indochina.²⁴ This was followed by President Dwight Eisenhower's warning of a "falling domino" in Asia if Indochina were allowed to be "lost" to the Communists. Dulles then went to London and Paris to push for the united action.²⁵ According to Chinese diplomatic reports, although U.S. officials agreed to hold the Geneva Conference, they were pushing France to continue the war and wanted to prevent the conference from discussing Indochina at all. Meanwhile, Chinese leaders believed, the United States had sent new military assistance to the French, and U.S. military commanders were striving to get authority over the indigenous Vietnamese troops who had been under French control.²⁶

In these circumstances, the Geneva Conference provided Chinese leaders with an excellent opportunity to prevent U.S. intervention in Indochina through diplomacy, and they believed the PRC could outmaneuver the United

22. For the text of Dulles's remarks, see *Department of State Bulletin*, 25 January 1954, p. 108; and Randle, *Geneva 1954*, pp. 29, 37.

23. U.S. Department of State, "The Threat of a Red Asia," Press Release, No. 165, Series S, No. 13 (Washington, DC: Department of State Public Services Division, 1954), pp. 1–6; and Randle, *Geneva 1954*, pp. 58–61.

24. James Cable, *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 53, 56; and Randle, *Geneva 1954*, p. 92.

25. "The French and British responses to U.S. clamor for 'United Action,'" 16 April 1954, in CFMA, 102-00159-04, pp. 14–17. Unless indicated otherwise, English translations of CFMA documents are my own.

26. *Neibu cankao* [Internal Reference], 16 November 1953, p. 7. These briefings prepared by the Xinhua News Agency were available to only a limited number of Chinese officials and provided the most important background for their policymaking deliberations. The only collection open to the public is available in the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Universities Service Center for China Studies.

States by exploiting the differences between Washington and its allies. PRC leaders noticed that Washington's attempts to increase U.S. intervention in Indochina ran up against the French, who were unwilling to cede their interests in Indochina to the United States, despite their reliance on U.S. assistance.²⁷ Chinese leaders believed that U.S. encouragement of France to fight on and the U.S. offer of military and advisory assistance had led to French resentment that the United States wanted to sacrifice French lives in pursuit of U.S. interests, with the U.S. government as yet unwilling to send its own troops to Indochina.²⁸ Leaders in Beijing also sensed that France and the United States also had opposing attitudes concerning the Geneva Conference. The United States downplayed the significance of the conference and opposed possible solutions, including the division of Vietnam, a coalition government, or a free elections. In contrast, French politicians attached a high value to negotiation. According to Chinese documents, on the eve of the Geneva Conference the question for many French officials was not whether they wanted war or peace but how to bring about peace. To get peace, according to Chinese sources, the French government was considering making concessions to the PRC, including granting it diplomatic recognition or allowing it entry into the United Nations (UN) in return for agreeing to end its assistance to the DRV. According to Chinese diplomats, French Premier Joseph Laniel declared that he was considering moving ahead with the negotiations without consulting the United States. Because the United States was pressuring France to approve the European Defense Community (EDC), the French had leverage to maneuver on their own vis-à-vis Indochina, according to Chinese Foreign Ministry analysis.²⁹

At a Chinese government conference in mid-February in preparation for the Geneva Conference, Zhou summarized the PRC's perception of U.S.-French relations:

On the Vietnam question, contradictions exist between France and the United States. France wants to have peace, and the United States does not want peace; France does not want to let the United States intervene in Vietnam, but the

27. "Premier Zhou Enlai's report on the national conference on foreign affairs of 1953," 5 June 1953, in CFMA, 102-00110-01, pp. 4-43.

28. "French attitude toward the Indochinese ceasefire negotiation as seen from the French parliament debate," 9-13 March 1954, in CFMA, 102-00158-01, pp. 71-73.

29. See "Latest development of the French and American contradictions on the issues of Indochinese ceasefire and 'European Army,'" 15-20 March 1954, in CFMA, 102-00158-01, pp. 75-79; "Our analysis of the French attitude toward the Vietnam problem," 13 March 1954, in CFMA, 110-00258-08, pp. 51-54; and "The American and French preparation for the Indochina issue to be discussed at the Geneva Conference," 18 March 1954, in CFMA, 110-00258-04, pp. 24-26.

United States is attempting to gain control of France's command over military affairs and training in Vietnam, a step that has been rejected by France. Therefore, our general policy line should be "showing carrot to France while using stick to deal with the United States."³⁰

To Chinese leaders' satisfaction, U.S. policy was not supported by another major ally, the United Kingdom. The Chinese knew that Britain had supported the French invasion of Indochina and had provided moderate military assistance to protect its colonial interests in Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia. But when the Indochina war worsened in early 1954, the British, according to Chinese officials, became increasingly worried that the United States would intervene in Indochina, which would provoke the PRC into participation, ultimately leading to a world war.³¹ Moreover, according to Chinese diplomats, British leaders were eager for trade with China and wanted to make use of Geneva to end the embargo on the PRC, which the United States had imposed in 1951. As PRC leaders learned, British trade policy was supported by other European states such as Italy and West Germany. Chinese diplomats highlighted an article in a West German newspaper that argued trade was the most powerful weapon the PRC could use in Geneva.³²

As the disagreements between the United States and its major allies became more obvious, PRC leaders believed they could frustrate any U.S. intention to move into Indochina by playing the Western powers against each other. In addition, Chinese officials believed they could push U.S. allies to make major concessions to China, such as cancellation of the embargo, allowing trade, or even refraining from vetoing China's entrance into the UN.³³ Their confidence was revealed by the issues they prepared to bring to the negotiation: In addition to a peaceful solution of the Indochina problem, the

30. "Transcript, Zhou Enlai's speech at a preparatory meeting by the Chinese delegation attending the Geneva Conference (excerpt)," 17 February 1954. The translation of the quotation is adapted from Chen Jian's translation in CWHIP Document Reader.

31. "Collection of documents on the British responses to the Indochina issue," 25 March 1954, in CFMA, 110-00248-04, pp. 16–21. For British policy toward the Geneva Conference, see Kavin Ruane, "Containing America: Aspects of British Foreign Policy and the Cold War in South-East Asia, 1951–54," in *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (March 1996), pp. 141–174; Geoffrey Warner, "The Settlement of the Indochina War," in John W. Young, ed., *The Foreign Policy of Churchill's Peacetime Administration, 1951–55* (Leicester, UK: Leicester University Press, 1988), pp. 233–259; and Matthew Jones, "The Geneva Conference of 1954: New Perspectives and Evidence on British Policy and Anglo-American Relations" (paper presented at the Wilson Center Workshop on the Geneva Conference, Washington, DC, February 2006).

32. "The American and French preparation for the Indochina issue to be discussed at the Geneva Conference," 18 March 1954, in CFMA, 110-00258-04, pp. 24–26.

33. *Ibid.*

Chinese wanted to expand discussion to the Taiwan issue and U.S.-China relations.³⁴

Building a United Front

While planning to separate the United States from its allies, PRC leaders closely coordinated policies with their comrades, something that has not been explored by other scholars. Documents and memoirs from the PRC, the Soviet Union, and the DRV allow the original positions of the three states to be documented for the first time. In early 1954 all three governments recognized the growing threat of direct U.S. intervention in Indochina and wanted to use the Geneva Conference to negotiate a ceasefire. The Soviet Union and North Vietnam also agreed to the PRC's tactics of exploiting the conflicting interests between the Western states in order to realize peace in Indochina.³⁵

However, the Communists differed somewhat on some major issues, especially the three most important problems they later faced at Geneva: the demarcation line, the status of Laos and Cambodia, and supervision of the

34. *Mao Zedong Zhuan*, p. 555.

35. For the PRC's position, see "Preliminary opinions on the peaceful solution of the Indochina problem prepared by Vietnam team of the Chinese delegation to the Geneva Conference," 23 March 1954, in CFMA, 206-00057-03, pp. 88-92; "Comprehensive proposal for the peaceful solution of the Indochina problem prepared by Vietnam team of the Chinese delegation to the Geneva Conference," 24 March 1954, in CFMA, 206-00057-04, pp. 99-100; "Proposal for restoring peace in Indochina," in CFMA, 206-00057-05, pp. 101-103; and "Draft proposal for the peaceful solution of the Indochina problem prepared by Vietnam team of the Chinese delegation to the Geneva Conference," 1-31 March 1954, in CFMA, 206-00057-09, pp. 195-202. For the Soviet position, see "Outline of directives on the issue of the restoration of peace in Indochina," 17 March 1954, in CWIHP Document Reader. For the PRC's analysis of the DRV's positions and its difference with China, see "Table of proposals for the peaceful solution of the Indochina problem prepared by Vietnam team of the Chinese delegation to the Geneva Conference," 1-31 March 1954, in CFMA, 206-00057-05, pp. 143-158. This extremely important document provides the most important information about the DRV leaders' considerations about the Geneva Conference at a series of Politburo conferences held in preparation for the negotiation, and it is the only available Chinese document revealing the differences between China and the Vietnamese leaders. The message in this document is consistent with that in declassified Vietnamese documents, such as Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Diplomatic Struggle." The following analysis of the DRV's positions is based primarily on this CFMA document. See also Qian Jiang, *Zhou Enlai yu Rineiwa Huiyi* [Zhou Enlai and the Geneva Conference] (Beijing: Zhonggong Dangshi Chubanshe, 2005), pp. 47-50. For the Chinese contact with Soviet leaders, see Telegram, Zhang Wentian to Beijing, 5 March 1954, in *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 12-13; Telegram, Zhang to Beijing, 6 March 1954, in *CWIHP Bulletin*, No. 16 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008), pp. 13-14; and Molotov's "Memorandum of Conversation with Zhang Wentian," 6 March 1954, in *CWIHP Bulletin*, No. 16 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008), pp. 86-88. For China's contact with the North Vietnamese, see Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, p. 358. For the Soviet-North Vietnamese contacts, see the memoranda of 5 and 31 March 1954, CWIHP Document Reader; and of 26 March 1954, as quoted in Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 17.

ceasefire. China proposed the 16th parallel as a temporary partition line in Vietnam. Although the Soviet Union accepted partition as “the middle position” they would seek in Geneva, the North Vietnamese had different ideas, despite Zhou’s repeated suggestions. First, DRV leaders could not agree among themselves whether to pursue an on-the-spot ceasefire or a clear line of demarcation. The former option would give them more territory and help them win an election if the French agreed to hold one right after the ceasefire. However, DRV leaders admitted that achieving this result would be difficult. Also, a demarcation line would require the DRV to withdraw its forces from southern Indochina and give up many bases it had built. Moreover, the DRV leaders who agreed to accept a demarcation line did not necessarily agree about where the line should be drawn. Because a line would suggest partition of Vietnam, at least temporarily, many DRV leaders regarded this as the *least acceptable position*.³⁶

On the issue of Laos and Cambodia, the DRV stressed the “shared destiny” of the states in Indochina and demanded a “general solution” to the Indochina issue, although they also acknowledged that the situation in the two other states differed from that in Vietnam. The Chinese accepted the North Vietnamese position that the three states would ultimately form a Federation of Indochina, but they focused on the current phrase and aimed at “three unified and independent states” that would later join in a federation “on the basis of common will.”³⁷ On the other hand, the North Vietnamese did not put forward any concrete solution to resolve disagreements among the three states.³⁸

The Communist positions on how to supervise the ceasefire are the best indication of the three states’ differing concerns. PRC leaders were most hopeful that a ceasefire in Indochina would preclude future U.S. intervention. Hence the Chinese were the only party to propose that the five powers guarantee any ceasefire reached in Geneva and that a supervisory commission be

36. “Table of proposals for the peaceful solution of the Indochina problem prepared by the Vietnam team of the Chinese delegation to the Geneva Conference,” 1–31 March 1954, in CFMA, 206-00057-05, pp. 143–158.

