

## FRENCH INDOCHINA

### THE INTEREST OF THE UNITED STATES IN NATIONALIST OPPOSITION TO THE RESTORATION OF FRENCH RULE IN INDOCHINA<sup>1</sup>

851G.00/1-347

*Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Charlton Ogburn, Jr., of the  
Division of Southeast Asian Affairs*

[WASHINGTON,] January 3, 1947.

Participants: Mr. Tswen-ling Tsui, Counselor, Chinese Embassy  
Mr. Kenneth P. Landon<sup>2</sup>  
Mr. Charlton Ogburn, Jr.

In the course of a conversation with Mr. Tsui, we referred to his previous suggestion that the American, British, and Chinese consuls in Hanoi<sup>3</sup> might independently and informally make known to the French authorities that their services were available if it appeared that they might be useful in the cause of peace. (Memorandum of Conversation of December 31<sup>4</sup>). We said that we believed that our respective consuls were already acting along the lines of his suggestion in a practical situation which threatened needless suffering and pointed out that we had heard that the Chinese Consul General in Hanoi had received a proposal from the Vietnam military commander that, subject to French agreement, the Vietnam troops withdraw from the Chinese section of Hanoi, which might obviate a costly struggle and save many Chinese lives. We added that our Consul in Hanoi had asked if the Department perceived any objection to his being present unofficially as an observer of the withdrawal inasmuch as the Vietnamese might request his presence for the sake of the added sense of security which it might give them. We told Mr. Tsui that we had informed our Consul that we had no objection to his acting on humanitarian grounds in such a situation as that which he described, or—always with the agreement of the French—in any other strictly local, military, non-political situation with the object of saving lives. We

<sup>1</sup> Continued from *Foreign Relations*, 1946, vol. VIII, pp. 15-84. For additional documentation on United States policy with respect to Indochina during 1947, see United States Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, in 12 volumes (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1971), Books 1 and 8.

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Chief of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs.

<sup>3</sup> James L. O'Sullivan, Vice Consul; Arthur G. T. Wilson, Consul; and Yuen Tse-kien, Consul General, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> *Foreign Relations*, 1946, vol. VIII, p. 83.

emphasized, however, that we had instructed him in no circumstances to become involved in any situation in any manner which could be interpreted as an attempt to mediate a political issue. We further informed Mr. Tsui of our understanding that the British Consul in Hanoi had been authorized to lend his services in the withdrawal of the Vietnam troops, should this take place.

Mr. Tsui stated that he had heard of none of these developments and expressed his appreciation of being informed of them.

We pointed out that we had had no information as to whether anything had come of the Vietnam proposal to withdraw from the Chinese section of Hanoi. Mr. Tsui stated that if he received any news on this point he would let us know.

851G.00/1-347 : Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

RESTRICTED

SAIGON, January 3, 1947—11 a.m.

4. Moutet<sup>5</sup> went to Hanoi yesterday; reportedly will return today. Official reticence as to whether will meet Ho<sup>6</sup> or other representative Vietnam Government but known French hope arrange cease-fire. In conversation with representative Socialist press, Moutet stressed desire settle conflict but reiterated French stand willing to give autonomy internal affairs but France to handle external relations and to maintain her legitimate economic interests. All this far less than Vietnam has claimed and far short of independence, but many Cochinese who formerly spoke of union and outright independence now speak of progressive independence.

Continuance of isolated incidents in Cambodia and restored territories but on the whole, situation not unfavorable and French not uneasy.

Dept please repeat to Paris.<sup>7</sup>

REED

851G.00/1-347 : Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Embassy in France*

CONFIDENTIAL

WASHINGTON, January 3, 1947—7 p. m.

21. *Newsweek* Jan 6 stated that though news not yet announced, US has already taken steps halt fighting Indochina and that last week Bonnet<sup>8</sup> was called in by Dept and told that (1) Indochinese

<sup>5</sup> Marius Moutet, Socialist, French Minister of Overseas France on a visit to Indochina.

<sup>6</sup> Ho Chi Minh, "President of the Provisional Government of Vietnam Democratic Republic".

<sup>7</sup> Repeated to Paris January 4.

<sup>8</sup> Henri Bonnet, French Ambassador.



settlement imperative, (2) affair could be brought up UN any time by any power and that US would not necessarily support France, (3) that US wishes ensure no lend-lease weapons being used suppress Vietnam and suspects they are being used, and (4) Moffat<sup>9</sup> is in area and would be glad assist both sides.

For your info, of four numbered statements, three and one-half completely false. Only element truth was fact ActSecy suggested dispute might be brought up UN by third power.

Dept replying press queries that ActSecy discussed Indochina with Bonnet Dec 23 (Deptel 6586 Dec 24<sup>10</sup>). Tenor his remarks made public press conf Dec 27. (Radio bulletin No. 309). To this Dept has nothing add except statement *Newsweek* story pure specimen think-piece. You may make similar reply queries.

Sent Paris 21. Repeated Saigon 1.

BYRNES

851G.00/1-347 : Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

HANOI, [January 3, 1947.]

1. Have recently learned that Federal Information Service Saigon published news that Chinese Consul (actually Consul General) and myself in interview with General Morlière<sup>11</sup> December 21 "expressed without restriction their indignation at conduct of VN which they qualified as criminal and bestial folly".

On that date General Morlière, Acting Commissioner as Sainteny then in hospital with wound, called conference British Consul, Chinese Consul General, and myself (British Consul unable attend as he could not because of gun fire safely leave his residence). General Morlière expounded details Vietnamese attack night December 19 upon French. I made no statements (nor did Chinese Consul General) re Vietnamese or their actions. I considered interview one of information which called for no declarations on my part.

That General Morlière or Federal Information Service in Saigon should have seen fit to publish communiqué on meeting without consent or knowledge of participants I find most unusual. I do not understand at all fact that he (or Information Service) should attribute to them statements they did not make.

O'SULLIVAN

<sup>9</sup> Abbot Low Moffat, Chief of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs.

<sup>10</sup> *Foreign Relations*, 1946, vol. VIII, p. 77.

<sup>11</sup> Acting French Commissioner for Tonkin and North Annam and commanding French troops in that area.

851G.00/1-647: Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

HANOI, January 6, 1947—9 a. m.

6. Sainteny told me in recent interview that policy of France in northern Indochina is: *a.* to restore order; after order is restored, to allow Vietnamese to choose govt they desire, altho he said govt Vietnamese selected would have to respect accords signed.

From recent conversations with various officials and military officers, it is apparent that they are agreed a period of military operations will be necessary. There is disagreement on length of such period but all agree it may be very long, at least 6 months to year.

There is no agreement among them on what will follow period of military operations, that is on what kind of govt will result in northern Indochina.

Repeat to Paris.

O'SULLIVAN

851G.00/1-747: Telegram

*The Consul General at Singapore (Josselyn) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

SINGAPORE, January 7, 1947—3 p. m.

3. From Moffat. Revisited Bangkok yesterday, received latest information FIC from Hunter.<sup>12</sup> Although have not seen Reed and O'Sullivan reports, feel impelled as chief SEA urge prompt US action aimed terminate war Vietnam not only save countless lives but protect position US and other democracies SEA. Hands-off policy seems here based European considerations and temporary French political situation and appears as US approval French military reconquest Vietnam although in fact Vietnam record no worse than French. Even if French military campaigns successful, hatreds engendered will defeat French civil and economic objectives and threaten all western interests SEA. Doubt French ability establish effective puppet govt, proposal use Kuomintang trained personnel may prove trojan horse.

Indo-China situation exceeds domestic issue. Developments already threaten adverse effect NEI. Soviet not directly active SEA and need not be as democracies performing most effectively their behalf. Moral leadership by US essential this area, hundred million people increasing nationalist.

<sup>12</sup> Lt. William H. Hunter, Assistant Naval Attaché and Assistant Naval Attaché for Air in Siam.

Better French elements FIC reported disgusted policy pursued by d'Argenlieu,<sup>13</sup> military and colonials. Even these apparently would like pull back if face can be saved. Earnestly urge US—even this late date—endeavor mediate to seek truce and political settlement. For reasons stated mytel from Saigon,<sup>14</sup> third party action seems essential. Because of recent French action believe permanent political solution can now be based only on independent Vietnam (alternative is gigantic armed colonial camp), but confident still possible secure full protection French property, interests and culture, predominance French foreign advisers, members FIC Economic Union Cambodia and Laos, and close treaties with or even membership in French Union.

Repeat again deep need for US moral leadership increasingly critical situation this political, economic and strategic area. Urge again I return Dept instead Canberra. [Moffat.]<sup>15</sup>

JOSSELYN  
851G.00/1-747: Circular telegram

*The Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic Officers*<sup>16</sup>

SECRET

WASHINGTON, January 7, 1947—3 p. m.

Nay Attaché Bangkok<sup>17</sup> reports French now trying clear lines Saigon to Cambodian border using all French Indochina reserves. These troops and 16,000 now en route from France then be thrown into all out reconquest Tonkin where puppet Govt may be set up. This is plan of d'Argenlieu and LeClerc,<sup>18</sup> with Moutet wavering as leftists Saigon reportedly favor reopening negotiations with Ho. Final decision be made when Moutet returns Paris Jan 16.

BYRNES

<sup>13</sup> Adm. Thierry d'Argenlieu, French High Commissioner in Indochina.

<sup>14</sup> Telegram 479, December 12, 1946, not printed.

<sup>15</sup> The Department replied to Mr. Moffat in telegram 13, January 10, 4 p. m., to Singapore, that his suggestions had been carefully studied. In this telegram the efforts made to date were reviewed and the opinion expressed that everything possible was being done. It was also indicated that no other qualified officer was available for the Canberra Conference at that late date. (851G.00/1-747) With regard to the conference to consider establishment of a regional advisory commission for non-self-governing territories in the South Pacific, see Department press release of January 4, Department of State *Bulletin*, January 12, 1947, p. 51; for report on the conference, see *ibid.*, March 16, 1947, p. 459.

<sup>16</sup> At Paris.

<sup>17</sup> Comdr. Alfred W. Gardes, Jr.

<sup>18</sup> Maj. Gen. Jacques-Philippe Leclerc, Inspector General of French Armies in North Africa, formerly Commander in Chief of French Forces in the Far East.

851G.00/1-747: Telegram

*The Minister in Siam (Stanton) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

BANGKOK, January 7, 1947—4 p. m.

28. 1. For some time representatives in Bangkok of free Lao and free Cambodian Govts have been working on memo which would set out in brief form history of relation of states of Lao[s] and Cambodia with France, their grievances against French Govt and conclude with statement their hopes for independence and ultimate establishment federation of states of Southeast Asia. More recently local representatives Vietnam Govt have been drawn into and participated in preparation and drafting this document.

2. This document after many revisions signed on January 1, 1947 by principal representatives in Bangkok of free Lao and free Cambodian groups as well as representative Vietnam Govt and contained appeal to US and UN intervene without delay in situation Indo-China. However, after further consideration, these representatives decided address appeal directly to Secretary General UN<sup>19</sup> omitting request for intervention by US.

3. This document given recently by Prince Suphanavan, one of free Lao leaders Bangkok, to Military Attaché<sup>20</sup> at which time former expressed hope it might be transmitted to Secretary General of UN thru diplomatic channels. In view present developments Indo-China and other impending developments mentioned following paragraphs it seems advisable to me this document reach Secretary General at early date. I have therefore told Military Attaché he might tell Prince Suphanavan that Legation will endeavor to see that this memo reaches Secretary General of UN. Copy of memo being forwarded to Dept by Legation.<sup>21</sup>

4. Memo as finally drafted is fairly objective presentation of views and aspirations of the three states. Perhaps two most significant features of document are firstly advocacy of United States or federation of countries of Southeast Asia comprising Burma, Siam, the Malay Federation, United States of Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos and secondly that memo is joint document signed by representatives of free Cambodians, free Laos and Vietnam Govt.

5. As indicated in mytel 7, January 4,<sup>22</sup> conditions in provinces of Battambang and Lao territories recently returned to French have been reasonably quiet since retrocession but as indicated in that message it could hardly be expected that free Laos and free Cambodians would

<sup>19</sup> Trygve Lie.

<sup>20</sup> Col. Reginald F. C. Vance.

<sup>21</sup> Despatch 244, January 13, not printed.

<sup>22</sup> Not printed.

remain inactive for any length time. Vietnam Govt by radio and thru its various agents has naturally been working among free Cambodians and free Laos in effort enlist their open support against French and there are numerous indications these efforts have met with favorable and in some instances enthusiastic response. As further indication of probable action by these groups, Military Attaché reports that Tao Au and Prince Suphanavan, two free Lao leaders, have left Bangkok and are headed for Lao territory and that they and their subordinates have dropped vague hints indicating that free Laos hope to be able to oust French from Luang Prabang, force abdication present Lao King and place on throne one of their own number, possibly Prince Petseath.<sup>23</sup>

6. While Legation has only limited knowledge of recent development in Indo-China, particularly Tonkin area, it appears to me that situation is steadily deteriorating, that present hostilities between Vietnamese and French are likely to spread and that free Laos and free Cambodians may be expected at any time to join in attacks on French, feeling that present developments furnish opportunity achieving their aspirations by force. Result therefore may well be that virtually all of Indo-China will be engulfed in vengeful strife which will still further embitter relations between native peoples of Indo-China and French and result in general chaos. It is also conceivable that neighboring countries in Southeast Asia may become either directly or indirectly involved. It is certain that sympathies of such neighboring countries as Siam, Burma, Malaya and Indonesia lie with Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians. Serious and widespread conflagration in Indo-China is therefore matter which may very definitely affect peace of Southeast Asia. In these circumstances it appears to me that situation in Indo-China is one which very definitely comes within purview of UN and more particularly of Security Council. It also raises the question of what if anything US could do by way of offering its good offices to assist in preventing spread of hostilities and in working out of just and equitable solution. It is therefore my earnest hope that Dept will give this whole problem most careful consideration with view to taking such steps as seem desirable and advisable either by offering its good offices or causing this serious situation to be considered by Security Council at early date.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Prince Phetsarat, former Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Luang-Prabang, living in Bangkok.

<sup>24</sup> The Department replied in telegram 14, January 8, 7 p. m., in part as follows: "Dept approves efforts secure info concerning current developments Indochina but does not consider Dept proper channel transmit memoranda to SC from 'free' groups claiming represent nationalist movements Indochina. You should therefore return document in question." (851G.00/1-747) A circular telegram dated January 9, 4 p. m., was sent to London, Moscow, and Nanking, reporting this exchange and adding: "Before taking further action re Indochina we await French official statement after Moutet's return Paris." (851G.00/1-947)

7. Dept please repeat to Saigon and Paris.

STANTON

851G.00/1-347: Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Embassy in France*

SECRET

WASHINGTON, January 8, 1947—1 p. m.

59. Following is text of unnumbered, undated tel from Hanoi received Jan 8:

[Here follows text of telegram 1, January 3, page 53.]

Saigon Tel 494, Dec 23,<sup>25</sup> reported official communiqué had quoted Amer, Chinese Consuls Hanoi as characterizing Vietnam action as criminal folly and bestial.

Dept extremely surprised this attempt local French place US in partisan position. Request you call attention FonOff this matter, taking view, in consideration O'Sullivan's denial, that correction should be made through Federal Information Service Saigon if such was channel of distribution original communiqué, and through whatever other channels were employed. You may say Consul Saigon expressing same view High Commissioner.<sup>26</sup>

Saigon be guided by above.

Sent to Paris 59. Repeated Saigon 4.

BYRNES

851G.00/1-847

*Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs  
(Vincent) to the Under Secretary of State (Acheson)*

[WASHINGTON,] January 8, 1947.

MR. ACHESON: Lacoste, Minister in the French Embassy, called this afternoon by appointment. He referred to your conversation of some two weeks ago with Ambassador Bonnet and to the Ambassador's statement at the time that he would inform the French Government of our views and communicate back to us the views of the French Government.

Lacoste said he was under instructions to state that the French Government appreciated the understanding attitude that Mr. Acheson had shown in discussing the problem of Indochina; that it had taken note of Mr. Acheson's offer of "good offices" and appreciated the spirit

<sup>25</sup> Not printed.

<sup>26</sup> In telegram 192, January 16, noon, from Paris, the Embassy reported taking up this matter with the Foreign Office which felt it could best be arranged in Saigon between Admiral d'Argenlieu and Consul Reed (851G.00/1-1647).



in which the offer was made; and that the French Government did not feel that it could avail itself of our offer but must continue to handle the situation single-handedly along the lines stated by Moutet. Lacoste went on to say that the principal objective of the French military was to restore order and reopen communications. He said that after this was done the French Government would be prepared to discuss matters with the Vietnamese. He said that the French Government had every intention of living up to the agreement of last March 6<sup>27</sup> and the *modus vivendi* of September 15,<sup>28</sup> once order was restored. I asked him whether he thought the French military could restore order within any foreseeable future time. He seemed to think, without much evidence of conviction, that they could.<sup>29</sup>

Mr. Lacoste then described to me at some length the acts of perfidy and cruelty on the part of the Vietnamese. He gave me detailed accounts of atrocities, etc., etc.

I expressed my sympathy for the French who had suffered in this manner. I then repeated to him that, although we had no ready-made solution for the Indochina problem, we were greatly concerned over it and continued ready to be helpful should an appropriate occasion arise. Speaking personally, I told him that I thought there was one flaw in the French approach to the problem worth mentioning. I had in mind an apparent assumption by the French that there was an equality of responsibility as between the French and the Vietnamese. I said that this did not seem to me to be the case; that the responsibility of France as a world power to achieve a solution of the problem was far greater than that of the Vietnamese; and that the situation was not one which could be localized as a purely French-Vietnamese one but might affect adversely conditions throughout Southeast Asia.

Mr. Lacoste quickly substituted the word "authority" for "responsibility" and said that the French were now faced with the problem of reasserting their authority and that we must share the responsibility for their delay in doing so because we had not acceded to French requests in the autumn of 1945 for material assistance. Seeing that I was more amused than impressed with his argument, he said that he fully understood what I was driving at and that he knew it was the earnest hope of the French Government to arrive at a peaceful solution for the Indochinese situation as soon as possible.

J[OHN] C[ARTER] V[INCENT]

<sup>27</sup> See telegram 20, March 7, 1946, 7 p. m., from Saigon, *Foreign Relations*, 1946, vol. VIII, p. 32.

<sup>28</sup> See telegram 4671, September 17, 1946, 5 p. m., from Paris, *ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>29</sup> In reporting this interview in telegram 89, January 9, 3 p. m., to Paris, the Department said it hoped "this does not represent definitive crystallization of view that problem is purely internal. Less dangerous situations have been raised in SO in past." (851G.00/1-947)



851G.00/1-747 : Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Embassy in France*

SECRET

WASHINGTON, January 8, 1947—7 p. m.

74. Bangkok's Jan 7 repta to you. In the light of reports from Saigon, Hanoi and Bangkok we are increasingly concerned about the situation as it has developed in Indochina. The press knows of Bonnet's call at the Dept on Dec 24 and we have indicated to the press (see Bulletin 309) that we are awaiting the Moutet reports. With the situation in Indochina we can therefore expect increased public interest over here. In the light of reports we have been receiving from the area and which have been repeated to you the situation in Indochina can no longer be considered to be a purely local or internal matter. We are therefore vitally interested in such decisions as the French Govt may reach following Moutet's return to Paris and as a result of the reports which he will no doubt make. We naturally hope that an equitable solution can be found which will bring an end to hostilities in Indochina. I feel that it will be useful for you to have an informal talk with Blum reiterating our interest in this matter as was done here with Bonnet (Embtel [Deptel] 6586 Dec. 24<sup>30</sup>) and express the hope that the French will be willing to keep us fully informed of developments.<sup>31</sup>

Sent Paris as 74 repta for info to Saigon as 5, Hanoi as 4, Bangkok as 16.

BYRNES

851G.00/1-947 : Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

HANOI, January 9, 1947—1 p. m.

11. Vietnam Government appears working for Chinese intervention in Indo-China.

Vietnamese seem to be taking every precaution possible to protect Chinese lives and property (as they have also tried to protect other foreigners—one American caught in battle area was even given turkey for Christmas by Vietnamese authorities). Ho Chi Minh recently

<sup>30</sup> *Foreign Relations*, 1946, vol. VIII, p. 77.

<sup>31</sup> The Ambassador in France, Caffery, reported in telegram 237, January 17, 9 p. m., as follows: "I spoke of the Indo-Chinese situation with Leon Blum today. He fully appreciates our point of view and will, I feel sure, convey that fact to President Auriol as well as to the ministers in the new government." (851G.00/1-1747) This was reported by the Department in telegram 14, January 20, 7 p. m., to Saigon and repeated in 9 to Hanoi. The French National Assembly and the Council of the Republic had elected Vincent Auriol as President on January 16, and a new cabinet under Premier Paul Ramadier was confirmed on January 21.

addressed via Vietnamese radio very conciliatory letter to Vietnam's friend "China" in marked contrast to Ho's attitude when Chinese forces occupation here.

Within last week, Chinese Consul General has grown increasingly critical French inability protect Chinese citizens of whom he claims there are 150,000 in Tonkin with 100,000 in areas not controlled by French (pre-war census lists 50,000 Chinese in Tonkin and it seems doubtful number has tripled since that time).

Should Chinese Consul General[']s negotiation for peaceful settlement [of] fate Chinese [quarter] Hanoi break down and French attack, Chinese protest would seem possible.<sup>32</sup>

Repeat to Paris.

O'SULLIVAN

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851G.00/1-947 : Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

SAIGON, January 9, 1947.

11. In the final broadcast before departure, Moutet said in summary that purpose French Government remains, as always, peace; that France does not renounce policy of agreements; that France opposes campaign of oppression; that France will protect herself, and will not yield to violence; that France has always desired the free association in the French Union and Indo-Chinese federation between the peoples who can freely govern themselves; that reestablishment of peaceful order means protection of lives and property of French, Chinese, and Indo-Chinese, and does not mean colonial war; that France will not go back on her word, and desires negotiate in security with true representatives of Vietnam people who are decided to apply loyally agreements freely entered into; that he has never considered military decision as substitute for peace, so hopes will come soon.

Not repeated to Paris.

REED

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851G.00/1-1147 : Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

HANOI, January 11, 1947—3 p. m.

13. Have received from Viet-Nameese sources copies of documents Ho Chi Minh wished to present Moutet (Viet-Nameese Government apparently bitterly disappointed Moutet and Ho did not meet. Viet-

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<sup>32</sup> For solution, see telegram 19, January 16, and footnote 37, p. 64.

Namese state messenger bearing letter of invitation for Moutet disappeared. French say letter never received). Paragraph from document which seems authentic, Ho was prepared to propose following to resolve present crisis: (a) Cease fire order supervised by mixed commissions on all fronts, troops returning to positions defined by accord March 6 and staff agreement April 3 with release all prisoners political and otherwise; (b) Stop all reinforcements en route Indo-China; (c) Immediate meeting qualified representatives both Govts (Moutet and Ho) to organize referendum Cochinchina, treat diplomatic relations Viet-Nam with exterior, question of Indo-China Federation and place of Viet-Nam in French Union.<sup>33</sup>

In view evolution situation French would have refused accept return of troops to positions defined April 3 agreement which Ho obviously knew.

Repeat to Paris.

O'SULLIVAN

851G.00/1-1547: Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

PARIS, January 15, 1947—2 p. m.

181. Moutet, on his own suggestion, gave me last night a detailed account of what he had heard and seen in Indo-China, also showing me a number of pictures of mutilated persons as well as a number of captured papers and documents showing how the Vietnam planned and prepared the surprise attack on the evening of December 19. According to these papers and Moutet's declarations, it seems reasonably certain that the Vietnam had planned a general massacre of French troops and civilians as well as native and Chinese sympathizers. Only 2 hours before the time fixed for the general attack, the French authorities were warned by their agents that the attack was impending and therefore a general massacre was avoided. Most of what Moutet told me and much of the contents of the papers I saw have appeared in one way or another in public print.

<sup>33</sup> Copies of documents were forwarded in despatch 179, February 7, from Saigon; they were finally delivered to Commissioner Sainteny about February 3, according to despatch 7666, February 20, from Paris, which also reported that the covering letter was dated January 9, the day after Minister Moutet's departure (851G.00/2-2047). Consul Reed pointed out that only the Vietnamese side was presented in these documents. He concluded that "In the last analysis, it is certain that both sides have made mistakes, have violated the various agreements, and have thus precipitated the present conflict." (851G.00/2-747) In his telegram 56, February 12, from Saigon, he reported that the press had published a Vietnamese communiqué at Paris which declared the conflict was becoming an international question and repeated earlier arguments (851G.00/2-1147).

Moutet went on to remind me of his well-known advanced views as well as his life-long activities on behalf of native inhabitants of French overseas possessions. However, he alleges he was struck by the fact that the massacre was planned for the day it had been publicly announced that he was due to arrive in Indo-China and he affirms that he was so shocked at what he heard and saw there that he is now convinced that it is essential that the French carry out successful military activities at a very early date; not involving, however, anything in the nature of a military conquest of the country which he declares is unnecessary because most of the Annamite population is not behind the small Communist group which now dominates, and which is composed, he says, of a coterie of Moscow-trained young men. He does not believe that Ho Chi Minh or his Government have any real authority now. He says that he believes that Ho Chi Minh and most of his colleagues did not approve the attempted massacre but "went along" when they saw that they had been out-maneuvered and outplayed by the extremists. He says that no attempt, whatever, was made by anyone either in the Vietnam Government or extremist group (he is vague about this "group") to get in touch with him and he is not at all clear as to how or with whom they must eventually negotiate. In any event, once the military situation takes a definite turn for the better, France must carry out its promises in regard to future relations with the Governments of Indo-China.

He described his visit to the regions recently retroceded by Siam<sup>34</sup> and was effusive in his thanks for what our Government had done in that connection.

I stated with emphasis our concern over the Indo-Chinese situation and told him that obviously that situation affects other areas also and that we are frankly perturbed at the way things are going.

Moutet said that he could well appreciate our point of view.

As the Department is aware, it is not yet known who will take part in the next French Government which is to be formed within the next few days and Moutet may not remain in the Cabinet; also Blum is to return from London tomorrow but it is not now known whether he will remain in office.<sup>35</sup>

CAFFERY

<sup>34</sup> For documentation on the settlement of the Siamese-French Indochina boundary dispute, see *Foreign Relations*, 1946, vol. VIII, pp. 978 ff.

<sup>35</sup> With regard to the new French Government, see footnote 31, p. 60. Minister Moutet remained in office in the new Cabinet.

851G.00/1-1647 : Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

HANOI, January 16, 1947—1 p. m.

19. About 6,000 Vietnamese (all of whom departed for Vietnam controlled areas) and 500 Chinese (most of whom remained Hanoi) left Chinese quarter Hanoi yesterday under arrangements made by Chinese Consul General with Tu Ve<sup>36</sup> in that area. Chinese Consul General very vague about how he made these arrangements but I believe bribery may have been used.

This leaves about 10,000 Chinese, 600 Hindus, and unknown numbers Vietnamese still in quarter.

Yesterday's scheduled meeting of Consuls with Vietnamese authorities, reference questions of remaining neutrals Chinese quarter and French hostages, was postponed by military operations. It is now tentatively set for January 17.<sup>37</sup>

Repeat to Paris.