37. At this time, PRC leaders had little idea about the history and geography of Indochina, as well as the situation in Laos and Cambodia, so they readily accepted the DRV’s idea for an Indochinese Federation. See “Review of the work on the Geneva Conference (draft),” n.d., in CFMA, 206-00019-01, p. 51.

38. See “Table of proposals for the peaceful solution of the Indochina problem prepared by the Vietnam team of the Chinese delegation to the Geneva Conference,” 1–31 March 1954, in CFMA, 206-00057-05, pp. 143–158. On the evolution of the DRV’s idea for an Indochinese Federation, see Christopher Goscha, “Geneva 1954 and the ‘De-internationalization’ of the Vietnamese Idea of Indochina,” paper presented at the Wilson Center Workshop on the Geneva Conference, Washington, DC, February 2006.

established to ensure that the Indochinese states did not allow foreign troops and weapons on their territory. The Soviet Union did not specify a position on this issue, emphasizing instead key Soviet interests in Europe. For the DRV, adoption of the Chinese proposal would mean that North Vietnam could no longer get military assistance from the PRC, which by this time was Hanoi's only source of aid.³⁹

In addition, the Vietnamese still did not have high expectations of diplomacy, despite the Soviet and Chinese emphasis on the importance of negotiation.⁴⁰ For these two countries, the minimum objective in Geneva was to maintain direct negotiations between the French and the DRV, *even if* no agreement could be reached. Some DRV military commanders wanted to use military pressure to force the French to give up Indochina. Although the PRC had always staunchly supported the DRV and helped it launch a series of successful operations, Chinese leaders responded to the start of the Dien Bien Phu campaign in March by stressing that military actions must serve diplomatic purposes. Zhou told Chinese military advisers in Vietnam to win several battles before Geneva “in order to gain the diplomatic initiative,” and Mao urged them to keep the military pressure on the French but not to expand the fighting.⁴¹ PRC leaders also ruled out the possibility of sending Chinese troops to join the war directly, despite repeated North Vietnamese requests for China's direct intervention after their forces suffered heavy losses in the initial phase of the campaign.⁴² Determined to neutralize Indochina through diplomacy, the PRC got ready to stop assistance to the DRV once an armistice was concluded, and ordered that Vietnamese Communist troops being trained in China be moved back to the DRV as soon as possible.⁴³

39. For the DRV's reliance on the PRC's assistance, see Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The Diplomatic Struggle,” p. 14. According to Qiang Zhai, “Until 1954, China bore full responsibility for guiding and support the Vietnamese revolution.” See Zhai, “China and the Geneva Conference of 1954,” p. 106.

40. According to Asselin, the DRV leaders “expected the Geneva talks to be difficult,” and did “not harbour illusions that peace [would] come easily.” Therefore, the DRV leaders “ha[d] no high expectation about the Geneva Conference” even before the opening of the talks. See Asselin, “The Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the 1954 Geneva Conference,” p. 166.

41. Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, p. 358; and Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, *Jianguo Yilai Mao Zedong Wengao* [Mao Zedong's manuscripts since the foundation of the People's Republic of China], Vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1989), p. 480 (hereinafter referred to as *Mao Wengao*, Vol. 3).

42. Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations and the Role of China*, p. 36; Qian, *Zhou Enlai yu Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 67–69; and *Mao Wengao*, Vol. 3, p. 474. The Chinese leaders also knew about the U.S. press speculation that China would not send troops to Indochina even if the United States increased assistance to the French. See *Neibu cankao*, 7 April 1954, p. 3.

43. When meeting the North Korean delegation in Beijing on 17 April, Zhou revealed that the PRC would work against U.S. sabotage of Geneva and try to reach an agreement through diplomatic efforts.

The PRC's goal was not completely compatible with the DRV's. Although the Chinese wanted a neutralized Indochina and were willing to accept a temporarily divided Vietnam, the North Vietnamese wanted a ceasefire and ultimately a Federation of Indochina, but they did not have a clear idea how they could achieve even the short-term goal. Chinese leaders invited Ho Chi Minh to Beijing in late March to coordinate their positions, but they were able to reach only general agreements: a solution to the Indochina problem included a military ceasefire and political elections; the two sides should regroup their forces after the armistice; the French should finally withdraw their forces from Indochina on schedule; and elections should be held to create a unified Vietnamese government. The DRV also agreed to stay within the French union and maintain its economic and cultural ties with France as a way to induce France to negotiate. However, the two sides did not reach a consensus on the most important issues of how to achieve a ceasefire—Did they want a clear-cut demarcation line or an on-the-spot ceasefire?—and how to handle the issue of Laos and Cambodia.

The Communist differences on these key issues remained until negotiations began in Geneva. In early April, Chinese and North Vietnamese leaders went to Moscow at the request of Soviet officials.⁴⁴ The Communist leaders reached some general agreements, including that they would secure the DRV's independent participation in the conference and the "resistance governments" of Laos and Cambodia would participate in the Vietnamese delegation if they failed to gain status as independent delegations.⁴⁵ The goal at Geneva would be a ceasefire, guaranteed by the five powers, and withdrawal of all foreign forces from Indochina within six months of the ceasefire. Finally, the DRV's military action would continue until an acceptable political solution was reached; that is, they would follow a policy of "fighting while talking." But the three states failed to reach agreement on the most important question: whether they wanted a demarcation line or an on-the-spot ceasefire. Soviet and Chinese leaders again suggested the 16th parallel and they

On the same day, Mao said he believed "it is possible that an armistice could happen in Vietnam" and that, because of this likelihood, the North Vietnamese artillery units being trained in China should be moved to Vietnam as soon as possible. Otherwise, an armistice would prevent their return. See *Mao Wengao*, Vol. 3, p. 480.

44. "Memorandum of Meeting between Soviet Ambassador Pavel Yudin and Mao," 26 March 1954, in Shen Zhihua Personal Archives (SPA). The author is deeply indebted to Shen Zhihua for providing these translations of important Soviet documents. For the Soviet perspective on the Communist meetings in Moscow, see Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, pp. 22–24.

45. According to Goscha, DRV leaders did not "over-emphasize the request that the Lao and Khmer resistance governments participate in the conference" in their talks with the Chinese and Soviets. Goscha, "Geneva 1954," p. 11.

agreed that French and Vietnamese Communist troops would adjust their occupied territories after the ceasefire.⁴⁶ The Soviet Union had decided to let the Chinese and North Vietnamese take the initiative on the Indochina issue in Geneva, and Soviet leaders told leaders in Beijing and Hanoi that they would respect whatever decision they reached.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, preoccupied with the threat of U.S. intervention, the Communist states made up their minds that “any agreement on Indochina . . . shall contain a clause on the end of U.S. interference in Indochinese affairs.” To eliminate any excuse the United States might use to move into Indochina, the Communists decided to leave no impression that the PRC “at present is providing assistance to the DRV.”⁴⁸ In a series of instructions to the grassroots organizations of the Vietnam Workers’ Party (VWP), DRV leaders warned that the “ruling circles in the U.S. have openly and directly been intervening in the war of aggression” and were pushing France to “conscript troops and exploit our people with all methods in order to implement the policy of ‘using Vietnamese to fight Vietnamese, feeding war with war.’” Therefore, they said the VWP must support the Geneva Conference to defeat the U.S. plan of intervention.⁴⁹

On the eve of the Geneva Conference, PRC leaders’ determination to reach agreement was strengthened by reports from Chinese diplomats about the differences between the United States and its allies. According to Chinese

46. “A comprehensive plan for Indochinese peace issue prepared by the Vietnam team of the Chinese delegation to the Geneva Conference,” 5 April 1954, in CFMA, 206-00055-04, pp. 27–29. This Chinese document drafted during the Moscow meeting indicates that after the ceasefire the two sides would adjust their territories “in a suitable way.” The document is consistent with declassified Vietnamese sources that clearly point out the Communists’ failure to reach a consensus on this issue. See Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The Diplomatic Struggle,” p. 39; and “Work summary of the Geneva Conference,” n.d., in CFMA, 206-00019-01, p. 13. This new evidence contradicts Gaiduk’s argument that “during the negotiations in early April all principal questions relating to the Communist position at the forthcoming conference in Geneva were settled,” as well as Olsen’s contention that the DRV agreed to divide Vietnam into two zones during the Communist meetings in Moscow. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 24; and Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations and the Role of China*, p. 38.

47. On Soviet objectives in Geneva, see “Outline of directives on the issue of the restoration of peace in Indochina,” 17 March 1954, in CWIHP Document Reader; and Qian, *Zhou Enlai yu Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 63–65.

48. Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations and the Role of China*, p. 35.

49. Instructions by the Secretariat, 7 and 10 April 1954, in CWIHP Document Reader. On his way to Geneva, Zhou again met the North Vietnamese leaders in Moscow. The Communists approved the DRV “opinions on the situation and our strategies and policies.” See Telegram, Zhou to Beijing about his meetings with the Communist leaders, 23 April 1954, in CFMA, 206-00048-08, available in *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 18–19, and in *CWIHP Bulletin*, No. 16 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008), p. 15. However, no Vietnamese document outlining these plans has turned up. Considering what happened later, the Vietnamese Communists apparently failed to come up with any concrete plans and just stated some general principles in it.

intelligence, France was eager for a solution. Although the current French administration was not sure what actions it could take in Geneva, it was uninterested in united action with the United States.⁵⁰ PRC leaders noticed that Dulles's trip to Paris and London in mid-April failed to win either French or British support for the initiative. France simply rejected Dulles's request to issue a joint statement. The British, while agreeing to state that they would study the possibility of establishing a defense group in Southeast Asia, refused to issue a joint communiqué about the topic, preferring instead to give diplomacy an opportunity in Geneva. The Indian government, whose policy on Indochina PRC leaders believed reflected the British position, called for a ceasefire in Indochina in opposition to the U.S. desire for united action.⁵¹

To convey to Britain the PRC's willingness to reach agreement in Geneva, Zhou deliberately told the Indian ambassador to Beijing before he left for Geneva, "The Geneva Conference must not fail. The Chinese delegation will do its best to bring about an agreement, especially on restoring peace in Indochina," despite U.S. efforts to sabotage the conference. "The Western states such as Britain and France should be told that they are facing two different roads: they could either have good relations with Asian people and maintain part of their interests, or refuse this road and choose to walk the same road with the United States, thus losing everything."⁵² British leaders realized that Zhou was reminding them of the vulnerability of Hong Kong, a British crown colony.

Preventing the United States from Sabotaging the Conference

The opening session on Korea confirmed PRC leaders' perception of the tensions within the Western alliance. Chinese officials regarded Korea as a less serious issue, insofar as the war there had stopped and the Communists already had concluded that the United States was not interested in a permanent solution.⁵³ Yet the PRC delegation deliberately avoided mentioning Indochina

50. "Difficult situation facing France and the U.S. on the eve of the Geneva Conference," 9 April 1954, in CFMA, 102-00159-03, pp. 10–13.

51. Qian, *Zhou Enlai yu Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 79–80; and Li Lianqing, *She Zhan Rineiwa* [Verbal struggle in Geneva] (Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1994), pp. 15–18.

52. *Zhou Enlai Waijiao Huodong Dashiji*, p. 58; *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 15–18; and Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, pp. 360–361.

53. As expected, the discussion reached a deadlock three days after the conference because the United States did not want to solve the problem, and Britain and France were not interested, as Zhou reported

in order to increase the French appetite for negotiation. At the same time, the DRV maintained military pressure on the battleground. After British and French leaders expressed eagerness to solve the Indochina problem, the Soviet Union pushed the French to invite the DRV delegation to the conference. Meanwhile, Chinese officials noticed that the two U.S. allies were indifferent to the Communist accusations against the United States on the Korean issue.⁵⁴ Despite Dulles's statement at his press conference that he would not meet the Chinese premier unless their cars collided, British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden met Zhou shortly after the conference started. At the meeting, Eden expressed strong interest in developing relations with the PRC, especially trade. He went out of his way to distinguish Britain from the United States, telling Zhou, "we have nothing in common with the United States except the same language," and claiming Britain would not oppose PRC sponsorship of the conference, thus making it the five-power conference the Communists had pressed for.⁵⁵ Zhou judged from these observations that the British sincerely wanted peace in Indochina and concluded that "it is impossible for the U.S. to prevent the negotiations on the Indochina issue now."⁵⁶

As soon as the Indochina session started, Zhou pushed the DRV delegation to agree to let the French withdraw their wounded soldiers to demonstrate sincerity. But it did not take long for the gaps between the two sides' positions to emerge. First, they did not agree on the general goal of the conference. France was interested in a ceasefire but refused to discuss the future of Vietnam. Hence, the French delegation proposed to start negotiations about the ceasefire first. DRV officials, however, wanted to discuss simultaneously a

to Beijing. See Telegram, Zhou Enlai to Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, and the CCP Central Committee, 28 April 1954, in CWIHP Document Reader. Similarly, the Soviet leaders did not expect to solve the Korean problem, as Molotov had told Eden in Berlin. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 29.

54. Telegram, Zhou Enlai to Mao Zedong, 26 April 1954; and Telegram, Zhou to Mao, 1 May 1954, in *CWIHP Bulletin*, no. 16 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008), pp. 15–16. The Soviet Union did not insist on the attendance of the two "resistance governments" and was satisfied with the participation of the DRV delegation. On Molotov's efforts to invite the DRV, and Western reactions to his proposal, see Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, pp. 29–31. On the Communist plan for the attendance of the "resistance governments," see *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, p. 120.

55. Telegram, Zhou Enlai, 1 May 1954, in *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, p. 97, translated in *CWIHP Bulletin*, No. 16, (Fall 2007/Winter 2008) pp. 16–17; Telegram, Zhou Enlai to Beijing, 3 May 1954, in *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 402–407; and "Telegram regarding setting up diplomatic relations with Britain," 4 May 1954, in CFMA, 110-00023-04.

56. "British actions in the beginning period of the Geneva Conference," 7 May 1954, in CFMA, 102-00159-07, pp. 30–31; and Telegram, Zhou to Mao, 1 May 1954, in *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, p. 97. Chinese officials had learned that the United States planned to put off the negotiation on Indochina until the Korean sessions brought about a result, which meant Washington wanted to avoid the Indochina negotiation altogether, having expressed no interest in a solution to the Korean problem. See "IV: Preliminary opinion on a peaceful solution to the Indochina problem," 23 March 1954, in CFMA, 206-00057-03, p. 2.

ceasefire and a political solution that would lead to a unified Vietnam. They vowed not to stop military actions until a satisfactory result was achieved through negotiation, in line with the position they had forged with their Communist allies.

The second difference was about the supervision of the ceasefire. Although the two sides agreed about the necessity of supervision, they disagreed on the composition of the supervisory commission. The French suggested an ambiguous form of “international control” of the ceasefire, but the Communists suspected the French proposal would be largely the same as the U.S.-proposed military group, and they counter-proposed a commission made up of neutral states, including India, Pakistan, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Indonesia or Burma. The Western countries rejected this suggestion, arguing that “Communist states were not neutral” and that the presence of Poland and Czechoslovakia on the commission would render it useless, as they had learned from the commission supervising the Korean armistice.

The third difference concerned Laos and Cambodia. The Western side and the Laotian and Cambodian governments wanted to separate these two states from Vietnam because they had been invaded by the DRV. No fighting was actually taking place between these two states and France, and the so-called “Resistance Governments” in Laos and Cambodia were no more than Vietnamese puppets. The Western delegations demanded the unconditional withdrawal of DRV forces from Laos and Cambodia before any negotiation about a ceasefire in Vietnam could be conducted. The Communists, however, refused to admit that DRV forces were present in Laos and Cambodia, and they proposed an overall ceasefire in Indochina, signaling that they intended to represent the whole of Indochina, in support of their ultimate goal of building a Federation of Indochina.

To make matters worse, the United States was trying to exacerbate the conflicts between the two sides, which PRC leaders believed was the major reason for the deadlock. Despite the British and French requests, Dulles was uninterested in the negotiations and left Geneva even before the conference entered the Indochina phase. Even as the conference was discussing a ceasefire, the U.S. government publicized its plan to help France and the Indochinese states resist “Vietnamese invasion.” Meanwhile, the United States repeatedly demonstrated its intention to develop a “collective defense group” in Southeast Asia. Reports from Chinese diplomats only confirmed Chinese leaders’ suspicions that the United States did not want the war in Indochina to stop and was determined to sabotage the Geneva Conference.⁵⁷

57. 1954 *Nian Rimeiwu Huiyi*, p. 122.

To facilitate private discussions, the negotiations divided into restricted sessions at Molotov's request. However, this change of format did not result in any progress because both the DRV and France were increasing the pressure, expecting the other side to retreat first. The Viet Minh forces were preparing for new offensives after Dien Bien Phu, the French started talking with the United States about internationalizing the war, and they deliberately leaked this news as a way to press the Communists.⁵⁸ When that had no effect on the Viet Minh but did spark British protests, French officials explicitly warned the Chinese that they would seek U.S. assistance if the Vietnamese Communists refused to make concessions. At the same time, the French promised they would consider establishing diplomatic relations with the PRC if it could push the DRV to reach a satisfactory solution.⁵⁹ By late May, French officials became impatient and made a more serious threat, warning that if the Vietnamese Communists "did not make good use of their time," the French would have to "turn the war over to the United States." They requested direct meetings between the military representatives from France and the DRV to talk about the ceasefire.⁶⁰

To break the deadlock, the PRC encouraged the DRV delegation to make some concessions, particularly after Eden also warned Zhou that the military situation in Indochina would "deteriorate" if no agreement could be reached in Geneva.⁶¹ But the North Vietnamese were reluctant to follow the Chinese advice, despite their concern about U.S. intervention. The victory at Dien Bien Phu had emboldened DRV leaders. More importantly, officials in Hanoi were still divided on the question of how they could obtain a ceasefire. In this circumstance, Wang Jiaxiang, the Chinese vice foreign minister, suggested starting discussion on the ceasefire issue while keeping on the agenda the proposal for a political solution, a retreat from the Communists' original position of spontaneous negotiation on the two issues. Wang also suggested the DRV reconsider its position on Laos and Cambodia. He reminded Pham Van Dong, the DRV's chief delegate, that DRV newspapers had once acknowledged the existence of North Vietnamese forces in the two countries. Dong admitted this but preferred to avoid the issue in the conference.⁶² Chinese officials also

58. On the secret Franco-American talks, see Anthony Eden, *Full Circle* (London: Cassell, 1960), pp. 119–120.

59. *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 259–260.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 261–263.

61. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 122.