O'SULLIVAN

851G.00/1-2147 : Telegram

*The Chargé in the United Kingdom (Gallman) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

LONDON, January 21, 1947—7 p. m.

444. Department's telegram 335, January 20.<sup>38</sup> 1. Indo-China situation discussed at Foreign Office 21st. Following highlights discussion:

(a) British were prepared discuss Indo-Chinese situation with Blum provided he raised question. Blum did not do so and therefore Indo-China was not discussed in Blum talks here.

(b) Foreign Office unable to predict whether Indians propose raise Indo-China issue UN. Foreign Office has no evidence Indians will do

<sup>36</sup> Armed anti-French force holding the Chinese quarter of Hanoi.

<sup>37</sup> The meeting took place on January 21 when the Vietnamese promised to release "neutrals" (non-French) and hinted that French persons might be visited by the International Red Cross. On January 24 a further evacuation of the Chinese quarter at Hanoi occurred. Before the final evacuation on February 20 could take place, the quarter was abandoned by armed Vietnamese. In telegram 62, February 18, from Hanoi, Vice Consul O'Sullivan stated: "This solves thorny military and political problems for France and is due largely efforts of Chinese Consul General." (851G.00/2-1847)

<sup>38</sup> Not printed; it requested that the British Foreign Office views be sounded out and stated that the French Government was "fully advised our concern and Caffery has personally reiterated Blum informally our interest and desire be kept fully informed". (851G.00/1-2047)

so but points out Indian politicians unpredictable and now virtually independent of British influence.

(c) French Embassy complained informally to Foreign Office over anti-French and pro-Vietnam statements attributed Nehru<sup>39</sup> and Aung San,<sup>40</sup> but was told British Government could accept no responsibility therefor.

(d) During last fortnight or so French have flown about 20 aircraft through India and Burma to Indo-China. British approved flights but requested French to space flights so as not to create undue attention India and Burma and possibility of Indian and Burmese objection.

(e) Foreign Office unable hazard prediction whether India and Burma will endeavor provide substantial material support Vietnam regime. Thus far India has given no such support while in Burma support limited to about 100 volunteers. Foreign Office view is neither India nor Burma in position grant any important support Vietnam.

(f) British Embassy Paris after discussions with French Foreign Office sees little prospect clarification French policy for fortnight after formation new government, it being felt at least that much time will be needed consider Moutet's report and recommendations. Meantime French probably will continue military operations and strengthening of forces in Indo-China.

(g) Foreign Office has no evidence Siam Government overtly supporting Vietnam or other anti-French elements Indo-China. Foreign Office of view Siamese would scarcely risk such activities at this juncture but might adopt such policy in event of disintegration French authority Indo-China.

2. Foreign Office states it much concerned over Indo-China situation particularly in reference possible adverse repercussions in India, Burma and Indonesia. But we gather from our talks with Foreign Office officials that Foreign Office has formulated no clear and positive proposals for coping with situation should it continue to deteriorate. British obviously hope French and Vietnam will be able speedily to reconcile differences but they apparently feel such hopes have little chance of materializing in light present developments. Meanwhile British await policy clarification new French Government and trust it will devise policy mutually satisfactory to France and Vietnam.

3. Foreign Office states it would welcome our views on steps that might be taken to harmonize French-Vietnam relations.

Sent Department 444, repeated Paris 99.

GALLMAN

<sup>39</sup> Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Executive Councilor for External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations of the Indian Interim Government.

<sup>40</sup> U Aung San, Deputy Chairman of the Burman Executive Council and head of Burma Mission to London.



851G.00/1-2247 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

PARIS, January 22, 1947—7 p. m.

289. Careful reading of that portion of Ramadier's speech yesterday re Indochina discloses certain points of interest:

(1) Prime Minister was extremely firm and categorical on necessity of putting down present disorders and restoring order and security. "We must relieve our garrisons, re-establish essential communications and assure the security of the peoples who have taken refuge with us".

(2) He confirmed indications that France will not negotiate with present Vietnam Government in anticipation that new more moderate leaders will arise.

(3) At such time France will consent to inclusion of Cochinchina in Vietnam and will not insist on Vietnam membership in French Union being indirect through membership in Indochinese federation. (When time comes for negotiations) "France will not fear, if the population desires it, the union of the three Annamite countries, nor will she refuse to accept the independence of the Vietnam in the framework of the French Union".<sup>41</sup>

Department please repeat to Saigon as 2 from Paris.

CAFFERY

851G.00/1-2247 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

NANKING, January 22, 1947—8 p. m.

122. During course of a call by Embassy officer on Foreign Office official in connection with another matter, latter vouchsafed information that French in Indo-China had felt out Chinese officials there regarding possibility of a new regime headed by Bao Dai<sup>42</sup> (reported to be in Hong Kong) in executive capacity with support of Annamite Nationalist Party. Foreign Office official indicated any revival imperial idea in this area would be unsatisfactory to China.

Informant also gave his opinion that French were determined not to treat with Ho Chi-Minh, and that calculated purpose of Moutet's recent mission to Indo-China was to retrieve French position by rupture of agreement with Ho, which Moutet had signed.

STUART

<sup>41</sup> Telegram 334, January 24, 9 p. m., from Paris reported that the words "and the Indo-Chinese Federation" were added to this quotation as published in the *Journal Officiel* of January 21 (851G.00/1-2447).

<sup>42</sup> Former Emperor of Annam, known also as Nguyen Vinh Thuy.



851G.711/1-2547: Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

PARIS, January 25, 1947—noon.

336. Question of censorship in Indochina discussed with Baudet<sup>43</sup> last evening. He said that a message had been sent to d'Argenlieu pointing out the possible injurious effect on American public opinion of censorship policy recently adopted. Baudet added, however, that Foreign Office did not feel it had the authority to issue instructions to d'Argenlieu on a matter which is considered to be a military question.<sup>44</sup>

CAFFERY

851G.00/2-347: Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Embassy in France*

SECRET

WASHINGTON, February 3, 1947—8 p. m.

US URGENT

431. There is reason for increasing concern over situation as it is developing in Indochina and for that reason I feel you might well take early occasion to have frank talk with Ramadier or Bidault<sup>45</sup> or both somewhat along lines conversations you have already had with Blum, but at this time going in fact beyond position you took in those talks. We have only very friendliest feelings toward France and we are anxious in every way we can to support France in her fight to regain her economic, political and military strength and to restore herself as in fact one of major powers of world. In spite any misunderstanding which might have arisen in minds French in regard to our position concerning Indochina they must appreciate that we have fully recognized France's sovereign position in that area and we do not wish to have it appear that we are in any way endeavoring undermine that position, and French should know it is our desire to be helpful and we stand ready assist any appropriate way we can to find solution for Indochinese problem. At same time we cannot shut our eyes to fact that there are two sides this problem and that our reports indicate both a

<sup>43</sup> Philippe Baudet, Director of the Asiatic Division of the French Foreign Office. <sup>44</sup> Despatch 187, February 19, from Saigon, gave a detailed account of steps taken since mid-November to control the dissemination of information in Indochina and the flow of information out of Indochina. As the Chief of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs (Moffat) commented in a memorandum of March 7, "the picture of the censorship exercised by the French as it appears in this despatch is that of a totalitarian regime at its worst." The Department on April 28 commended the writer of the despatch for compiling "this discerning and comprehensive report on a subject of the greatest interest to the Department." (851G-918/2-1947)

<sup>45</sup> Georges Bidault, French Minister for Foreign Affairs.

lack French understanding of other side (more in Saigon than in Paris) and continued existence dangerously outmoded colonial outlook and methods in area. Furthermore, there is no escape from fact that trend of times is to effect that colonial empires in XIX Century sense are rapidly becoming thing of past. Action Brit in India and Burma and Dutch in Indonesia are outstanding examples this trend, and French themselves took cognizance of it both in new Constitution and in their agreements with Vietnam. On other hand we do not lose sight fact that Ho Chi Minh has direct Communist connections and it should be obvious that we are not interested in seeing colonial empire administrations supplanted by philosophy and political organizations emanating from and controlled by Kremlin. Fact does remain, however, that a situation does exist in Indochina which can no longer be considered, if it ever was considered, to be of a local character. If that situation continues deteriorate some country in direct interest is very likely to bring matter before Security Council under Chapter 11 of Charter. We have no intention taking such action ourselves at this time, but French will surely appreciate that we do have a vital interest in political and economic well being this area. If some country should bring matter before Security Council we would find it difficult to oppose an investigation Indochinese problem unless negotiations between parties were going on. It might be added that it would not in our estimation be in France's long-range interest to use her veto position to keep matter from coming before Council. Frankly we have no solution of problem to suggest. It is basically matter for two parties to work out themselves and from your reports and those from Indochina we are led to feel that both parties have endeavored to keep door open to some sort of settlement. We appreciate fact that Vietnam started present fighting in Indochina on December 19 and that this action has made it more difficult for French to adopt a position of generosity and conciliation. Nevertheless we hope that French will find it possible to be more than generous in trying to find a solution.<sup>48</sup>

MARSHALL

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<sup>48</sup> This telegram was repeated in 612, February 6, 4 p. m., to London, for the information of the British Foreign Office. The Department added that it would be interested in British views with regard to possible settlement of the Indochina problem and also as to any steps looking toward establishment of peace if the impasse were to continue. (851G.00/1-2947)

851G.00/2-347 : Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Embassy in France*<sup>47</sup>

SECRET

WASHINGTON, February 6, 1947—1 p. m.

US URGENT

469. Reference to Chapter XI of Charter contained in Deptel 431, Feb. 3, did not mean to indicate that matter could be brought to SC attention under Chapter XI as violation of declaration regarding non-self-governing territories. Before situation in Indochina could be brought to SC's attention, conditions of Chapter VI must be met, i.e., complaining state must allege a dispute or situation of the nature referred to in Art 34 of Charter. It is possible that state bringing complaint might argue before SC that France has violated the principles of Chapter XI. Such a line of argument was put forward in Indonesian case before SC in London.<sup>48</sup>

Re reference to possible use of veto, by France, it should be made clear that under Four Power Declaration made at San Francisco and SC practice veto cannot be used to prevent matters coming before Council and that Dept believes it would not be in France's long-range interest to use her veto to prevent substantive Council action.

MARSHALL

851G.00/2-647 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*<sup>49</sup>

SECRET

PARIS, February 6, 1947—2 p. m.

524. This morning I put squarely before Bidault the matters set out in Department's 431, February 3. He said that he was appreciative of our interest and grateful for our friendly expressions but that he wanted to make the most express reservations from a juridical point of view in regard to a country in direct interest bringing the matter before the Security Council under Chapter II of the Charter observing that if that were done for Indochina some other country might do it also for Algeria or even Corsica.

The French Government he said is perfectly aware that the day of colonial empires in the Nineteenth Century sense of the word is a thing of the past. He added that the French Government has kept the door open to some sort of settlement; that the French Government would without question be generous and conciliatory in trying to find

<sup>47</sup> Repeated in telegram 671, February 10, 6 p. m., to London.

<sup>48</sup> For American position on Indonesian case at the United Nations Security Council, see footnote 2, *Foreign Relations*, 1946, vol. VIII, p. 787.

<sup>49</sup> Repeated in telegram 643, February 7, 7 p. m., to London.

a solution: in fact, Admiral Thierry D'Argenlieu's secret recommendation that the French Government make a public statement that it would not deal with Ho Chi Minh's Government has been categorically rejected and the Admiral's resignation is being accepted. He is to be replaced by General Leclerc who Bidault remarked dislikes D'Argenlieu and will adopt a policy as far removed from D'Argenlieu's as possible. "However," he said "please keep this extremely confidential because if de Gaulle<sup>50</sup> finds out that Leclerc is going out there he will get hold of him, poison his mind and upset our apple cart". "You may assure your Government that we are more than anxious to find a peaceable liberal solution in Indochina and to find it as soon as possible."<sup>51</sup>

CAFFERY

851G.00/2-747: Telegram

*The Chargé in the United Kingdom (Gallman) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

LONDON, February 7, 1947—7 p. m.

865. 1. Substance Deptel 431, February 3, to Paris communicated FonOff 7th for which it expressed appreciation.

2. Reference last paragraph Deptel 612, February 6,<sup>52</sup> FonOff states Allen<sup>53</sup> has been in Java for some days and has had no reports from him recently on Indochina. However, based on recent discussions with French Embassy here and on reports from Paris, FonOff is of view that French are preparing ground for renewal of conversations with Ho Chi-Minh. As evidence of more conciliatory trend in French policy FonOff cites decision of French Govt to recall D'Argenlieu as well as intimation by French Embassy here that Moutet report recommends resumption of negotiations with Vietnam. Moreover, FonOff states French now more cognizant of unrest stirred up in India, Burma, Ceylon and Singapore over Indochina and threat to line of communications. Additionally Moutet report said to indicate inability of France to carry on large scale protracted hostilities Indochina and to set forth that present French operations being carried on primarily to induce Vietnamese to moderate present policies after which French

<sup>50</sup> Gen. Charles de Gaulle, President of the French Provisional Government, November 1945-January 26, 1946.

<sup>51</sup> A summary of the exchange with Foreign Minister Bidault was sent in telegram 30, February 7, 6 p. m., to Saigon, and repeated as No. 13 to Hanoi and No. 153 to Nanking.

<sup>52</sup> See footnote 46, p. 68.

<sup>53</sup> Richard H. S. Allen, Head of the Southeast Asia Department, British Foreign Office.

feel basis for satisfactory solution may be reached. As indicated above, FonOff considers French have failed in efforts to win over "moderate" Vietnamese and consequently preparing to resume negotiations with Ho.

3. FonOff feels Dept's representations may lend impetus apparent trend of French policy to resume negotiations with Ho. FonOff intimates it has no present intention of following our lead, pointing out French still suspicious of British policy as witness what happened in Syria. As FonOff now believes prospects are good for resumption by French of conversations with Ho, it feels Indochinese situation may improve rather than deteriorate and that in light of this expectation FonOff has not given consideration to steps that might be taken should situation worsen.

4. FonOff states according British Embassy Paris General Morliere has been relieved of his command.

Repeated Paris 90.

GALLMAN

851G.00/2-747 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

PARIS, February 7, 1947—10 p. m.

PRIORITY

573. Baudet today confirmed to us that, as reported in press, local representatives of Vietnam yesterday transmitted unofficially to French Government another peace offer, somewhat similar in content to that received in December. He said principal points in document were substantially as follows: immediate cessation of hostilities on all fronts; appointment of armistice commissions to insure cease-fire order is observed; withdrawal of all troops to positions previously defined by Franco-Vietnamese accords of March 6 and April 3, 1946; immediate halt to all reinforcements for French troops in Indo-China; Government of Ho Chi-minh to be only representative of Vietnam during negotiations; negotiations to be based on previously signed agreements between France and Vietnam; Moutet to proceed at early date to Indo-China to reach agreement in principle with Ho Chi-minh regarding basis for negotiations, which should be based on recognition of political and territorial integrity of Vietnam Republic within framework of French Union.

Baudet did not indicate what French position would be with respect to individual points of Vietnamese message but indicated French Government "might agree to enter into discussions with Vietnamese".

CAFFERY

851G.00/2-1047 : Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Consulate at Hanoi*

SECRET

WASHINGTON, February 12, 1947—6 p m.

14. Urtel 48 Feb. 10.<sup>55</sup> Nanking reported Jan 22 that FonOff official vouchsafed info that French in Indochina had felt out Chinese officials there regarding possibility new regime headed by Baodai with support Annamite Nationalist Party. Official indicated revival imperial idea would be unsatisfactory China. Reed Dec 27 reported considerable talk French endeavoring contact Baodai and urge form new govt and such rumors not infrequent. However, no evidence here any concrete French proposals and Dept inclined agree urtel 9 Jan 7<sup>55</sup> that return-Baodai as head Govt only remote possibility. Presumably his past close association Ho and reported efforts China obtain Chinese backing Vietnam independence would weigh against him. Appears unlikely restoration monarchy under other pretender would be favored by present French Govt. Official Socialist organ *Populaire* has warned against any plan "dig up group reactionary mandarins representing out-of-date social system".

MARSHALL

851G.00/2-1047 : Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Consulate at Hanoi*

CONFIDENTIAL

WASHINGTON, February 14, 1947—5 p. m.

15. Urtel 51 Feb. 10.<sup>55</sup> Re Vietnam report that Secy's declaration showed that international opinion does not wish see war in Vietnam, Secy in Feb 7 press conf said for attribution but not quotation "We are naturally deeply interested troubled situation Indochina and naturally are hopeful they can find pacific basis for its adjustment".

Sent Hanoi 15. Repeated Saigon 32.

MARSHALL

851G.00/2-1547 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

PARIS, February 15, 1947—1 p. m.

688. During lengthy conversation yesterday, Gustave Moutet, son and head of personal "Cabinet" of Minister Overseas France, insisted on fact that "no one in French Government has any thought of re-

<sup>55</sup> Not printed.



conquering area or re-establishing 1939 *status quo*". He said that French wanted to negotiate as soon as possible with Vietnam but that this would only be possible after military successes which would prove to Vietnam its impossibility of obtaining military decision.

Gustave Moutet said current French military policy is destruction of Vietnam's Armed Forces with little consideration to expand territory occupied, and he added military situation had "greatly improved" recently and that Vietnam's military resistance now generally weakening. He said Vietnam losses in killed were between 8,000 and 10,000. He believes arrival of reinforcements will permit further military advantages, but uncertain whether these would be sufficient to permit successful negotiations. Combined operations by French forces on the spot, plus reinforcements, will not be possible for extensive period, as French Government most anxious repatriate certain units which have been in Indo-China for long while.

Concerning Vietnam's possible appeal to UNO, Gustave Moutet confirmed French would oppose this move energetically, alleging Vietnam has no international status, and that France is "only foreign power which has recognized Vietnam's entity and this only as part of French Union".

D'Argenlieu's removal was commented on in these terms: "Notwithstanding his many qualities he has now outlived his usefulness. Furthermore his proud and solitary character has resulted in difficulties between himself and all elements in Indo-China." Choice of successor will only be made by Government after D'Argenlieu's return, but it was clearly indicated military would be chosen "at least for a while as civilian High Commissioner would be considered a loss of face".

CAFFERY

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851G.00/2-1647: Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

PARIS, February 16, 1947—3 p. m.

705. I reviewed in some detail yesterday with Ramadier the situation in Indochina, restating our point of view and emphasizing especially the outmoded colonial outlook of many French officials, especially in Saigon. Ramadier agreed; in fact, he agreed that our point of view was reasonable all along the line. He told me that Leclerc has definitely turned down the Government's request to go to Indochina as High Commissioner and that he, Ramadier, had offered the job only a few minutes before to General Juin,<sup>56</sup> who promised to

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<sup>56</sup> Gen. Alphonse Pierre Juin, Chief of the French Army General Staff.



think it over and reply at an early date. Ramadier observed: "Of course no one wants that job at this juncture, but I very much hope that Juin will take it". (Juin came out of Ramadier's office as I went in).<sup>57</sup>

Repeated London 136.

Caffery

851G.00/2-2047: Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

RESTRICTED HANOI, February 20, 1947—5 p. m.

64. By Viet Nam radio today and also letter of February 19, I with British, Chinese colleagues and Indian Vice Consul as well as International Red Cross representative, invited to attend meeting February 21 by Giam.<sup>58</sup>

I, of course, will not attend.<sup>59</sup> Understand British Consul and Chinese Consul General probably will not attend although Indian Vice Consul has requested permission from Sainteny to keep rendezvous.

Giam gave no reason for meeting but from tone Viet Nam radio lately, he may wish protest against French "atrocities" in Cochinchina and south Annam.

Repeat to Paris.

O'SULLIVAN

851G.00/2-2147: Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

HANOI, February 21, 1947—10 a. m.

[Received February 25—12:35 a. m.]

67. This French text Ho Chi Minh appeal of February 20 to French people and French President (have seen original letter and have verified Ho's signature thereon).<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Telegram 839, February 24, 2 p. m., from Paris, reported that General Juin declined the offer. (851G.00/2-2447).

<sup>58</sup> Hoang Minh Giam, Vietnamese Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

<sup>59</sup> In telegram 22, February 28, 3 p. m., to Hanoi, the Department replied: "Believe would be desirable for you whenever possible maintain contact Vietnam leaders provided French authorities not object." The telegram added that discretion would need to be used to "prevent political abuse such contacts". (851G.00/2-2047).

<sup>60</sup> In repeating this telegram in 789, February 28, noon, to Paris, the Department added: "In view of O'Sullivan's verification signature and Ramadier's reluctance concede authenticity previous proposals Dept anxious learn French reaction and intentions." (851G.00/2-2147)

[Translation:] "Once again I address an urgent appeal to the Government and people of France.

Much French and Vietnamese blood has been shed:

Numerous Vietnamese towns and villages are destroyed and French enterprises ruined.

Each day that this fratricidal war lasts multiplies the misery and increases the devastation.

It is claimed that the French forces are used only to establish peace and order. This is not true. The truth is that where there are no French troops there is no conflict and peace and order reign. Once more we solemnly declare that the people of Vietnam desire only their unity and independence within the French Union, and we pledge ourselves to respect French economic and cultural interests in Vietnam.

Can France, the champion of liberty, continue to make war on a people who are claiming only the most legitimate rights and who wish to cooperate with her?

France has only to give the word for hostilities to cease immediately, for so many lives and so much property to be saved, for friendship and confidence to reign.

If in spite of our sincere desire for peace, France insists upon continuing the war, she will lose all without gaining anything for the war will result only in the creation of hatred and bitterness between our two peoples.

It is true that the French troops have airplanes and tanks but we have on our side the justice of our cause and the firm intention to resist until the end.

We do not believe that France desires to continue this war which is the anti-constitutional, disastrous and without glory.

We beg the French Government to be so good as to make known clearly its policy with regard to Vietnam. We beg the French people to be so good as to make known their opinion of this bloody and stupid conflict.

As for ourselves our position is clear: we want our unity and our independence within the French Union; we want a just peace which will do honor both to France and to Vietnam."

(Signed) Ho Chi Minh

Transmission copy this document apparently reason Giam requesting meeting for today with Consuls. Original this message in hands French authorities.

O'SULLIVAN

851G.00/2-2747: Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

SAIGON, February 27, 1947—noon.

80. Chinese Consul General informs me Communist agents (including several agents recently arrived from Yenan) have been stirring up trouble among the thousands of Chinese made homeless by

fires on outskirts Saigon and yesterday planned demonstration in front of his office with intention create incident with French police. He warned French and measures were taken to prevent demonstration but he believes this attempt is latest of what may be anticipated.

He had previously told me that undoubted increase in Chinese Communists due agents who worked upon dissatisfied elements, also that many students being converted to Communism to extent that he was tempted to ask schools be closed down. He added two, possibly three, Communist elements working in French Indo-China; first, French (only a few); second, Chinese (numerous); and third, Russian (but no confirmation) but that these elements did not appear to be working together very closely. In his opinion Vietminh party completely controlled by Communist elements whose idea of nationalist state is but prelude to an eventual Communist state.

While I agree in part I feel that Annamite Communism perhaps over emphasized as a present danger although it is definitely a potential one. My opinion Communist trained leaders took control of nationalist movement by advocating "throw out the French" but if Communist leaders removed nationalist movement would remain as such. Danger then would be Chinese imperialism and eventual taking over large part of trade.

Please repeat to Nanking, Paris.

REED

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851G.00/3-347 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

PARIS, March 3, 1947—7 p. m.

956. Department's telegram 789, of February 28, 1947.<sup>61</sup> Marius Moutet, Minister Overseas France, informs us that Vietnam appeal of February 20 to French people and French President has never been officially received by Government in Paris. However, both Minister and his son, Gustave Moutet, Chief of Cabinet, seemed completely familiar with text of appeal which they said had been received in Paris "through Reuters".

Moutet termed the appeal "a small step forward" in that it omitted previous demand for return to military *status quo ante*. However, he regretted comminatory tone of appeal, terming it "psychological warfare", and deplored that Vietnam, if it wishes to negotiate with French Government, does not do so through official channels instead of merely diffusing it through radio and newspaper channels.

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<sup>61</sup> See footnote 60, p. 74.

Moutet stressed sincere desire of French Government to negotiate but in view necessity to "save face" in the Far East and in view of way in which French were "caught napping and nearly evicted on December 19", he is obliged, he says, to take precautions against a second Vietnam "trap" and must insist on certain security guarantees before real negotiations start. While not attempting to deny partial responsibility of "certain French officials in Indo-China", Socialist Moutet alleges high indignation over Vietnam duplicity and mentioned that the French Government security demands would include the retention of certain number of military bases in Vietnam territory as well as on "some kind of control" over the Vietnam Army. The Overseas Minister reacted unfavorably to Vietminh demand for "unity" in last sentence of Ho's appeal, as meaning insistence on obtaining Cochinchina. Moutet strongly defended position that France was protector of Cochinchinese people and would not turn them over against their will to a "ruthless Communist dictatorship". He observed that this last Ho "message" might be brought by "a political party" in the Assembly during the debate on Indo-China scheduled for March 6.

In view of fact that both Bidault and Moutet have (I think sincerely) denied receiving letter in question, Department may wish to inquire of O'Sullivan the basis for his belief that letter was actually delivered to the French.<sup>62</sup>

CAFFERY

851G.00/3-647: Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

PARIS, March 6, 1947—3 p. m.

1007. French Cabinet yesterday named Emile Bollaert High Commissioner to Indochina to replace Admiral D'Argenlieu. Communiqué adds D'Argenlieu will accompany Bollaert to Indochina and transfer office there.

Baudet characterized temporary return of D'Argenlieu as compromise designed to save Admiral's face and satisfy his supporters in Cabinet.

<sup>62</sup> The Department in its telegram 24, March 6, noon, to Hanoi (38 to Saigon) asked for information in this regard and repeated 956 from Paris (851G.00/3-347). Vice Consul O'Sullivan reported in telegram 87, March 12, 10 a. m., from Hanoi, that Ho's letter was received by the British Consul through the International Red Cross representative who had seen the Vietnamese on February 21; the letter was then given to French authorities for transmission to Paris (851G.00/3-1247). Vice Consul O'Sullivan reported in telegram 100, March 23, 5 p. m., that French refusal to allow the Consuls to contact Vietnamese authorities in regard to the question of hostages might be explained on the ground that the French "did not wish to receive peace proposal authenticity of which Consuls might be in position to confirm". (851G.00/3-2347)

Bollaert is Career Prefect who took active part in resistance movement as representative de Gaulle: was appointed Regional Commissioner at Stuttgart and Prefect of Vosges after liberation; recently named to Council of Republic representing Rassemblement des Gauches as one of 50 members chosen by Assembly. While Bollaert is reported to be able and energetic man, he is relatively unknown and his appointment is obviously expedient determined by refusal of General Leclerc, General Juin and perhaps other personalities to accept post.

While no sensational developments are expected from assembly debate on Indochinese policy opening March 7, some clarification of Government policy will probably emerge. This, with appointment of Bollaert, may end status of indecision and drifting which has been apparent in recent weeks.

Department please repeat Saigon as Paris' No. 5.

CAFFERY

851G.00/3-647: Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

PARIS, March 6, 1947—4 p. m.