62. "Minutes of the Meeting of Wang Jiaxiang, Pham Van Dong and Gromyko," 15 May 1954, in CWIHP Document Reader. Meanwhile, the French were stressing to the Chinese officials the

proposed the temporary division of Vietnam “along the 14th, 15th, or 16th parallel,” but the DRV refused the idea as “politically disadvantageous” and instead proposed regrouping forces “according to the situation after the fall of Dien Bien Phu,” which would give the Hanoi government more than 80 percent of Vietnam’s territory. The Soviet Union supported the idea of division but avoided getting involved in the dispute and asked the two delegations to work out the differences themselves.⁶³

Under these circumstances, the negotiations failed to break the deadlock. On 25 May, after repeated requests from the Chinese, Pham Van Dong agreed to regroup military forces into zones decided by the two sides, which implied his acceptance of demarcation, and he also agreed to hold military commander meetings with France in both Indochina and Geneva. The military talks started on 1 June, but French officials soon complained to the Chinese that the DRV refused to talk about ceasefire details and simply put forward abstract principles.⁶⁴

Chinese leaders were dismayed by the lack of progress, in part because they were simultaneously facing a surge of pressure elsewhere. In the Taiwan Strait, after the most serious conflicts since 1949 broke out between the PRC and the Nationalists in May 1954, the United States sent aircraft carriers to the area. Meanwhile, Chinese leaders sensed that the United States was considering an alliance with Chiang Kai-shek and had sent a series of military leaders to Taiwan to discuss it. According to Chinese diplomats, U.S. officials were also visiting Southeast Asia and pressuring Britain and France for their cooperation in establishing a Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). PRC officials were aware that the United States planned to sponsor the organization with Australia, New Zealand, Britain, and France and wanted to include some Asian states. They noticed that President Eisenhower even declared U.S. willingness to move on without Britain if the latter was hesitant to follow the United States.⁶⁵

significance of differentiating Laos and Cambodia from Vietnam: The Vietnamese invasion of Laos and Cambodia would lead to a Southeast Asia bloc, which would put China in a disadvantageous position. For the minutes of the meeting between Chinese and French diplomats on 18 May 1954, see *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 259–260. For Zhou’s 19 May 1954 report to Beijing about this issue, see *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, p. 132.

63. Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The Diplomatic Struggle,” p. 40; and Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 37.

64. See the notes from the French-PRC discussions, 5 June 1954, in CWHIP Document Reader; Qian, *Zhou Enlai yu Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 263–264; and Randle, *Geneva 1954*, p. 232.

65. Regarding the tensions in the Taiwan Strait and U.S. official visits to Taiwan, see the numerous reports in the 21–27 May issues of *Neibu cankao*. For the Chinese Foreign Ministry analysis of U.S. efforts to conclude a Southeast Asia Defense Pact, see “U.S. actions in Southeast Asia after the

To safeguard Chinese interests against the United States, officials in Beijing wanted to use Geneva to pursue their original plan of ending the war by separating the United States from its allies. Their observations convinced them this strategy was still feasible, insofar as serious differences still existed among the Western states. According to Chinese intelligence, the French still refused to let the United States command Vietnamese troops, and, although the British agreed to the U.S. suggestion to hold a military staff meeting with other allies, they declared in advance that the conference would not include talks on the defense treaty in Southeast Asia.⁶⁶

At the same time, the DRV's top leaders were anxious about U.S. intervention and were pushing their delegation in Geneva for progress. In a telegram to the delegation on 27 May, the VWP Central Committee warned that the French were "play[ing] up and inflat[ing] the military threat against them" to find "a justification for sending additional reinforcements and for requesting American assistance." Meanwhile, DRV leaders acknowledged that the demand for restoration of peace among ordinary Vietnamese had "grown very strong." On the other hand, they admitted that they were unsure how to bring about peace and "[did] not have a clear understanding of the situation in France or of the international situation."⁶⁷

The PRC therefore took the initiative again. In a lengthy telegram to the Central Committees of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and VWP, Zhou encouraged the North Vietnamese to "enter discussions of substance" on the key issues of dividing zones, ceasefire supervision, and Laos and Cambodia. The DRV, he said, should "develop a more clearly defined solution" and "persistently take the initiative to pursue peace" instead of procrastinating in the negotiations, which would lead to failure. Zhou proposed dividing Vietnam at the 16th parallel and urged the VWP to be ready to make even more concessions. Zhou claimed that the Soviet Union had approved of this suggestion, and he called on the DRV to make concessions on Laos and Cambodia as well. The three countries of Indochina, Zhou argued, were delimited in "very clear terms" by national borders, which had existed before the French created the colonial state of Indochina. The Communist forces in both Laos and Cambodia were limited, and no independent

liberation of Dien Bien Phu and the contradictions between the U.S. and Britain and France," 28 May 1954, in CFMA, 102-000159-10, pp. 42-44.

66. "U.S. actions in Southeast Asia after the liberation of Dien Bien Phu and the contradictions between the U.S. and Britain and France," pp. 42-44.

67. Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Diplomatic Struggle," p. 24.

Communist party existed in either country, contrary to what the DRV had been claiming.⁶⁸

At the same time, Zhou made overtures to France and Britain. In a meeting with French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault, Zhou told him that China's goal was to restore peace in Indochina and that he would do his best to realize that goal. He promised that the regrouping and supervision issues could be solved and that Vietnam would join the French Union after its independence. Zhou frankly told Bidault that China was worried about U.S. intervention in Indochina and that he believed China and France had a common interest in stopping the fighting in Indochina.⁶⁹ He encouraged the French to be more active and take more initiatives, and he agreed that the negotiations should work on the demarcation and supervision issues simultaneously. Chinese diplomats soon started to talk with their French counterparts about the two issues. After the French complained again that the DRV just talked about principles and refused to make concrete proposals, Wang Bingnan, the head of the Chinese delegation, assured the French that "problems could be solved," implying Communist concessions.⁷⁰

When Zhou explored British intentions, Eden told him that Britain sought better relations with the PRC. He encouraged the PRC to send diplomatic representative to London and even offered to visit China. This was a highly significant proposal. No head of government, including those of Communist countries, had visited Beijing since the founding of the PRC, and the British still supported Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China (ROC) in the UN. On the issue of Indochina, Eden did not support Poland and Czechoslovakia as candidates for the supervisory commission, but he wanted to include more Asian states, implying the British Commonwealth members, through which the United Kingdom could exert influence. However, Eden also set a deadline for the negotiation and said he hoped the conference would be ended "in 10 to 15 days."⁷¹ In response, Chinese officials agreed to send a

68. Telegram, Zhou Enlai to Mao Zedong and others about the eighth restricted session, 30 May 1954, in *CWIHP Bulletin*, Issue 16 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008), p. 26; Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, pp. 371–372; Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Diplomatic Struggle," p. 40; and Goscha, "Geneva 1954," pp. 12–15. Zhou's telegram answers Gaiduk's question of what China did to convince the Vietnamese that partition served their interest. See Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 38.

69. *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 268–270; and Minutes of Zhou's Meeting with Bidault, 1 June 1954, in *CWIHP Bulletin*, Issue 16 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008), pp. 28–30.

70. *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 271–276; and Minutes of Wang Bingnan's Meeting with Jean Chauvel and Jacques Guillermez, 5 June 1954 in *CWIHP Bulletin*, Issue 16 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008), pp. 34–38.

71. *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, p. 239.

chargé d'affaires, something the PRC had earlier refused to do in protest over Britain's recognition of the ROC, and suggested an exchange of trade delegations. At the same time, the Chinese wanted to make a public announcement about the exchange of trade delegations in order to put more pressure on the United States.⁷²

The VWP Central Committee finally agreed on 4 June to Zhou's suggestion about temporarily dividing Vietnam at the 16th parallel.⁷³ The DRV delegation's acceptance of partition was a significant step forward, but Western governments demanded more concessions on the issues of supervision and Laos and Cambodia.⁷⁴ Britain nominated the five "Colombo powers" as candidates for the supervisory commission, and the West opposed granting the commission the right of veto, as the Communists proposed, because it would give Communist states so much power that they could make supervision impossible. On the issue of Laos and Cambodia, the French told the North Vietnamese that an unconditional withdrawal of DRV forces was "a prerequisite" for the negotiation to move on.⁷⁵

The Western side became increasingly impatient when DRV leaders proved unwilling to retreat further from their positions and simultaneously pressed on with military actions on the battlefield. U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith warned Molotov that the United States would intervene in Indochina if the Viet Minh had "too great appetites" and "overreached themselves."⁷⁶ Eden told Zhou directly that the conference would fail if no progress was made.⁷⁷ At the same time, the British changed their attitude toward an exchange of chargé d'affaires with the PRC and called off the Chinese trade delegation's visit to Britain after having previously agreed to it.⁷⁸ A French diplomat also warned the Chinese that the United States wanted both the Korean and the Indochinese negotiations to fail.⁷⁹ At the same time, the British government announced that Prime Minister Winston

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 420–424.

73. Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Diplomatic Struggle," pp. 40–41. The DRV made this decision under the pressure of U.S. intervention—coincidentally, just as U.S. leaders decided to give up that very option.

74. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 37.

75. Goscha, "Geneva 1954," p. 19.

76. Memorandum of Conversation, Smith-Molotov Meeting, 22 May 1954, in *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. 16, p. 899; and Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 36.

77. *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 165–166.

78. *Ibid.*, pp. 424–425.

79. *Ibid.*, pp. 101–104. The negotiation on the Korean problem ended on 16 June without achieving any result.

Churchill and Foreign Secretary Eden would visit Washington soon, which the Chinese worried would lead to a U.S.-British agreement on establishing SEATO.

Anxious about these signals, Zhou expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of progress in the military talks and warned the VWP that the United States would disrupt the conference if the North Vietnamese failed to carry the negotiation forward.⁸⁰ He urged the VWP to move the demarcation line to a location between the 16th and 17th parallels and called for concessions on Laos and Cambodia in return for French concessions on the dividing zones in Vietnam.⁸¹ Zhou said that British officials had assured him that if an agreement was reached in Geneva, Britain “can not imagine that any participating countries would use such an agreement to establish bases in Laos and Cambodia.” He urged the VWP to retreat on “the key issue” of Laos and Cambodia so that the conference could continue.⁸²

Under pressure from Zhou, the DRV finally agreed to withdraw its troops from the two states. Zhou immediately revealed this major concession to Eden, but he clarified that these two states should become “Southeast Asian type” countries, meaning neutral states, in which the United States should not build military bases.⁸³ When Zhou announced the concession in the plenary conference, he even agreed to allow Laos and Cambodia to import weapons for self-defense purposes, so long as they did not allow foreign military bases on their lands.⁸⁴ Pham Van Dong also formally declared that the DRV would respect Laotian and Cambodian independence and unity.