1008. Deptel 818, March 3 and A-343, February 25.<sup>63</sup> Baudet, director of Far Eastern Division of Foreign Office, confirms ex-Emperor Baodai in Hong Kong. Baudet doubted practicability of reestablishing monarchy but admitted existence of some sentiment in "Annamite" circles (apparently distinct from Tonkinese and Cochinchinese) for return of a mandarin government caused by reaction to authoritarian methods of Viet-Minh. Baudet stated that in any event no steps towards restoration of Emperor would be taken without "consultation with Annamese people".

Department please repeat Hanoi as Paris' 3 and Saigon as Paris' 6.

CAFFERY

851G.00/3-747: Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

PARIS, March 7, 1947—6 p. m.

1031. Ramadier, at his regular weekly press conference yesterday, anticipated Assembly debate scheduled today on Indo-China by devoting entire conference to that subject. Summary of Ramadier's

<sup>63</sup> Neither printed.

lengthy statement indicates he first emphasized favorable development of military situation; French forces have cleared area around Hanoi, Haiphong, Hue and other centers and in central Annam have joined up with forces coming from Laos, thus cutting Vietnam in two. These successes, said Premier, have demonstrated to Vietminh they cannot impose their solution Indo-Chinese problem by force.

Indo-Chinese problem, continued Premier, had thus become primarily constitutional and political one and France had accordingly named US [as?] High Commissioner, M. Bollaert, civilian and member of Parliament. Summarizing provisions of new constitution for organization of French union, Ramadier emphasized members of union were obligated to unite their efforts and resources for its joint defense and French Government has responsibility of coordinating these resources and directing general defense policy. Thus, French Republic will retain direction of military and diplomatic policy of French Union. Prime Minister re-emphasized this point in discussing plans for future political developments in territories of Indo-China.

After defending somewhat feebly representative character of Cochin-Chinese Government, Ramadier said French would not oppose evolution of countries of Indo-China in conformance with their national aspirations: "We see no objection to union of three Annamite countries on condition that it does not take place to the exclusive advantage of one part of these territories, which would establish its suzerainty over the others". France would act as mediator between desires of different countries.

In conclusion Ramadier referred to Indo-Chinese federation as necessary to regulate certain common problems as, for example, currency and transport. Nevertheless such federation should not restrict interior development of each country.<sup>84</sup>

In analyzing Prime Minister's statement it is apparent there is nothing essentially new in it. However, certain points are clarified and others are for first time given official expression. Thus Ramadier made it clear France intends to retain control of military establishment and foreign diplomatic relations not only in Indo-China but in entire French Union. Union of Cochin-China with Vietnam which has been one of fundamental points of difference in past negotiations is admitted but in federal form through which French obviously hope to retain certain special rights and privileges in rich Cochin-Chinese area where bulk of French economic interests are concentrated.

<sup>84</sup> Telegram 95, March 18, 10 a. m., from Hanoi, reported the reaction of Ho Chi Minh as broadcast March 15. Ho regarded Ramadier's statement that France was not opposed to Vietnam's independence and unity as a declaration not in accord with the facts and concluded that continued war would cause losses to France and inevitable perishing of the French Union. (851G.00/3-1847)



Idea Indo-Chinese federation should be political entity through which influence and authority of Vietnam could be restricted has apparently been abandoned in accordance with long-held views of Foreign Office. Thus another serious bone of contention between France and Vietnam may have been eliminated. Interesting to note Ramadier made no mention of referendum in Cochinchina provided for in agreement of March 6, 1946.

Finally, no attacks were made on Ho Chi-minh or other Vietminh leaders and no statements were made re what authorities French would or would not negotiate with.

Department please repeat to Saigon as Paris 7.

Sent Department as 1031, repeated London as 205.

CAFFERY

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851G.00/3-1947: Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

PARIS, March 19, 1947—7 p. m.

1186. I talked last evening with Bollaert, new High Commissioner for Indochina. He talked very sensibly and in realistic fashion about his job. He assures me that he is well aware that any attempt to return to previous colonial practice is inconceivable and that he leaves with the determined intention of carrying out all promises hitherto made by the French Government in regard to the "independence of various countries within the French Union". He said that he hoped particularly to maintain cordial relations with our consular representatives in Indochina and he asked me to communicate this fact to them. He will get into touch with them soon after his arrival. He said that he realizes also the importance of good relations with our press representatives and that they be given ample opportunity to send out news.

It is not his intention to stay there indefinitely. He is going out only to do a job: That is, to come to an agreement with "whatever authorities really represent the people of Indochina".

Repeated Moscow 154. Department please repeat to Saigon as Paris 9.<sup>65</sup>

CAFFERY

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<sup>65</sup> Repeated also to Hanoi as No. 29, March 24, 3 p. m.



851G.00/3-1947 : Telegram

*The Acting Secretary of State to the Embassy in France*

CONFIDENTIAL

WASHINGTON, March 24, 1947—6 p. m.

1078. Urtel 1184 Mar 19.<sup>66</sup> According *NY Times*, Ramadier interrupted Moutet speech to say France had received no propositions from any authentic representative Vietnam and that letter signed Ho and addressed Blum had been declared fraudulent by experts.

Does this refer letter authenticated by Consul Hanoi (Hanoi tel 87 Mar 12<sup>67</sup>), which was transmitted by Giam?

Obscure news item Mar 19 quotes Moutet to effect negotiations with officials Annam and Tonkin close to Vietnam Govt have already begun with Cochinchina PriMin as intermediary. If true, would welcome your confirmation and elucidation. If not, Dept interested learning, without wishing you raise question any official manner, exactly what French expect to happen to permit resumption negotiations, view French refusal acknowledge value any Vietnamese appeals.

Sent Paris 1078. Repeated Saigon 51 and Hanoi 30.

ACHESON

851G.00/3-2747 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

PARIS, March 27, 1947—2 p. m.

1313. Deptel 1078, March 24. Question of authenticity of peace proposals emanating from Ho Chi Minh was discussed with Baudet last evening. After admitting Ho's letter of February 20 had been received in Paris, Baudet stated this letter, together with other messages to French, signed Ho, as well as number of orders and instructions to Viet-Nam officials recently seized in Indo-China had been examined by number of French handwriting experts who were unanimous and positive in their belief all signatures were forged. Baudet confirmed recent reports in press that no one had been found who had seen Ho Chi Minh since November [*December?*] 20. While French authorities do not place much credence in reports of Ho's murder or death they are puzzled by his complete disappearance.

Remarks attributed to Moutet, mentioned in Department's telegram under reference, were made March 19 at Socialist National Congress which took place during same period as Assembly debate on Indo-China. Baudet said he felt Moutet's statement was hardly justified by information available to Government and pointed out that following

<sup>66</sup> Not printed.

<sup>67</sup> See footnote 62, p. 77.

day Hoach<sup>68</sup> issued statement which, while cautious in phrasing, could only be interpreted as denial of Moutet's allegations. Baudet expressed opinion Moutet's remarks were designed to take some of edge off Communist attacks in Assembly on his policy. Embassy is inclined to believe Moutet was defending himself from criticism within his own party. It will be recalled that while Socialist deputies unanimously supported Moutet and Ramadier in Assembly, debate in party Congress on Indo-Chinese policy was bitter with left-wing leader Boutvieu leading strong opposition to Moutet.

Baudet added that instructions to new High Commissioner Bollaert had been approved and he would presumably leave March 28 as scheduled. Baudet said, except for administrative matters, these instructions are general rather than detailed. Bollaert is not being told he must or must not negotiate with any individuals or groups but his instructions provide that any conversations entered into must be with persons representing and having confidence of broad mass of people. France cannot assist in or condone establishment of Government of Viet-Nam which will not follow democratic principles as these are understood in West. France feels it would be dangerous for all concerned if small minority should be permitted to establish dictatorship over bulk of population by authoritarian and terroristic methods such as had been practiced by Viet-Minh in recent months. If Ho Chi Minh should emerge from his retirement and establish contact with Bollaert he would be told, according to Baudet, that he must first broaden base of his government and eliminate extremists. Baudet admitted reported appointment of Hoang Minh Giam as Foreign Secretary, if confirmed,<sup>69</sup> would appear to be step in that direction.

Re persistent rumors of possible return of ex-Emperor Bao Dai, Baudet again denied any negotiations with Bao were going on. He remarked that ex-Emperor is extremely cautious person and would certainly not consider returning to Indo-China until Viet-Minh had surrendered or been eliminated from political picture. While instructions to Bollaert did not entirely exclude possibility of return of Bao Dai, they make clear that any move for his return must originate with Annamite people.

Sent Department 1313; repeated to London 259, Moscow for delegation 188.<sup>70</sup>

CAFFERY

<sup>68</sup> Dr. Le Van Hoach, President of the Provisional Government of Cochín China.

<sup>69</sup> Telegram 98, March 22, 8 a. m., from Hanoi, reported Giam's confirmation on March 17; he filled the post previously held by Ho Chi Minh concurrently. Mr. O'Sullivan pointed out, "If French wish to deal with Vietnam, Giam is person who could be considered as outside Vietminh Party." (851G.00/3-2247)

<sup>70</sup> Repeated in telegram 56, March 28, 7 p. m., to Saigon, and in 33 to Hanoi.

851G.00/3-2847: Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL HANOI, March 28, 1947—8 a. m.

110: According French monitoring service, Radio Vietnam 26 March states Giam made following declaration upon assuming office Minister Foreign Affairs:

"I continue faithfully President Ho's policy with democratic peoples of world and primarily with people of France. We have no race hatred and we accept independence of Vietnam in framework French Union."

This statement seems designed to enforce impression that Giam is "moderate" with whom French might deal. Coming on eve of Bollaert's arrival in Indochina, it appears to indicate Vietnamese are not unwilling negotiate.

O'SULLIVAN

851G.00/3-2847: Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*<sup>71</sup>

SECRET HANOI, March 28, 1947—2 p. m.

111. Re second paragraph Deptel 30, March 24,<sup>72</sup> I believe Ramadier referred to December 19 letter which Ho Chi Minh addressed jointly to Blum and Auriol, as letter I authenticated was dated February 20 and addressed to President French Republic.

Copy of December 19 letter from Ho to Blum and Auriol will be found as December [document?] No. 76 attached to memorandum and supporting documents which I forwarded Saigon in January with suggestion it be transmitted Department. This memorandum with documents I received from Giam January 9 together with package which Giam said contained original memorandum (prepared by Vietnamese for presentation to Moutet on his visit here in early January; see mytel 13, January 11) and which he requested I transmit together with 2 letters to Sainteny. This I did without however opening package or letters and I have no knowledge of what they contained other than what Giam told me. Ramadier or Moutet later said in Assembly that signature on memorandum was typewritten.

As for what French expect to happen to permit resumption negotiations, it might be noted that French military position in Tonkin improving and that there are indications that Vietnam Government is encountering serious difficulties. Some of these indications are thin

<sup>71</sup> Repeated in telegram 1168, April 1, 1 p. m., to Paris.

<sup>72</sup> Same as telegram 1078, March 24, p. 81.

but steady trickle of people flowing back to area controlled by French, incomplete evacuation of populace in areas into which French have moved last 10 days, increasing difficulty of communication for Vietnam Government as French extend military control, apparent success of French in developing partisans among ethnic minorities to operate against Vietnamese, and growing munition shortage in Vietnam Government (there is for example report that recent executions by Vietnam Government done with hammers instead of firing squads).

French may consider Vietnam Government will weaken further in near future to such extent that Ho Chi Minh will drop "extremists" or that "moderates" will split from Tongbo group.

O'SULLIVAN

851G.00/4-447 : Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

RESTRICTED

SAIGON, April 4, 1947—3 p. m.

105. Returning from Hanoi where attended funeral General [Colonel] Debes,<sup>73</sup> Bollaert has begun series of consultations to put self in contact with overall situation. No developments expected immediate future. According to report military situation in north is excellent but widespread sabotage, guerrilla activities continue in Cochinchina and there are reports continuing trouble Cambodia, also outbreak some trouble Laos. Apparent that Viet Minh Army does not intend major battle but confine self to sabotage, guerrilla activities.

Native press generally insistent French must deal with Ho and decries talk of restoration Baodai although mentioning he might act as go-between French and Ho—equally insistent union three "Kys."<sup>74</sup>

Representatives many native political elements gathering Saigon for anticipated conversations with Bollaert and his political advisors. There is a general air of conciliation and majority hope for a speedy settlement of the situation.

Dept please repeat to Paris.

REED.

851G.00/4-447 : Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

HANOI, April 4, 1947—4 p. m.

115. With much confusion, French authorities instituted customs collections at Haiphong and other ports of Indochina under their

<sup>73</sup> Commanding officer in Tonkin since the departure of General Morlière; killed March 30 in a plane crash.

<sup>74</sup> Administrative districts (or countries), Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin.

control end of last week. There is great uncertainty regarding rates to be applied but effectively collections are being made by "federal" agents with monies apparently reverting to "federal" funds.

It will be recalled that French regulations for control Haiphong were precipitating cause of incident that city November 20 and question customs loomed very large in all French-Vietnamese discussions.

French authorities also have instituted "federal" *sûreté* on approximately same basis as before war with all Vietnamese required carry identity cards. While there is good reason in terms military security to justify this practice, its effect is reestablishment of pre-war administration. In this connection, it might be noted that both customs and police could be considered by French only "administrative matters" to which Baudet had reference in fourth paragraph Deptel 33, March 28<sup>75</sup> yet they actually are policy decisions shaping future structure of "Indochinese Federation".

Repeat to Paris.

O'SULLIVAN

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851G.00/4-147: Telegram

*The Acting Secretary of State to the Consulate at Hanoi*

CONFIDENTIAL

WASHINGTON, April 4, 1947—8 p. m.

36. Urtel 113 Apr 1.<sup>76</sup> Dept has received no indication Ho in disfavor Moscow. On contrary, criticism Ho in Communist press has been absent. Latest issues *L'Humanité* available Dept (Feb 11 and previous) feature articles by Indochina correspondent L'Hermite quoting Ho with approval, which would hardly be case if Ho expelled from party. *L'Humanité* probably most authoritative Communist organ outside Russia.

Sent Hanoi 36. Repeated Paris 1234 and Moscow 818.

ACHESON

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851G.00/4-1147: Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

HANOI, April 11, 1947—8 a. m.

124. According French monitoring service, Radio Vietnam March 10 [30?] reported that Ho Chi Minh, upon learning death of Colonels

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<sup>75</sup> See third paragraph of telegram 1313, March 27, p. 81.

<sup>76</sup> Not printed.

Debes and Gufflet<sup>77</sup> (previously said by Radio Vietnam to have been shot down by VN anti-aircraft guns) declared:

"As French they were our friends, as soldiers they were brave, as colonialists they were our opponents. But before God and humanity everyone is a brother and equal. That is why I bow before their souls. I deeply regret that men of valor such as they are sacrificed in this fratricidal war. Otherwise they would have been very useful in common work between France and Vietnam."

This declaration continues tenor of remarks attributed by Radio Vietnam to Ho since December 19. During that time remarks alleged to have originated with Ho have never been directed against France but when critical are confined to "reactionary colonialists".

Repeat to Paris.

O'SULLIVAN

851G.00/4-1147: Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

PARIS, April 11, 1947—11 a. m.

1489. During private conversation Gustave Moutet, son of Minister for Overseas France, continued to insist that no negotiations are now in progress in Indochina but he added that he believed "a suitable approach from the Viet-Minh may well be made in the not too distant future". Answering a question as to what would constitute in French eyes "a duly accredited plenipotentiary" (my 1409 of April 3<sup>78</sup>), he said that in addition to being a person representing in fact elements dominant "throughout the Vietnam" he would have to carry an authentic communication indicating willingness to accept France's minimum security requirements: "In such a case we would agree to an armistice." (These are thought to be the same as reported previously.)

From the above conversations the impression was derived that the French authorities may be playing with words when they state that no negotiations are in progress in Indochina, and that secret negotiations may even be taking place at the present time. If this impression is correct, what the French Government terms the "opening of negotiations" may really be the conclusion of the present suspected ones, marked by the arrival of a Vietnam plenipotentiary with the acceptance of France's armistice terms which, according to Moutet, are "well known to the Vietnam leaders."

<sup>77</sup> Colonel Gufflet, chief of staff to General Jean Valluy, was killed in the same plane crash as Colonel Debes on March 30.

<sup>78</sup> Not printed.



Referring to ex-Emperor Bao-Dai, Gustave Moutet declared that the French were in a quandary as while they felt the former still retained a considerable influence in Annam, he carried little weight elsewhere in Indochina. This ["*Thus?*"], added Moutet, "in availing ourselves of Bao-Dai's service, we would be using an instrument of most uncertain value".

Sent Department as 1489, repeated London as 286. Department please repeat to Saigon as Paris No. 12.

CAFFERY

851G.00/4-1747 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in Siam (Stanton) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

BANGKOK, April 17, 1947—3 p. m.

[Received April 19—8:35 p. m.]

289. Embassy's telegram 260, April 7.<sup>79</sup> 1. Colonel Law,<sup>80</sup> who has been in informal contact with Dr. Pham Ngoc Thach who describes himself as Vietnam Undersecretary of State and who arrived Bangkok recently has received from latter two letters addressed to me. The first letter dated April 12 transmits memo regarding conflict in Indo-China and it is stated was sent to Vice Consul O'Sullivan at Hanoi in January this year for transmission Department.<sup>81</sup> If Department hasn't received memo, will forward same airmail. Attached memo are 76 documents consisting exchange correspondence between Vietnam Government and French authorities, instructions allegedly issued by French authorities to their military, an account the Haiphong incident and various recent communications addressed by Ho Chi Minh to French Government proposing cessation of hostilities and resumption of negotiations. These documents are of considerable interest but inasmuch as Embassy unable to reproduce them because of lack clerical help we propose forward them Department by courier and would appreciate receiving due course hectograph copies these documents. It is also requested hectograph copies be sent to War, Navy Departments.

2. Second letter dated April 13 encloses letter addressed General MacArthur<sup>82</sup> and informs him that the Vietminh Government reserves all rights connection with question disposition Indo-China's gold now held Tokyo and estimated amount \$37,498,000. Rights also reserved

<sup>79</sup> Not printed.

<sup>80</sup> Lt. Col. William Law, Assistant Military Attaché in Siam.

<sup>81</sup> See telegram 13, January 11, 3 p. m., from Hanoi, p. 61.

<sup>82</sup> General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in Japan.

connection Jap reparations which may be due to Indo-China. What disposition does Department wish made letter addressed MacArthur?

3. I am not acknowledging in writing these communications from Dr. Thach but have asked Colonel Law to inform him orally that I received them and that their substance will be communicated Department State.<sup>83</sup>

4. Department please repeat Paris and Saigon.

STANTON

851G.00/4-2647 : Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

SAIGON, April 26, 1947—noon.

132. Bollaert in course long conversation this morning said still investigating and having conversations, mentioning talks yesterday with certain Tonkinese who represent less extreme elements. In principle Bollaert says it is for three "Kys" to decide whether want union or not but, in any case, France feels has right to maintain interests which has built up in FIC—specifically economic and cultural—in return for benefits France has brought to FIC. He feels it is better as both sides want find solution but danger is continuing double dealing of Vietnam particularly Ho and close supporters. France must have security against this and attacks such as in December. He said big change will be noted in 3 months as he has recommended many social and agrarian reforms which will improve lot of natives and this should gain support and convince natives France's good intentions. Up to French Government to approve. Spoke highly of progress Cambodia and Laos where democratic constitutions will govern with a minimum of French tutelage.

REED

851G.00/4-2847 : Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

SAIGON, April 28, 1947—3 p. m.

134. Continuing mytel 132, April 26. Bollaert added proper safeguards to be taken that rights Cambodia [and] Laos be protected if

<sup>83</sup> In telegram 220, April 25, 8 p. m., to Bangkok, the Department replied that the memorandum mentioned in paragraph 1 had been received and the letter mentioned in paragraph 2 should be returned and could be mailed to the addressee if desired (851G.00/4-1747). In despatch 366, April 24 (received May 29), the Embassy in Siam transmitted the documents referred to in this telegram and added that Dr. Thach deemed the United States to be the only power able to stop hostilities in Indochina (851G.00/4-2447).

union three "Kys", mentioning customs currency. He blamed many French who came here for profit with no attempt understand natives; also blamed natives no appreciation what France has done nor realization they not ready for independence.

General impression from conversation earnest effort find some solution, that federation idea except for customs currency, other economic, cultural matters being discarded and French Union being stressed, that reorganization French official setup FIC in progress. May [My?] comment increasing guerrilla activity (mytel 133 today date <sup>84</sup>) will not help smooth negotiations either side.

Bollaert deplored anti-American press attacks, would do his best stop them; also would give personal attention other problems of Consulate General, asking me to write to him "personal" letters.

REED

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851G.00/5-247 : Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

SAIGON, May 2, 1947—11 a. m.

141. Source who often gives correct information states French-Vietnam negotiations proceeding faster than anticipated and anticipates definite change in situation in not too distant future, also believes Ho will remain.

Definitely two trends to negotiations: (1) to recognize Ho because of undoubted influence with bulk of natives but eliminating extreme elements and (2) to deal with Bao Dai who apparently has Chinese backing and who enjoys growing popularity.

Changes in high Government personnel and apparent scrapping of ideas, projects former High Commissioner is disturbing to many French who feel Bollaert to arrive at quick solution will go too far in yielding to Vietnam desires.

Anti-French activities on increase and April 29 night 20 grenades thrown in city and 1 land mine exploded near city center—this after city-wide raid led to detention over 1200 natives.

Contacts descending from north express concern over possible famine conditions and lack of repairs to dikes.

Please pass Paris.

REED

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<sup>84</sup> Not printed.

851G.00/4-2947 : Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Consulate General at Saigon*

CONFIDENTIAL

WASHINGTON, May 3, 1947—1 p. m.

71. Annamese businessman Canton rated fairly reliable stated Mar 18 Chinese Govt (1) not yet committed either French or Baodai and is negotiating Ho's representative Nanking, (2) would support Ho if he guarantees abandon communism, allow eradication Chinese Communists Indochina and reaffirms Chinese rights Haiphong and Yunnan railway and economic privileges, and (3) would prefer make this deal and abandon Baodai owing Ho's popular support.

Dept would appreciate being kept fully up date on views Chinese officials and ConGens Indochina on present Vietnam Govt and French policies and on their appraisal situation Indochina. Consider this important not only because significance position Chinese Indochina but because Chinese, who would be among chief losers should Kremlin-orientated state emerge Indochina, should prove a weathervane of trends within Vietnam connected with influence Communists in Vietnam Govt. Dept recognizes, however, that since all three extra-national elements in Indochina (Kmt Chinese, French, and Communists) would each tend naturally be engaged on separate fronts with aim eliminating other two, Chinese cannot be expected follow clear and simple policy, but Dept assumes any Vietnam Govt acceptable Chinese Govt, may be considered on face free of predominant connections Communist International. Evidence so far conflicting. Urtel 136 Apr 29<sup>85</sup> and other reports indicate Chinese supporting Baodai in hope supplanting Ho's Govt with one under Chinese influence, and urtel 80 Feb 27 quotes Chinese ConGen Saigon as believing Vietminh completely controlled by Communist elements whose idea of nationalist state is but prelude to eventual Communist state. O'Sullivan, however, after dinner with Tu Ve authorities Hanoi in company Chinese ConGen Hanoi, Jan 22, stated he amazed close relationship Chinese and Vietnamese. Further, report which Dept treats with great reserve quotes Annamese businessman in China Apr 2 as stating Wu Tieh Chen, Kmt secretary, promised Ho's representative Chinese Govt would not interfere Vietminh purchases arms Kwangsi or their shipment Tonkin.

Sent Saigon 71. Repeated Nanking 526 and Hanoi 44 for action and Paris 1632 for info.

MARSHALL

<sup>85</sup> Not printed.

851G.00/5-647 : Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

HANOI, May 6, 1947—8 a. m.

151. ReDeptel 44, May 3, 1 p. m.<sup>86</sup> Mytel May 3, 11 a. m.,<sup>87</sup> explained attitude Chinese Consul General immediately before his departure for Shanghai.

Chinese Consul General here (Yuen) apparently has always been considerably less disturbed by activities of both Chinese and Vietnam Communists than his confrère (Ing) in Saigon, which may account for discrepancy in official Chinese attitude here and that in Saigon. However, Chinese circles here state that Yuen is higher ranking officer than Ing and that Foreign Office has given Yuen very wide discretionary powers re Chinese policy here.

Yuen, who has been here since October '45, has never waived in his support Vietnam Government against French. He has stated over and over again during past year that one people should not hold another in bondage (conveniently forgetting Chinese presence in Sinkiang). He believes March 6 agreement reached simply by desire both French and Vietnam to rid country of Chinese armies occupation. But he maintains that Vietnam, even though it be Communist dominated, should be given its independence. He reasons that if Vietnam were independent and began to play Moscow game too strongly Chinese would be able to handle situation. However, he has expressed fear of results here if France retains its place in Indochina and French Communist Party subsequently gains control French Government. Under such circumstances he believes Chinese Government would have much more difficulty in containing situation.

He considers: (1) French wish reinstall same regime as previous to war; (2) Ho has almost complete support of people; (3) French have insufficient troops and material to reach military decision here; (4) French do not understand world has changed in past 7 years.

It should be recalled in appraising Yuen's attitude that [area?] with 100,000 Chinese in Tonkin he has probably more and better sources of information than even French. His attitude toward French seems conditioned by trying to prove that China, not France, is fourth of Big Five.

Repeat to Paris.

O'SULLIVAN

<sup>86</sup> Same as telegram 71, May 3, 1 p. m., *supra*.

<sup>87</sup> Not printed.

S51G.00/5-747 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in Siam (Stanton) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

BANGKOK, May 7, 1947—9 a. m.

361. 1. Deptel 230, May 2,<sup>88</sup> received here May 5. Dr. Pham Ngoc Thach left Bangkok for Indo-China about 10 days ago. Colonel Law who saw him a number of times feels no doubt person visiting Bangkok and representing himself to be Thach was in fact Under Secretary of State Pham Ngoc Thach (Hanoi's 136, April 24<sup>88</sup>). Specimen of Dr. Thach's signature will be found on letter dated April 12 addressed to me, original of which forwarded to Department by courier with my despatch No. 363, April 23.<sup>89</sup>

2. Referring information concerning Viet Nam internal situation, Colonel Law and myself propounded a number of questions and the following are Dr. Thach's replies in summary: (a) Ho Chi Minh is in good health; (b) President Ho continues to direct the affairs of the Viet Nam Government and presides regularly over the weekly meetings of the Council of Ministers; (c) There have been number important changes in the composition of the Viet Nam Government since outbreak of present hostilities; (d) The Communist Party in Indo-China, according to Dr. Thach, is devoting its energies to fostering a triumph of the national cause and Communism for majority of members is merely a means of achieving independence. Text of questions and answers being forwarded by airmail both State and War Departments.<sup>90</sup>

3. Fully appreciating delicacy of situation in Indo-China and that utmost discretion essential in dealings with Viet Nam officials or representatives, Embassy's contacts with local representatives or visiting Viet Nam officials has been through Colonel Law, who some 6 months ago established contact with local representatives of Viet Nam, Free Laos and Free Cambodians. Through these contacts, which are entirely informal and personal, Law has been able to obtain much interesting information without attracting much attention, although these contacts are well known to local French Legation officials. Colonel Law has worked closely with me in these matters which we have discussed fully in every instance and I have utmost confidence in his discretion and ability. Upon Dr. Thach's arrival he wished call on me, but it seemed to me, in view delicacy situation, much better for Law to make informal contact with him in view his previous contacts with Viet Nam representatives here.