The Communist delegations’ concessions kept the conference from failure. French policymakers told their Soviet counterparts that the U.S.-British meeting in Washington did not matter and that negotiations at Geneva should continue “at the highest possible level.”⁸⁵ British Foreign Secretary Eden also assured Molotov that the foreign ministers should continue to discuss the problems of supervision and guarantees. Meanwhile British diplomats declared their readiness to accept China’s *chargé d’affaires*.⁸⁶ Under allied pressure, U.S. officials had to acknowledge that the Geneva Conference

80. Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, pp. 380, 382.

81. Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The Diplomatic Struggle,” p. 41.

82. *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 166–167, 169, 240–241; and Minutes of conversation between Zhang Wentian and [Harold] Caccia, 15 June 1954, in CWIHP Document Reader.

83. *Zhou Enlai Waijiao Huodong Dashiji*, p. 66.

84. *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 170–172.

85. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 39.

86. *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 428–429.

“should be kept going while there was hope of reaching reasonable settlement.”⁸⁷

In the meantime, political change in France also gave the Communists hope. On 16 June, French Premier Joseph Laniel was replaced by Pierre Mendès France. Chinese officials had long believed he was much more pro-peace than Laniel, and Soviet officials had learned from Mendès France’s foreign policy adviser in early April that the new prime minister wanted a ceasefire in Indochina and free elections in Vietnam.⁸⁸ Mendès France’s promise to the French people that he would resign if he could not bring about peace in Indochina by 20 July further reinforced the Communists’ impression that they could cooperate with the new French leader.

To build on the momentum, Zhou worked out a new position with the two other Communist delegations. The DRV was supposed to facilitate a solution in Vietnam by withdrawing all its forces from Cambodia and pursuing a political solution. Much the same was to happen in Laos, with only two regrouping areas in the north and two in the south. For Zhou, such concessions were necessary because:

The current situation is: if we propose a reasonable plan in the military meeting, it would be possible to solve the problem with France and reach a ceasefire quickly. As a result, we could push the new French government to stand up to U.S. intervention, and at the same time, delay the European Defense Community issue. Therefore, it would benefit both the East and the West.⁸⁹

To ensure that the North Vietnamese understood the significance of a peaceful solution, Zhou proposed holding a meeting with “a maximum number of comrades in control in the Vietnam Central Committee.” The VWP leaders agreed, seeing new indications of U.S. determination to get involved in Indochina. On 19 June, Ngo Dinh Diem became premier of South Vietnam. Viet Minh leaders saw this as a clear signal that Washington had its “lackey”

87. Telegram to Department of State about Smith-Molotov meeting, 18 June 1954, in *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. 16, p. 1189.

88. For Chinese foreign ministry analysis of French politicians, see “Analysis of the French ruling group,” 29 January 1954, in CFMA, 110-00258-09, pp. 56–57. For the Soviet contact with Mendès France’s policy adviser, see “MID USSR—Plans for discussions with Zhou Enlai and Ho Chi Minh,” in AVPRE, F. 022, Op. 7b, Pa. 106, D. 7, Ll. 23–26, quoted in Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations and the Role of China*, pp. 34–35. These documents modify Qiang Zhai’s argument that the Chinese initially were not sure of Mendès France’s intentions regarding Indochina before Zhou met him. See Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 58.

89. Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, p. 386. On the DRV’s considerations about Cambodia and Laos, see Goscha, “Geneva 1954,” pp. 18–24.

in place and that, if the Geneva Conference failed, the “Americans would have free rein” in Vietnam.⁹⁰

When the foreign ministers left the negotiation to their assistants in late June, Chinese leaders believed their efforts to prevent the United States from spoiling the negotiation on Indochina had worked well. Mao optimistically predicted that an armistice could be reached in July.⁹¹ However, the developments in Geneva were achieved at a price. The DRV’s agreement to separate Laos and Cambodia from Vietnam meant they grudgingly accepted that these two states would differ from the DRV in their political complexions. Thus, the Communists had to put aside, at least temporarily, the idea of an Indochina Federation.⁹² The fact that it was China that put forward the suggestion also sowed seeds of disagreement in Sino-Vietnamese relations, although at the time the two countries were satisfied with the progress in Geneva and wanted to continue the negotiation.⁹³ Chinese leaders understood this, and they were also aware that some North Vietnamese military leaders were still reluctant to resort to diplomacy. In a telegram to Chinese military advisers in the DRV, Mao instructed them to restrain the North Vietnamese from expanding military actions before the end of the Geneva Conference, when the DRV was concluding a major military victory against the French.⁹⁴

Zhou Enlai’s Diplomacy Outside the Conference

Before Zhou left Geneva in late June, he started another round of intense diplomacy to make sure that the parties understood China’s position on a neutralized Indochina. He consulted with the Laotians and Cambodians about their future as independent states. He assured the two delegations that the DRV would withdraw its forces, and he guaranteed that their independence and security would be safeguarded. On the other hand, he warned that China would not allow the United States to build military bases on their territory: “Once such bases were built, we [China] would have to get involved, because they would be a threat to our security.” Remaining neutral was thus the only

90. Asselin, “The Democratic Republic of Vietnamese and the Geneva Conference,” p. 168.

91. *Mao Wengao*, Vol. 3, p. 509.

92. Goscha, “Geneva 1954,” esp. pp. 30–34.

93. The North Vietnamese saw the continuation of the conference despite U.S. sabotage as a “victory of great significance” that exceeded “our original expectation.” See Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The Diplomatic Struggle,” pp. 30–31.

94. *Mao Wengao*, Vol. 3, p. 509.

choice Laos and Cambodia could make.⁹⁵ Zhou's meeting with the two delegations was significant, not only because it was his first with officials from Laos and Cambodia, but also because it paved the way for Pham Van Dong's meetings with representatives of the two governments, which the DRV had branded as French puppets and refused to recognize.⁹⁶

Zhou then proposed a meeting with the new French premier, and at Zhou's insistence the PRC and France made a joint statement about the meeting in advance. Mendès France was frank about his eagerness for peace in his meeting with Zhou, telling the Chinese leader that the difficulty in making progress came from the United States. Zhou, for his part, said that China's greatest concern was to prevent the United States from internationalizing the war and building military bases in Indochina. Aside from that, China did not have other requirements. Mendès France responded that the "French government had not the slightest intention of allowing them [military bases] to be established."⁹⁷ Zhou then suggested that French and DRV military representatives could determine where to draw the line of demarcation. Once a line was specified, the political problem would "not [be] a big issue" and would be easily settled when the conference resumed in July. This suggestion indicates China's formal retreat from the Communists' agreement that a political solution must come before an armistice, in contrast to French attempts to have only a military ceasefire.⁹⁸ Zhou also told Eden that if the DRV's demands in Vietnam were satisfied, Hanoi would make concessions on Laos and Cambodia.⁹⁹

Zhou's concessions were based on his calculation of the international situation in late June. According to Chinese officials, the British were afraid of being dragged into a war in Indochina and did not want to bend to U.S. leadership in a Southeast Asian group. Thus, Chinese leaders sensed that the British were trying to form their own version of a Southeast Asian bloc with countries such as India, Indonesia, Burma, and Ceylon as a way to resist U.S. expansion into Britain's traditional sphere in Southeast Asia. Before leaving

95. *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 316–319; *Zhou Enlai Waijiao Huodong Dashiji*, p. 68; and Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, p. 389.

96. *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 316–319; *Zhou Enlai Waijiao Huodong Dashiji*, p. 68; Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, pp. 388–390; and Goscha, "Geneva 1954," pp. 21–22.

97. Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, p. 390; and Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 42.

98. *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 289–297; and Memorandum of Conversation, Zhou Enlai with Pierre Mendès France, 23 June 1954, in *CWIHP Bulletin*, No. 16 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008), pp. 51–55.

99. *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, p. 242; and Telegram, Zhou Enlai to Mao Zedong, 22 June 1954, in *CWIHP Bulletin*, No. 16 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008), p. 51.

for Washington, Eden declared in the British Parliament that Britain wanted to build a Locarno-type pact in Asia and that, more importantly, he would even include Communist states in the pact. His purpose in traveling to the United States was to convince U.S. officials to give France a chance to reach a peace agreement. Eden also expressed satisfaction about the improvement in Britain's relations with China.¹⁰⁰ Encouraged by these statements, Chinese leaders concluded that British leaders were not going to join the united action during their visit to Washington. Meanwhile, the Chinese believed the French were also resisting U.S. pressure to continue fighting in Indochina because they were worried that their sacrifice would only facilitate U.S. entry into the region, even if they ultimately won the war. In conclusion, Chinese leaders were confident that the United States would not be able to prevent them from neutralizing Indochina so long as they could keep Britain and France away from the United States and carry the conference forward.¹⁰¹

To gain Indian Premier Jawaharlal Nehru's support, Zhou visited India in late June, following up on an earlier Indian invitation he had declined. The visit to India reinforced Zhou's judgment that the PRC could, and should, work with the British.¹⁰² In New Delhi, Nehru tried to convince Zhou that London was still the center of diplomacy in the world and that, "to some extent, London was even more important than Washington." According to Nehru, Britain was not interested in the defense group the United States had proposed, and its policy toward China was far different from the U.S. policy.¹⁰³ Chinese leaders may not have completely accepted what Nehru said, but his description of UK-U.S. differences was consistent with Zhou's own observations in Geneva. Based on Zhou's experiences in

100. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 131.

101. "The U.S. attempts to form a 'Southeast Asian defense group,'" 30 June 1954, in CFMA, 105-00626-01, pp. 1-12.

102. The goal of Zhou's visit to India has not been adequately discussed in the extant literature. The CFMA documents indicate that his objective was to win over India in building a Zone of Peace to exclude U.S. influence from Asia. See "About Concluding a Mutual Non-Aggression Treaty with Southeast Asian States," 13 June 1954, in CFMA, 203-00005-06, pp. 55-57; "Opinion about Concluding a Mutual Non-Aggression Treaty with Southeast Asian States," 17 June 1954, in CFMA, 203-00005-06, pp. 58-60; and "Goal and Plan for Premier Zhou Enlai's Visit to India," 22 June 1954, in CFMA, 203-00005-01, pp. 3-4. According to Goscha, the Indians were interested in the neutralization of Laos and Cambodia and were relieved when Zhou confirmed to Nehru that the two states were different from Vietnam and should become "Southeast Asia type" neutral states. See Goscha, "Geneva 1954," pp. 24-25.

103. "Minutes of Zhou Enlai's meetings during his visit to India," 25 June 1954, in CFMA, 203-00006-01; and Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, pp. 390-393. On India's policy toward Indochina, see Gilles Boquérat, "India's Commitment to Peaceful Coexistence and the Settlement of the Indochina War," *Cold War History*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (May 2005), pp. 211-234.