<sup>88</sup> Not printed.

<sup>89</sup> Not printed, but see telegram 289, April 17, p. 87.

<sup>90</sup> Despatch 386, May 14, from Bangkok, not printed.



4. Referring suggestion that O'Sullivan visit Bangkok on vacation, I would be happy to have him do so for although Thach no longer here principal Viet Nam representative here Tran Van Giau, alias Dr. Ouang, alias Nguyen Duc Quon, might be useful contact. Dr. Ouang understood formerly to have been Ho Chi Minh's chief lieutenant in Cochin China and recently attended New Delhi conference as the Viet Nam representative. However, wish to point out that arrival of O'Sullivan and any conversations he might have with Viet Nam representatives here would certainly come to attention French Legation officials who might attach undue significance such meetings.<sup>91</sup>

5. Department please repeat to Saigon and Hanoi.

STANTON

851G.00/5-747: Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

SAIGON, May 7, 1947—5 p. m.

145. Usually reliable source states today's meeting Mus<sup>92</sup> and Giam near Hanoi (1) to arrange armistice and (2) arrange basis for future negotiations. Valluy's Chief of Staff has proceeded Hanoi for details armistice probably contacting Giap.<sup>93</sup> Informant says French not committed treat solely with Ho but want to enlarge negotiations include other elements, Bao Dai backers, et cetera—also French have no concrete plan for future except (1) abandon political federation and (2) insist upon economic [and] cultural agreement covering all French Indochina including free ports and transit rights for Cambodia and Laos. Confirming this lack of plan, he states Bollaert has called for final report organization needs, et cetera, various federal services now operating French Indochina to be submitted May 10th and when asked what will be future jurisdiction [and] scope such services, Bollaert replied he had no idea.

Informant believes French will try sell idea Vietnam federation with each of three "Kys" having autonomy. Hoach he states gaining ground in Cochin China and Bao Dai might go back Annam. He states movement Annam reported mytel 144, May 5,<sup>94</sup> not organized Government but only grouping of pro-Bao Dai elements.

<sup>91</sup> In telegram 45, May 9, 5 p. m., to Hanoi, the Department advised the Vice Consul that his proposed visit to Bangkok did not appear wise at that time (851G.00/5-747).

<sup>92</sup> Paul Mus, of the French School of the Extreme Orient, was in charge of economic matters in the Cabinet of High Commissioner Bollaert.

<sup>93</sup> Vo Nguyen Giap, Vietnamese Minister of Defense.

<sup>94</sup> Not printed.

This informant says Chinese flocking into French Indochina at rate of from 6 to 10 thousand per month and adds he voices sentiment majority of French in stating China is eventual danger to French and whites in French Indochina, that Communists and Kuomintang while fighting each other have single purpose as regards French Indochina. His sources in China indicate might be Chinese intervention Tonkin if not for difficulties with Communists. He foresees eventual Chinese domination Vietnam with Cambodia [and] Laos forced towards Siam and Buddhist country bloc and is frankly less apprehensive Communist danger than before, however feels outcome political situation in France will influence development Communist possibilities in French Indochina.

With reference Deptel 71, May 3, believe Chinese Consul General here playing with Bao Dai element and Chinese Consul General Hanoi playing with Vietnam so China will have two strings to her bow—no question Chinese Consul General here is contact man for Bao Dai and National Democratic front elements.

Please pass Paris Nanking.

REED

851G.00/5-747: Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

HANOI, May 7, 1947—6 p. m.

[Received May 10—10:18 a. m.]

154. Remytel 141, April 26,<sup>95</sup> following is believed to be text letter delivered April 25 by International Red Cross representative to De Pereyra:<sup>96</sup>

“Official message to the French Government:

Vietnam is fighting for its unity and its independence. France, President Ramadier has declared, is not opposed to this unity and independence.

The interest of the two peoples lies in collaborating fraternally within the French Union, an association of free peoples ‘who understand and love one another’.

If the war is continued, it can only increase hatred, entail new sacrifices in human lives, make the situation of French enterprises and the economy of Vietnam worse, without solving the problem of Franco-Vietnamese relations.

The French Government, by the appointment of the new High Commissioner of France in Indochina, appears to have shown its desire to

<sup>95</sup> Not printed; it reported that a meeting took place April 25 between Vietnam and International Red Cross representatives (851G.00/4-2647).

<sup>96</sup> Miguel de Pereyra, French commissioner for North Annam and Tonkin.

direct its policy with respect to Vietnam into a new channel, worthy of the New France.

Persuaded that the motion of the National Council of the S.F.I.O. of March 21, 1947 'not to let an opportunity pass to enter into negotiations with Vietnam' expresses not only the sentiments of the French Socialists but also those of all the people of France; to prove Vietnam's sincere devotion to peace and its friendship for the people of France; the Vietnamese Government proposes to the French Government the immediate cessation of hostilities and the opening of negotiations with a view to 'peaceful settlement of the conflict'.

Dated Hanoi, April 18, 1947, signed Hoang Minh Giam, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Democratic Republic Vietnam."

O'SULLIVAN

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851G.00/5-947 : Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

HANOI, May 9, 1947—5 p. m.

156. According French monitoring service, Radio Vietnam stated May 8 that Giam made following declaration (*Summary*) :

Three years ago United States recognized independence Philippines. If in near future we learn recognition of Indonesian and Vietnam Republics by great American Republic, that measure will surprise no one. Such measure would do honor to United States, increase United States prestige and influence in world and contribute effectively establishment peace Southeast Asia.

Repeat to Paris.

O'SULLIVAN

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851G.00/5-1347 : Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Embassy in France*

SECRET

WASHINGTON, May 13, 1947—8 p. m.

1737. We becoming increasingly concerned by slow progress toward settlement Indochina dispute. We fully appreciate French are making effort reach satisfactory settlement and hope visit Commissioner Bollaert to Indochina will produce concrete results. The following considerations, however, are submitted for your use any conversations you may have with French authorities at appropriate time this subject. We recognize it might not be desirable make such approach to newly constituted government in first days its reorganization, but nevertheless feel early appropriate opportunity might be found inform French Gov of our concern in this matter.

Key our position is our awareness that in respect developments affecting position Western democratic powers in southern Asia, we

essentially in same boat as French, also as British and Dutch. We cannot conceive setbacks to long-range interests France which would not also be setbacks our own. Conversely we should regard close association France and members French Union as not only to advantage peoples concerned, but indirectly our own.

In our view, southern Asia in critical phase its history with seven new nations in process achieving or struggling independence or autonomy. These nations include quarter inhabitants world and their future course, owing sheer weight populations, resources they command, and strategic location, will be momentous factor world stability. Following relaxation European controls, internal racial, religious and national differences could plunge new nations into violent discord, or already apparent anti-Western Pan-Asiatic tendencies could become dominant political force, or Communists could capture control. We consider as best safeguard against these eventualities a continued close association between newly-autonomous peoples and powers which have long been responsible their welfare. In particular we recognize Vietnamese will for indefinite period require French material and technical assistance and enlightened political guidance which can be provided only by nation steeped like France in democratic tradition and confirmed in respect human liberties and worth individual.

We equally convinced, however, such association must be voluntary to be lasting and achieve results, and that protraction present situation Indochina can only destroy basis voluntary cooperation, leave legacy permanent bitterness, and irrevocably alienate Vietnamese from France and those values represented by France and other Western democracies.

While fully appreciating difficulties French position this conflict, we feel there is danger in any arrangement which might provide Vietnamese opportunity compare unfavorably their own position and that of other peoples southern Asia who have made tremendous strides toward autonomy since war.

While we are still ready and willing do anything we can which might be considered helpful, French will understand we not attempting come forward with any solution our own or intervene in situation. However, they will also understand we inescapably concerned with situation Far East generally, upon which developments Indochina likely have profound effect.

Plain fact is that Western democratic system is on defensive in almost all emergent nations southern Asia and, because identified by peoples these nations with what they have considered former denial their rights, is particularly vulnerable to attacks by demagogic leaders political movements of either ultra-nationalist or Communist nature

which promise redress and revenge past so-called wrongs and inequalities. Signs development anti-Western Asiatic consciousness already multiplying, of which Inter-Asian Conf<sup>97</sup> an example. Unanimity support for Vietnamese among other Asiatic countries very striking, even leading to moves Burma, India, and Malaya send volunteer forces their assistance. Vietnam cause proving rallying-cry for all anti-Western forces and playing in hands Communists all areas. We fear continuation conflict may jeopardize position all Western democratic powers in southern Asia and lead to very eventualities of which we most apprehensive.

We confident French fully aware dangers inherent in situation and therefore venture express renewed hope they will be most generous attempt find early solution which, by recognizing legitimate desires Vietnamese, will restore peace and deprive anti-democratic forces of powerful weapon.

For your info, evidence that French Communists are being directed accelerate their agitation French colonies even extent lose much popular support France (urtel 1719 Apr 25<sup>98</sup>) may be indication Kremlin prepared sacrifice temporary gains with 40 million French to long range colonial strategy with 600 million dependent people, which lends great urgency foregoing views. French position Indochina dispute since Dec 19, which based on Vietnam initiative attack, seems Dept dangerously one-sided in ignoring Debes attack Haiphong Nov 23 and understandable Vietnam contention that stand had be made some point view steady French encroachments after Mar 6 on authority and territory Vietnam (e.g., establishment Cochinchinese Rep, occupation southern Annam and Moi Plateau, and Dalat plan French-dominated Federation to which Vietnam would be subservient,) Dept much concerned lest French efforts find "true representatives Vietnam" with whom negotiate result creation impotent puppet Govt along lines Cochinchina regime, or that restoration Baodai may be attempted, implying democracies reduced resort monarchy as weapon against Communism. You may refer these further views if nature your conversations French appears warrant.<sup>99</sup>

Saigon and Hanoi should be guided by this tel in any conversations Bollaert.

Sent Paris 1737. Repeated Saigon 78 and Hanoi 46.

MARSHALL

<sup>97</sup> An unofficial Asian relations conference was held at New Delhi in March and attended by delegates from Asian countries.

<sup>98</sup> Not printed.

<sup>99</sup> Telegram 2081, May 22, 3 p. m., from Paris, reported that Foreign Minister Bidault assured Ambassador Caffery that the French Government understood perfectly the American point of view and added that they did not contemplate any sort of a puppet government under Bao Dai (851G.00/5-2247).

851G.00/5-1547 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

NANKING, May 15, 1947—noon.

1054. Prior to his departure for Paris on leave, the French Ambassador<sup>1</sup> in conversation with Minister-Counselor<sup>2</sup> briefly reviewed Sino-French Indo-China situation. In his opinion before 1946 the Chinese Govt definitely had designs of infiltration and control but that about the beginning of that year it made a *volte-face* due to: (1) the difficulties Chinese authorities were experiencing in reestablishing themselves in other areas and in particular Manchuria; (2) the difficulties and opposition they had experienced in attempting to carry out their designs in Indo-China, particularly with the Annamites; (3) the necessity for having clean hands before the court of world opinion and UN. French Ambassador feels they have never wavered in that latter decision since it was made. He also stated his conviction, which he indicated he had reiterated to Paris, that both Gimo<sup>3</sup> and Foreign Minister<sup>4</sup> profoundly fear a Communist dominated Vietnam Govt and accordingly prefer the reestablishment of an enlightened French colonial administration of a modern type. French Ambassador cited the notably negligible amount of criticism in Chinese Govt controlled and influenced press of French actions in Indo-China, despite such occurrences as bombing and shooting of Chinese civilians. In this connection he welcomed decision of French Govt (reference Paris' telegram 4, May 9 to Nanking, sent Dept as 1905<sup>5</sup>) to compensate Chinese, although not required to do so under international law, and indicated that he had urged his Govt to take this course as an act of statesmanship. He added that of course the Chinese would exaggerate their claims and appear to be dissatisfied with the eventual settlement but he felt that end result would nevertheless redound to France's interests.

An opportunity was made to query French Counselor regarding actions and attitude of Chinese Consul General at Hanoi without divulging info contained in Deptcirc May 8, 11 a.m.,<sup>5</sup> and he too reiterated conviction that Chinese were not playing a double game but vouchsafed the opinion that Chinese Consul General was attempting to play his own game acting perhaps under pressure from powerful Chinese community interest. He cited fact that at least on one occasion French Embassy had definite proof that he had reported incorrectly

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Meyrier.<sup>2</sup> W. Walton Butterworth, Jr.<sup>3</sup> Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, President of the National Government of the Republic of China.<sup>4</sup> Dr. Wang Shih-chieh.<sup>5</sup> Not printed.



to Chinese Foreign Office statements to him by French authorities in Indo-China.

Dept please repeat to Hanoi, Saigon, and Paris.

STUART

851G.00/5-2147: Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

SAIGON, May 21, 1947—5 p. m.

162. As matters stand there are two main contenders for position of power in Vietnam (1) Vietminh with Ho—still leading figure, and (2) National Union Front with Bao Dai—not personally popular but important only through former position, but must be noted not much fundamental difference between parties as both claim unity and independence with guaranty France's "legitimate" economic cultural interests in French Indo-China.

Bollaert's Hanoi speech and Front's proclamation (my telegram 161, May 20<sup>6</sup>) present definite statements of position and when Ho's terms are known road to negotiation will be open; many believe terms already communicated Bollaert through Mus-Giam meeting<sup>7</sup> and Bollaert prepared make definite recommendations upon return Paris end of month.