Geneva and India, Chinese leaders concluded that the British government sincerely wanted better relations with China despite U.S. opposition and that the PRC should exploit the opportunity to establish diplomatic relations with the UK.¹⁰⁴

The visit by Churchill and Eden to the United States in late June confirmed for Chinese leaders that Britain could be used against the United States. In Washington, according to Chinese officials, British leaders refused to talk about any concrete steps toward a defense treaty in Asia and agreed only to a statement of general principles, despite the great pressure exerted by the United States. Chinese leaders saw the British visit to Washington as a U.S. diplomatic failure. Mao gladly told the Soviet chargé d'affaires in Beijing that, despite U.S. pressure on Britain to end the Geneva Conference, the British had continued the negotiations and, more significantly, Churchill had declared in Washington that he sought peaceful coexistence with the Communists. Soviet policymakers encouraged the Chinese to make good use of the chance to resolve the Indochina problem.¹⁰⁵ Chinese officials found several reasons to explain the British defiance of U.S. wishes. First, the British were afraid of being dragged into a nuclear war; second, Britain was under pressure from the world peace movement and members of the British Commonwealth; third and most important, the British economy was improving and no longer had to rely so heavily on the United States.¹⁰⁶

In light of these developments, Chinese leaders became confident that their goal could be realized so long as they could convince the North Vietnamese. From 3 to 5 July, Zhou held a series of intense meetings with VWP leaders in Liuzhou on the Sino-Vietnamese border. During a two-day-long presentation, Zhou stressed the necessity of an immediate ceasefire and the inevitability of U.S. intervention if the negotiations failed. He concluded: "The only task we are facing now is to accomplish peace." For that, he made

104. "Summary of the issue of establishing Sino-British diplomacy," 25 June 1954, in CFMA, 110-00023-18, p. 52; *Mao Zedong Zhuan*, pp. 562–564; Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, p. 395; and *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, p. 185.

105. Record of Conversation between Soviet chargé d'affaires in China V. Vaskov and Mao Zedong, 5 July 1954, in AVPRF, F. 0100, Op. 47, Pa. 379, D. 7, Ll. 69–70, from SPA. See also Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 43. The Chinese perception was wrong. U.S. and British leaders reached a confidential seven-point agreement, which later served as the basis for the Western negotiating position. The essence of the agreement was integrity and independence for Laos and Cambodia and division of Vietnam along the 18th parallel. But the agreement was not raised publicly at Eden's request. For the seven-point agreement, see Eden, *Full Circle*, pp. 132–133; and Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Diplomatic Struggle," p. 34. Moreover, the British agreed to study concrete steps to adopt to establish the defense pact, and a joint study group started working quickly after the British visit. See "Editorial Note," in *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. XVI, pp. 1254–1255.

106. "Report on the so-called British Asian Locarno plan," 4 July 1954, in CFMA, 110-00244-03.

some specific suggestions concerning the most important issue, namely, the demarcation line. The goal was the 16th parallel in Vietnam. If this was impossible, it could be moved north to Route No. 9 (approximately the 17th parallel). In Laos, the Communists would demand one area each in upper, middle, and lower Laos but could expect only the areas in upper and middle Laos. In Cambodia, the Communists could seek a regrouping area but should not have high expectations of achieving it.¹⁰⁷

Ho Chi Minh was also worried about U.S. intervention and agreed that they should strive to reach a compromise on the demarcation issue and end the Indochina war as quickly as possible. He also agreed to Zhou's proposal for neutralizing Laos and Cambodia. To make sure that the DRV delegation understood the urgency of the situation, Ho sent a "5 July Directive" to the VWP delegation in Geneva, laying out the official goal: a temporary demarcation line on the 16th parallel, a general election to take place six months to a year after the end of war, and two regrouping areas in Laos.¹⁰⁸

Nonetheless, the meetings in Liuzhou also revealed that differences remained between the two states and that DRV leaders were divided among themselves. The fact that Zhou had to make repeated requests highlights the unwillingness of the DRV to make concessions. Despite Zhou's insistence on the importance of peace, Ho maintained that the Vietnamese "should also be prepared for [continuously] fighting a war. The complication of our work is that we have to prepare for both possibilities [peace and war] in our strategy." Although Ho agreed that "the main direction should be the pursuit of peace," he stressed that "[t]here were many difficulties" in "persuad[ing] our cadres" to accept the wisdom of seeking peace with the French.¹⁰⁹

As soon as the meetings were over, Zhou met with the British chargé d'affaires in Beijing. The Chinese leader disclosed that he had reached agreement with the Vietnamese leaders, adding that "it should not take long to settle matters at Geneva." Zhou also revealed that "he did not think there was any danger of fighting on a significant scale in Indochina."¹¹⁰ Soon the

107. Minutes of these important meetings are not found in the declassified documents, but the contents of the meetings are disclosed in Xiong, *Zhou Enlai Chudeng Shijie Wutai*, pp. 139–144; Li, *Shezhan Rineiwa*, pp. 335–336; Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, pp. 394–395; and Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Diplomatic Struggle," pp. 41, 54–55. For detailed analysis of the meetings, see Chen, "China and the Indochina Settlement," pp. 254–257.

108. Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Diplomatic Struggle," pp. 35, 41–42; Asselin, "The Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the 1954 Geneva Conference," pp. 169–170; and Goscha, "Geneva 1954," p. 28.

109. Ho Chi Minh's presentation is in Xiong, *Zhou Enlai Chudeng Shijie Wutai*, pp. 143–144. English translation by Chen Jian, in "China and the Indochina Settlement," p. 257.

110. Telegram, Trevelyan to British Foreign Office, 8 July 1954, in CWIHP Document Reader.

Chinese and DRV governments published editorials in their respective newspapers highlighting the meetings and their quest for peace. This was the DRV's first public declaration that the chief goal in Geneva was peace.

After Zhou's meeting with the North Vietnamese, Chinese leaders reviewed their policy in Geneva and concluded that an agreement on Indochina was likely if the Communists could further exploit the conflicts between the United States and its allies.¹¹¹ They even believed the Eisenhower administration was riven by internal conflicts. The Chinese saw Undersecretary of State Walter Bedell Smith, who led the U.S. delegation in Geneva, as a more reasonable figure than Dulles and Eisenhower, and they sensed differences even between Dulles and Eisenhower that might provide opportunities for maneuver.¹¹² Based on this analysis, Mao instructed the Chinese delegation to resume the consulate talks in Geneva in order to play on the differences between U.S. leaders and isolate the more aggressive figures.¹¹³ En route back to Geneva, Zhou stopped over in Moscow and reached a final consensus with Soviet leaders. The Communists should put forward a simple, clear-cut proposal, acceptable to the French, that would help France resist U.S. pressure and bring about peace. Having reached this agreement, Zhou optimistically reported to Beijing that he was certain China's goal could be achieved in Geneva.¹¹⁴

China's Last Efforts to Neutralize Indochina

Zhou's first task back in Geneva, however, was to press the DRV delegation to accelerate the negotiations after failing to take any initiative during Zhou's absence. When the French proposed a demarcation line at the 18th parallel, the North Vietnamese were willing to accept only the 14th parallel, despite Ho Chi Minh's directive of 5 July and the requests from the Soviet and Chinese delegates. According to Zhou, the lack of progress resulted from the DRV

111. Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, pp. 395–396.

112. Wang Bingnan, *Zhongmei Huitan Jiunian Huigu* [Reflections on the nine-year Sino-American talks] (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 1985), pp. 19–20; and *Mao Zedong Zhuan*, p. 560.

113. *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 185–186. The United States had asked Britain to request that China set free some U.S. nationals detained in China, including a dozen U.S. airmen, whose planes had been shot down on what China saw as reconnaissance trips over Manchuria. When the British approached China again in Geneva, Zhou suggested a direct meeting between Chinese and U.S. officials. The two sides met four times, but the meetings were restricted to consulate affairs and did not bring about any results.

114. *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 231–232. For details about Zhou's meeting with the Soviet leaders, see Chen, "China and the Indochina Settlement," pp. 258–259.

authorities' overestimation of their military strength and their reluctance to give up the idea of a Federation of Indochina.¹¹⁵

Because French and British leaders were going to meet Dulles in Paris the next afternoon, Zhou wasted no time and held an overnight conversation with Pham Van Dong to convince him that, after the meeting with Molotov, the major task was to strive to reach agreement on Indochina. The Communist side, according to Zhou, must immediately let British and French leaders know about its desire for a settlement and put forward new proposals acceptable to the French in order to give them, especially Mendès France, "enough capital to counterbalance" U.S. pressure in Paris. For that purpose, Zhou suggested that Pham Van Dong propose the 16th parallel as a demarcation line but be prepared to move the line a little farther north to get an agreement. As for the election, they could strive for a fixed deadline, but it would be acceptable to reach agreement in principle and set the deadline later. On the issue of Laos, Zhou expected to send some members from the "resistance government" to the national government to form a coalition government. In Cambodia, most of the DRV personnel should withdraw, with the remainder staying to work underground. The key point, Zhou stressed, was to keep the negotiations going, which was the only means to settle the problem, and give up the unrealistic thought of unifying Vietnam through war. Pham Van Dong finally agreed to Zhou's proposals.¹¹⁶

Early the next morning, the three Communist delegations reached agreement on the basis of Zhou's position, and they met the Western officials immediately to make the concessions known.¹¹⁷ Zhou first assured Mendès France, that "we share common ideas and common goals, namely, to restore peace in Indochina," so "we should be able to resolve the problem." He encouraged Mendès France to meet with Pham Van Dong, who was ready to make further concessions.¹¹⁸ While Pham Van Dong was talking with Mendès France, Zhou had a separate conversation with Eden.¹¹⁹ To ensure that the

115. Li Kenong's report to Zhou Enlai on the progress of the Geneva Conference, 12 July 1954, in *Zhonggong Dangshi Ziliao* [Materials of the history of the Chinese Communist Party], March 1999, p. 69.

116. "Minutes of the meeting between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong," 12 July 1954, in CWIHP Document Reader. For detailed analysis of the meeting, see Chen, "China and the Indochina Settlement," pp. 259–260.

117. Li Lianqing, *Leng Nuan Sui Yue: Yibosanzhe de Zhongsu Guanxi* [Warm and cold times: Ups and downs in Sino-Soviet relations] (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 1999), pp. 226–227.

118. Li, *She Zhan Rineiwa*, pp. 359–364; *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 305–309; and Minutes of Zhou's meeting with the French leader, 13 July 1954, in CWIHP Document Reader.

119. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 44.

British understood the significance of the recent meeting in Liuzhou, Zhou briefed Eden again in person about the DRV's willingness for peace and assured him that neither the regrouping area in Vietnam nor the neutralization of Laos and Cambodia would be a problem so long as Indochina did not allow foreign military bases or join a military alliance. Zhou pushed Eden to "give a fair judgment" between the PRC and the United States: China, he said, wanted peaceful coexistence with "every country," whereas the United States planned to build a Southeast Asian military alliance to threaten the PRC.¹²⁰

Zhou shifted to Cambodia and Laos when the Western leaders were meeting in Paris. He reassured the leaders of the two states that the DRV would observe the principle of peaceful coexistence and was willing to establish friendly relations with them, provided that the two countries remained neutral and did not allow foreign bases on their territory. To demonstrate goodwill, Zhou retreated further and allowed the Cambodians to import foreign weapons and even introduce French troops after the period of armistice, so long as the United States was kept out of Cambodia.¹²¹ Zhou's overtures to the two states were both necessary and timely, because in private the United States not only was pushing Laos and Cambodia to insist on the right to join SEATO and but was also enticing them with promises of military assistance. Laos and Cambodia, for their part, had asked the United States for membership in the defense pact as protection against invasion by the DRV.¹²²

After his meetings with British and French leaders, Zhou reported to Beijing that the French were willing to reach agreement ahead of their self-imposed deadline, as they had already sent him a copy of a draft agreement. Zhou believed the French would finally agree to a demarcation line somewhere between the 16th and 18th parallels.¹²³ To get ready for the ceasefire, Zhou instructed Chinese military advisors in Vietnam to tell the Vietnamese to "quickly work out a plan for the [Vietnamese] People's Army to withdraw

120. Li, *She Zhan Rineiwa*, pp. 364–369; and *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 243–245. Most scholars have neglected China's diplomacy during the last phase of the Geneva Conference. See, for example, Zhai, "China and the Geneva Conference of 1954"; and Zhang, "Constructing 'Peaceful Coexistence.'" Chen Jian discusses China's diplomacy in this phase, but he concentrates on China's pressure on the DRV and Zhou's concession to Mendès France and Eden. See Chen, "China and the Indochina Settlement," pp. 259–261. Declassified archival sources permit a more sophisticated description of Zhou's diplomacy in the final stage of the Geneva Conference, especially his meetings with officials from Laos and Cambodia, which best demonstrate China's goal in Geneva and the tactics it adopted to achieve that goal.

121. For the telegram from Zhou to Beijing regarding his meetings with the Cambodians and Laotians, see Telegram, Zhou to Beijing, in *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 320, 331.

122. See the telegrammed exchanges between the U.S. Delegation and Secretary of State Dulles, June 1954, in *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. XVI, pp. 1226, 1235–1236, 1338, 1342.

123. *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 233–234.

from the South, and promptly report the plan to the Vietnamese delegation [in Geneva].”¹²⁴

The Communist states’ concessions, however, were not reciprocated by French concessions. After the Western governments met in Paris, Molotov pushed Mendès France to show flexibility on the demarcation line and set June 1955 as the deadline for the election in Vietnam. He told the French that the DRV’s concessions were made under “strong force of persuasion” and that the French should not expect more from Hanoi.¹²⁵ But based on the agreement reached with allies in Paris, the French refused to retreat from the 18th parallel demarcation line and opposed the Soviet proposal for elections.

The Communist delegations had to make more concessions. Molotov suggested moving the demarcation line somewhere north of the 16th parallel and seeking a flexible election date; for example, no later than June 1955, as the date of the real election. Zhou readily agreed with Molotov and assured Pham Van Dong that a flexible date had been approved by Ho Chi Minh in Liuzhou. He also suggested allowing French forces to stay in southern Vietnam until three months before the election, but as a negotiating tactic he suggested Pham Van Dong start with the 16th parallel and insist on a fixed election date.¹²⁶ After Ho Chi Minh sent another telegram to Pham Van Dong urging him to speed up negotiations (as the 5 July directive instructed), Pham Van Dong was finally ready to move ahead.¹²⁷

When Zhou made these proposals, PRC leaders were increasingly concerned about U.S. attempts to build SEATO. According to Chinese intelligence services, the United States had already started to prepare for a ceasefire scenario in Indochina. U.S. leaders sent General James Van Fleet to the Far East twice in early July to conclude an alliance with Chiang Kai-shek and to push for bilateral military alliances between Taiwan and Japan and South Korea.¹²⁸ PRC leaders suspected that the United States would use these alliances as the basis for an overall North Pacific military pact modeled on the

124. Telegram, Zhou to Wei Guoqing, 15 July 1954: quoted in Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, p. 399; the English translation is by Chen Jian in CWIHP Document Reader.

125. For the Soviet role in the last phase of the Geneva Conference, see Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, pp. 45–53.

126. Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, p. 399; and “Record of a conversation with Chou En-lai and Pham Van Dong,” 16 July 1954, in CWIHP Document Reader.

127. Goscha, “Geneva 1954,” p. 28.

128. The Chinese were incorrect. U.S. documents make clear that the United States was not considering a mutual defense treaty (MDT) with the ROC at this time, and Van Fleet did not seek an MDT during his visit. See “Memorandum of Conversation between Wellington V. Koo and E. F. Drumright and Walter P. McCaughy,” 17 July 1954, in General Records of the Department of State, Records of the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs Relating to Southeast Asia and the Geneva Conference, 1954, April–

North Atlantic Treaty Organization.¹²⁹ Zhou was suspicious that the United States, Britain, and France might have reached some agreement on SEATO during their meeting in Paris. If such a military group were built, Zhou told Molotov and Pham, and “the Americans manage to draw Bao Dai’s Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia into a military bloc, then the agreement we are drafting about a prohibition on creating foreign military bases on the territory of countries mentioned will lose the significance we are attaching to it.”¹³⁰

Zhou believed, however, they could still exploit U.S. allies’ worries about U.S. encroachments on their traditional spheres of influence in Southeast Asia. Britain seemed not to want to give up its Asian Locarno alliance, and Mendès France, according to PRC leaders, was strengthening cooperation with Britain, anxious for peace.¹³¹

To ensure that further concessions would not facilitate U.S. intervention in Indochina, Zhou wanted to receive guarantees from Eden and Mendès France. The Chinese leader told Eden directly that the Communists wanted peace but that peace followed by a U.S. military treaty, especially one that included the three Indochinese states, “would become meaningless.” Eden assured Zhou that the United States did not intend to build military bases in Laos and Cambodia, and Britain wanted the two states to be a “buffer” area between the two blocs. With regard to SEATO, Eden admitted that Britain and the United States were studying the possibility, but he did not think China should worry because the pact, if it materialized, would be “purely defensive,” and “the better result we could achieve here in Geneva, the less we need to worry about the defense arrangement.”¹³² After double-checking with the United States, the British promised Zhou that the three Indochinese states would not join SEATO and the final agreement, if reached, would include stipulations about this and the entrance of foreign personnel and arms.

June 1954, Box 14, RG 59, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, Maryland.

129. Some Chinese officials believed Van Fleet wanted to link the two military blocs in the North and South Pacific. See “Van Fleet’s Conspiracy in the Far East,” 17 July 1954, in CFMA, 206-00117-05, pp. 101–102.

130. Li Ping et al., *Zhou Enlai Nianpu*, Vol. 1, pp. 399–340; and Record of a conversation with Pham Van Dong and Zhou Enlai, 16 July 1954, in CWIHP Document Reader.

131. Record of a conversation with Pham Van Dong and Zhou Enlai, 16 July 1954, in CWIHP Document Reader; and “Mendès France cabinet and its domestic and foreign policy,” 17 July 1954, in CFMA, 206-00117-06, pp. 103–105.

132. For Zhou’s meeting with Eden, 17 July 1954, see *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 246–251. Eden’s reassurances about SEATO did not seem to assuage PRC leaders, who continued to believe the British wanted a Locarno-type pact.

With that guarantee, PRC officials promised the British that China would not ally with the DRV.¹³³ Zhou then assured Mendès France that the demarcation line and date of elections would not be problems if China was not threatened by the defense alliance in Southeast Asia.¹³⁴ But if the United States built an alliance and included Indochina, Zhou warned, “all of our efforts to push for these compromises will become fruitless.” He suggested including these stipulations in the final agreement.¹³⁵

Zhou then reiterated his positions to the Cambodian and Laotian delegations. The Cambodians, however, were still suspicious of the DRV and warned they would have to seek U.S. help and even consider joining SEATO if the North Vietnamese threatened their security.¹³⁶ Zhou assured them that this would not happen. To the Laotians, in addition to the promise that the Vietnamese Communist forces would finally leave, he said that Laos would be permitted to import weapons for defensive purposes and that the French would be allowed to retain two bases in Laos after the DRV troops withdrew. What the PRC opposed, Zhou told the Laotians and Cambodians, were U.S. bases and an alliance with the United States. The Laotians promised Zhou they did not intend to join SEATO.¹³⁷

With all these guarantees, the Communists were ready to make further concessions. Pham Van Dong finally agreed to a demarcation line drawn slightly to the north of Route No. 9, but in return he demanded French concessions on the timing of the election. Zhou agreed, but Molotov suggested another concession: setting a time period during which the election should be held. The Communists were also prepared to agree to the French proposal concerning the composition of the international supervisory commission, which would include India as chair, along with Canada and Poland.¹³⁸ Zhou, however, pointed out that a new French draft he had received did not include the provision about forbidding foreign bases in Indochina and that this position was also not in the draft documents about Laos and Cambodia. Communist leaders decided to ask Laos and Cambodia to make a formal statement about this commitment.

133. 1954 *Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 252–254.

134. 1954 *Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 307–309; and Minutes of Zhou’s Meeting with Mendès France, 17 July 1954, in *CWIHP Bulletin*, No. 16 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008), pp. 68–69.

135. 1954 *Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 307–309. See also “Memorandum of Conversation between Molotov, Zhou Enlai, and Pham Van Dong,” 17 July 1954, in AVPRF, F. 06, Op. 13a, P. 25, D. 8, L. 107, translated in *CWIHP Bulletin*, No. 16 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008), pp. 97–99.

136. 1954 *Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 321–322.

137. *Ibid.*, pp. 332–335.

138. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 47.

Molotov immediately informed Mendès France of the new concessions, but the French premier wanted to stick with France's original positions. The impasse caused Molotov to wonder whether the French wanted a solution at all. During a restricted session on 18 July, Molotov insisted that the Communists had made enough concessions and that failure of the conference at this point would not be their fault. Seeing no further concessions from the Communists, the British also became pessimistic, and Eden reported to London that the conference had "no more than fifty-fifty chance of reaching agreement."¹³⁹

The Communists, however, were determined to settle the issue, particularly after the U.S. delegation declared it would not disrupt an acceptable agreement and the British promised the final agreements would forbid foreign bases and alliances in Indochina. Zhou finally told Eden he agreed to the composition of the international supervisory commission.¹⁴⁰ In addition to allowing French troops to stay in Laos for some time, he also pared the regrouping area for resistance forces.¹⁴¹ The British emphasized that they guaranteed, on behalf of the British Commonwealth (not just the UK), that the Indochinese states would not be invited to join any military alliance. In return, Chinese officials made a package concession: The demarcation line could be ten kilometers north of Route No. 9; the election should be held two years after the signing of the armistice agreement, but no later than June 1955 (representatives of North and South Vietnam would negotiate the precise date); and the regrouping of the armed forces within Vietnam would be completed within 245 days of the agreement. In return, the PRC requested that the final agreements be guaranteed by all conference participants, including the United States. The British side, however, revealed that the United States would make only a unilateral declaration.¹⁴² On 20 July, the Cambodians agreed not to allow foreign combat forces on Cambodian soil, but they wanted to keep some foreign technicians and experts and import weapons for their security. They also opposed the six-month withdrawal period suggested by the DRV. After the PRC realized its goal of neutralizing Cambodia, Zhou promised to convince the DRV to accelerate the withdrawal and agreed to allow Cambodia to import weapons. The key point, Zhou told the Cambodians, was that Cambodia must not lean toward the United States.¹⁴³

139. *Ibid.*

140. *1954 Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 196–197.

141. *Ibid.*, pp. 310–315.

142. *Ibid.*, pp. 252–258.

143. *Ibid.*, pp. 322–338.

The Communists had primarily reached their goals, and the Geneva Agreements ended on 21 July with a temporarily divided Vietnam and a neutralized Cambodia and Laos.¹⁴⁴ But the two states were allowed to appeal for foreign military aid if they were under threat from Vietnam. To convince the Laotians that they did not need foreign military assistance, especially from the United States, after the agreements were concluded, Zhou reassured the Laotian delegation of the good intentions of China and the DRV and encouraged Laos to develop friendly relations with the latter. To demonstrate the PRC's sincerity, Zhou expressed his understanding of the Laotian request to keep French troops in Laos until the Vietnamese Communist "volunteers" finally withdrew.¹⁴⁵ Before the foreign ministers left Geneva, Zhou again sought Eden's guarantee that the United States would not establish military bases in Cambodia. He was satisfied upon being told that Britain placed a great deal of emphasis on China and wanted to further develop relations with the PRC.¹⁴⁶

Conclusion

The PRC played an instrumental role in bringing about the Geneva Agreements.¹⁴⁷ Zhou Enlai's timely concession to withdraw the DRV's forces in Laos and Cambodia prevented the Geneva Conference from coming to an early and fruitless end. The CCP's agreement with VWP leaders to seek peace as quickly as possible and its efforts to induce the DRV delegation to carry out this idea led to progress in the negotiation. Finally, Zhou's flexibility on the demarcation line in Vietnam and his concessions to Laotian and Cambodian security concerns directly contributed to the final agreements.

The PRC's actions in Geneva resulted principally from its security concerns. Seeing a U.S. military presence in its neighborhood as a serious threat, Chinese leaders strove to build a buffer area around the PRC by removing the U.S. presence through diplomacy, emulating the Soviet peace initiative. The Chinese started first with the Korean issue. By the time Geneva convened,

144. In addition to Zhou's combination of concessions and warnings, another important reason for the two states' agreement to neutralization was a change in U.S. policy. At this point, U.S. officials were convincing them to give up potential membership in the Southeast Asian defense pact. See Telegram: Smith-Kimny Meeting, 18 July 1954, in *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. XVI, pp. 1425–1426.

145. 1954 *Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, pp. 474–476. In private, Zhou believed letting the French stay was a wise way to keep the United States out.

146. 1954 *Nian Rineiwa Huiyi*, p. 212.

147. According to Olsen, "The Chinese performance during the Geneva Conference was decisive, not only in the eyes of the Western powers but also to the Soviets." See Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations and the Role of China*, pp. 43–44.

however, the war in Korea had stopped, and North Korea was a buffer for the PRC from U.S. military forces on the peninsula. Chinese leaders therefore concentrated on dealing with Indochina at Geneva. The Geneva Agreements built another buffer to the south of the PRC and thus decreased U.S. pressure on China.

The PRC's strategy of isolating the United States by winning over a majority of the participants at the Geneva Conference contributed to the final agreements. Although PRC leaders had only very limited access to information about relations between the Western powers, their perception of the differences among them was largely correct. Zhou's efforts to play the British and French off against the United States may not have exacerbated tensions within the Western camp as much as PRC leaders expected, but the demonstration of good intentions kept Britain and France in the negotiations, and this gave the Chinese an opportunity for diplomatic maneuvering. The PRC's assurances and concessions to Laos and Cambodia helped draw them away from the West and led to their approval of the Geneva Agreements.

The PRC's experience at Geneva had a strong influence on Chinese policy toward the United States. By the time the Geneva Conference ended, officials in Beijing were satisfied that the United States had been isolated and was vulnerable to diplomatic pressure. They aimed to continue the strategy of separating the United States from other states and were especially impressed with Britain's interest in better relations with the PRC, sensing that British policy was fundamentally different from U.S. policy.¹⁴⁸ To a great extent, the initiation of the crisis in the Taiwan Strait was China's effort to mobilize U.S. allies and Asian neutral states to push the United States not to conclude a mutual defense treaty with the Chinese Nationalist government on Taiwan.

Throughout the Geneva Conference, the PRC, the Soviet Union, and North Vietnam closely coordinated their positions and maintained a division of labor because of their common anxiety about U.S. intervention in Indochina. The Soviet Union was instrumental in bringing the PRC and DRV into the conference and in organizing the Communist states' action. For appearance's sake, however, Soviet leaders let the PRC and DRV initiate most of

148. To a great extent, the British misled the Chinese. According to Lloyd C. Gardner, the British public appearance was inconsistent with the positions they privately reached with the United States. When British policymakers traveled to Washington in late June, they were not able to convince the Eisenhower administration to take a conciliatory stance toward the Communists. Even so, Churchill "portrayed the outcome of the Washington talks as a green light for pursuing a rapprochement with both Russia and China." Despite promising Zhou that Laos and Cambodia would not be included in any defense pact, Eden agreed with U.S. delegates that SEATO should put the Indochinese associate states under its protection. See Lloyd C. Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam: From World War II through Dienbienphu, 1941-1954* (New York: Norton, 1988), pp. 307, 313.

the proposals.¹⁴⁹ Soviet officials tried, with considerable success, to convince Western governments that differences existed between the PRC and the Soviet Union. All of this was just for show. Molotov's remarks to Western leaders (e.g., "China is very much its own master on these issues") was nothing but a negotiating tactic.¹⁵⁰

The DRV's role was much more complicated. On the one hand, North Vietnamese leaders' worries about U.S. intervention in Indochina were real, and they urgently wanted peace.¹⁵¹ On the other hand, some DRV leaders were reluctant to give up their military advantage, especially after the victory at Dien Bien Phu. Yet they had neither concrete plans nor material means to realize their goal. Because they relied on China for ideological guidance and material assistance, the Chinese naturally provided advice, which Vietnamese leaders admitted they needed. Consequently, officials in Beijing initiated most of the important proposals and pushed Vietnam to make concessions.

However, although the Geneva Agreements served China's interests, they did not necessarily damage the DRV's interests. The DRV welcomed the eventual outcome and believed the agreements served the DRV's interests well.¹⁵² But when the situation in Indochina did not later develop as the North Vietnamese expected, both the Chinese and the DRV put forward different interpretations. Chinese leaders regretted pressuring Hanoi into the Geneva Agreements, and Zhou even admitted his "mistake" in pushing the DRV to retreat from its original positions. The North Vietnamese portrayed themselves as innocent victims of Chinese pressure. As Chen Jian points out, "Beijing's handling of the Indochina issue at Geneva in 1954 . . . sowed a seed of potential discord between the Chinese and their Vietnamese comrades."¹⁵³

149. For the division of labor among the Communists, see Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 34; and Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations and the Role of China*, p. 28.

150. My perusal of the Chinese documents corroborates Gaiduk's analysis of the Soviet documents. See Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, p. 32. But it goes against Zhai's and Immerman's arguments about the conflicts between Chinese and Soviet leaders. See Zhai, "China and the Geneva Conference of 1954"; and Immerman, "The United States and the Geneva Conference of 1954."

151. For detailed analysis of DRV leaders' need for the agreements, see Goscha, "Geneva 1954," pp. 34–36; and Asselin, "The Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Geneva Conference," pp. 176–183.

152. Immediately after the conference, both the North Vietnamese delegation and Ho Chi Minh believed that the DRV, by securing peace, had won a "tremendous victory" through diplomacy. The VWP Central Committee concluded that the peaceful settlement of the Indochina problem "shattered the scheme of the American imperialists to prolong and expand war in Indochina." See Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Diplomatic Struggle," pp. 65, 67, 69. This document casts doubt on Zhai's argument that "the Viet Minh accepted the solution reluctantly." See Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, p. 62.

153. Chen, "China and the Indochina Settlement," p. 262.

Furthermore, Chinese leaders' admission of "mistakes" added to Vietnamese Communists' resentment toward China, which contributed to tensions and eventually a military conflict between the two Communist states in 1979. Curiously, the war between the former Communist allies contributed to the normalization of the PRC's relations with its former enemy, the United States, and led to the tacit alliance between the United States and China in the 1980s.¹⁵⁴

154. James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), pp. 26–154; and Xiaoming Zhang, "Deng Xiaoping and China's Decision to Go to War with Vietnam," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 2010), pp. 3–29.