Progress has been made and several official sources intimate all will be settled in 3 months. Reasonably certain French will not install any puppet regime and in fact am not certain how long will maintain Cochín-Chinese regime. Bollaert's speech (my telegram 155, May 17<sup>6</sup>) and Front's proclamation indicate unlikelihood French dealing solely with Ho and some indication communication between Bao Dai and Ho.

British Vice Consul Hanoi informs British Consul General Saigon [that] Bollaert so shocked by destruction and so fearful possible floods, famine, that will go far in recommendations restore peace and order and increasing activity near Saigon can only help convince French their hold French Indo-China still precarious.

Opinion Saigon press is divided as to Front proclamation but majority believe it helps clarify situation.

Please pass Paris.

REED

<sup>6</sup> Not printed.

<sup>7</sup> In airgram A-13, June 20, from Hanoi (received July 21), Vice Consul O'Sullivan gave the text of a Vietnamese account of this meeting between Ho Chi Minh, Hoang Minh Giam, and Paul Mus. He stated that this text conformed with various Vietnamese reports and concluded: "If these were the conditions actually proposed upon which French would admit no discussion, it can only mean that Bollaert had no intention of treating with the Viet Nam Government." (851G.00/6-2047).

851G.00/5-2347 : Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

SAIGON, May 23, 1947—6 p. m.

165. In course interview with De Marolles,<sup>10</sup> at his request, saying Bollaert asked him discuss situation with me, took occasion convey gist Deptel 78, May 13.<sup>11</sup> He said Bollaert would appreciate views expressed especially as they coincided with his and said Bollaert doing his best bring about speedy settlement FIC situation. This difficult as he believes to treat with Ho solely, which latter reported to insist, is to deliver Vietnam into hands totalitarian regime, which, if now soft pedals Communist ideology because people not ready for it, has such ideology in mind as long range policy. Moreover, any change in Ho's govt to eliminate extremist, professed Communist elements would be only gesture, as "Tongbo"<sup>12</sup> is possibly real power. He felt National Union Front not as important as leaders would have it, but agreed Front does represent certain minority elements, chiefly in Annam, Cochin-China, which must be considered, as Bollaert wants all Vietnam elements consulted, without which little likelihood really democratic régime. He said Bollaert's departure for France may be delayed and intimated slow progress negotiations is cause thereof.<sup>13</sup> In De Marolles' opinion, China is future danger for independent Vietnam, which may well become as elsewhere Southeast Asia eventual scene struggle between Chinese interests and Communist ideas.

My impression Bollaert trying find satisfactory solution, but finding it all but impossible treat with anyone except Ho; also finding it difficult find formula protect French interests, as has no confidence in Ho or his group—as reported members Bollaert's Cabinet have rather divergent ideas and was rumored very profound; also impressed, Bollaert realized puppet regime only lead to further troubles; and in this connection, although still backing Cochin Chinese Govt, he is finding existence this Govt very embarrassing, as Govt while professing favor federation, wants autonomy.<sup>14</sup>

Please pass Paris, Nanking.

REED

<sup>10</sup> Claude de Marolles, assistant director of the High Commissioner's cabinet, in charge of foreign relations.

<sup>11</sup> Same as telegram 1737, May 13, p. 95.

<sup>12</sup> Party bureau of Vietnam.

<sup>13</sup> The High Commissioner left Saigon on June 11.

<sup>14</sup> In telegram 166, May 24, 11 a. m., from Saigon, Consul Reed noted that, in turning over the French official residence in Cochin China to President Hoach, Commissioner Bollaert stated that this was for the Vietnam people: "You will give it to those who are able to speak and rule in the name of the people." (851G.00/5-2447)

S51G.00/5-2947 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

PARIS, May 29, 1947—1 p. m.

2124. In conversation with Baudet last evening he expressed discouragement regarding Indo-China. Referring to recent press reports of supposed negotiations with Viet-nam Govt carried on by Professor Mus, Baudet explained that Mus is director of colonial school in Paris and accompanied Bollaert to Indo-China; has lived 25 years in that colony, speaks perfect Annamese and has many close friends among native population. While continuing to deny any negotiations with Ho Chi Minh Govt had occurred, Baudet admitted Mus had made certain soundings; regarding agency reports of Viet-nam broadcast rejecting supposed French terms, including demand for surrender by Viet-nam of all arms, Baudet admitted certain military guarantees had been demanded. He contended these were entirely justified in view intercepted messages proving Ho regarded armistice as merely opportunity to reform his forces and acquire additional arms from China.<sup>15</sup>

Department please repeat Saigon as Paris' 15.

Sent Dept as 2124, repeated London as 411.

CAFFERY

S51G.00/6-547 : Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

RESTRICTED

HANOI, June 5, 1947—2 p. m.

184. Destruction in Tonkin is literally appalling. Damage is due very largely to Vietnam Government policy of "scorched earth" although French bombing and shelling have contributed. Of small cities I have seen personally, Haiduong is about 60 to 70 percent destroyed, Hoabinh 100 percent razed, Hadong has perhaps a dozen buildings of several hundred standing. French aerial observers state that Tuyen-quang and Thainguyen have been destroyed by Vietnamese (French troops have not attacked these points). Correspondents state that Sept-pagodes and Quangyen are also wiped out. No estimate available of number of villages destroyed.

Destruction of course will be increased and famine made inevitable if dikes of Red River break or are cut by Vietnamese during flood waters which usually occur in August. Earthen dike system requires

<sup>15</sup> In telegram 2189, June 3, 6 p. m., from Paris, the Ambassador reported that Foreign Minister Bidault had told him that decoded Vietnamese messages showed a definite pro-Soviet orientation and that Ho's aim was to drive the French out of Indochina (S51G.00/6-347).

year round maintenance and military-like mobilization of population during flood waters to build reinforcements at threatened points and maintenance of dikes, of course, has not been done to any great extent during past 6 months of hostilities and mobilization of population seems impossible if hostilities continue. Even if dikes not cut, they will probably break if Red River floods surpasses 11 meter mark.

O'SULLIVAN

851G.00/6-1347 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in Siam (Stanton) to the Secretary of State*<sup>16</sup>

CONFIDENTIAL

BANGKOK, June 13, 1947—2 p. m.

[Received June 17—4: 17 p. m.]

466. Daridan<sup>17</sup> who just returned Bangkok from Paris via Saigon where discussed Indochina situation with Bollaert made following personal confidential observations:

1. Recent French demands Ho Chi Minh were purposely made very stiff because French authorities do not want treat with present Vietnam Govt which they do not regard as being representative of people of Annam and Tonkin. French authorities still hoping either Vietnam Govt will be reorganized to exclude Communist elements or overthrown and replaced by conservative regime, possibly under Bao Dai. Above development French hope may take place during next few months rainy season but if not then French military think they are sufficiently strong destroy Vietnam Govt and gain control and hold principal lines communication, this to be followed by creating new govt. Bollaert favors union Cochin China with Annam and Tonkin and independence for united republic Vietnam but within French Union. On question independence Vietnam, Daridan said it was his observation recent visit Paris that French people particularly Parliament not prepared grant more than independence in French Union. Added he was reasonably optimistic settlement would be effected within few months and stressed Bollaert's desire achieve settlement.

2. Situation Cambodia steadily improving according Daridan. Only two bands of Cambodians remain Siemreap area, all other having surrendered to French or dispersed.

3. Situation in Laos also quiet. Briefly discussed free Laos representatives here. Daridan thinks they and their activities not much import and apparently does not expect continue talks with them.

<sup>16</sup> Repeated by the Department to Hanoi as telegram 55, June 19, 3 p. m.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Daridan, French Chargé in Siam.

4. Discussed question confederation SEA countries. Daridan said he did not find much support this in Paris, that French Foreign Office was divided on question, that even proponents were thinking only terms economic [and] cultural matters and that there was definitely no thought political confederation. In this connection he said Laos feared Siam domination confederation.

5. Daridan slated head Asia Dept French Foreign Office but said Bollaert who is old and close friend insisting he accept position Indochina assist him. Matter being decided Paris. According Daridan, French Minister Siam will probably be Gilbert, presently Chief Personnel Dept, Foreign Office.

Sent Dept 466, Saigon by courier 15.

Dept. please repeat Paris.

STANTON

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851G.00/6-1447

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

[Extracts]

CONFIDENTIAL

SAIGON, June 14, 1947.

No. 256

SIR: I have the honor to summarize and analyze, as of possible interest to the Department, the chronological development of the situation in Indochina from the arrival at Saigon of Mr. Emile Bollaert, High Commissioner of the Republic in Indochina, on April 1, 1947, to his departure for France on June 11. This period of 70 days was a particularly critical one, as Mr. Bollaert had the unenviable task of endeavoring to counteract the effect of errors of omission and commission popularly attributed to the regime of Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu, former High Commissioner, and of attempting to find a solution of the complex Indochinese political problem which would be acceptable to both the French and the Annamite peoples. The extent of his success, of course, cannot be measured at this time save in relation to the state of affairs obtaining at the date of his arrival in Indochina, and only time will tell whether or not he has carried back to France a feasible plan for the restoration of peace and security and a workable recommendation for the future status of Annamite Indochina.

This then was Mr. Bollaert's heritage on the French side, a people sharply divided as to the best means of dealing with the situation, as to the concessions to be made, and as to the person or persons whom

France should recognize as the representatives of the Annamite peoples; on the Annamite side, a people almost universally distrustful of French intentions, convinced that the French would stop at nothing to deny the fulfilment of native aspirations, and cherishing a hatred and rancor engendered by decades of exploitation by a thoroughly selfish colonial regime. In several respects, however, he was fortunate. The situation could not have been worse—I may say with confidence that the present situation is far worse than when I arrived in February 1946. In his consideration of the thorny problem he could disregard any idea of military reconquest, as France as a whole had neither the will nor the means to embark upon such a vast undertaking, one that would be condemned by the world at large—the French were surely aware that the hard won successes of their military in Tonkin were more apparent than real. And he could count on the Kingdoms of Cambodia and Laos being content to accept French guidance, inspiration and tutelage—the Issarak movements could largely be dismissed as attempts to make dynastic changes rather than revolts against the French position in those countries. Moreover, the High Commissioner had the good fortune to arrive at a time when people were tired of fighting and destruction.

What plan if any the High Commissioner has taken back to France is of course not known. Logically, however, any plan likely to succeed will represent a great concession on the part of France and the unquestionable sacrifice of many of her interests. France has already jettisoned the idea of a Federation of the five entities making up the French Indochina of the past, France may well be prepared to throw overboard the Provisional Government of the Republic of Cochinchina, and France appears to be willing to accept a Vietnam Federation so long as both French and native rights are protected and not to be the spoil of an admittedly totalitarian regime. What security France can exact for such protection in the future is difficult to say. France, if Mr. Bollaert's declaration is to be given credence, will refuse to deal with any one faction. On the other hand Ho Chi Minh has always said he is not fighting the French but only the colonialists, and he has given some indication of willingness to make concessions in his acknowledgement of the right of each of three Kys to have local autonomy. How far communist-trained Ho Chi Minh is to be trusted is problematic and his concession of local autonomy may be merely a blind. Unfortunately, the majority of natives stoutly maintain that Ho Chi Minh is the man, *and the only one*, who represents them and they will oppose the putting forward of any other candidate as the creation of but another puppet and the erecting of a smoke screen for France's real in-



tentions. While the natives are tired of fighting and are apprehensive of the destruction and famine that impend for the future there is still a determined nucleus who are prepared to wage a bitter and ruthless warfare if the greater part of their claims is not met. To reconcile these differences will be difficult, but for the future of Indochina, for the stability of Southeast Asia, for the good of the whole Far East, and for the prestige of western democracy, whatever plan is adopted must be put into operation without great loss of time.

From a purely practical point of view too great concessions on the part of France might be very disastrous, if such concessions give the natives virtually a free hand. Many observers doubt whether they are capable of running an independent state and point to the fact that the Philippines after 40 odd years of benevolent tutelage, in which the advantages of education and instruction were available to all, are still not a model of good government. How much less chance would the Annamites have of making a success? The majority of these observers opine that without Occidental check or control the result would be chaos—and in that chaos either the Soviet or the Chinese would find their opportunity. The former would be able to establish their ideology in the very heart of teeming Southeast Asia, with millions of people to indoctrinate and to prepare for the ultimate struggle with the western democracies. The latter would be able to realize their age-old desire to dominate if not to take over this part of the Far East, a desire which is even now manifest. To many observers, the Chinese danger is the greater, even if not imminent because of China's preoccupation with her own political problems. Be that as it may, something must be done to eradicate the distrust and almost contempt of the French for the natives, and to eradicate the distrust and hatred of the natives for the French; something must be done to bring home to the French the fact that times have changed and that the natives have a right to more than a semblance of independence, and to bring home to the natives that the French have a legitimate interest and place in Indochina. Mr. Bollaert must have learned that the above are imperative and that they are the stones in the foundation of peace in Indochina.

The High Commissioner has now gathered the necessary data and it is the task of the French Government to supply and apply the answer. While that Government may continue to procrastinate in the hopes of wearing down the native opposition, I believe that that Government will be led to accept a Federated Republic of Vietnam, in which each of the three Kys will have autonomy, freely associated with the French Union. And Ho Chi Minh, if he is really the nationalist and patriot that he claims to be, must accept that his totalitarian government and Tonkin cannot speak for all Annamites.

Respectfully yours,

CHARLES S. REED, II

851G.00/6-1747: Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Embassy in France*RESTRICTED  
U.S. URGENT

WASHINGTON, June 17, 1947—7 p. m.

2201. Kenneth Campbell *N Y Times* dispatch datelined Paris June 16 quoted authoritative French sources to effect US has urged French terminate conflict with Vietnam, pointedly referring to undesirability prolonged conflict strategic Indochina and to possibility unrest might spread beyond Indochina.

Dept replying press inquiries along following lines:

"We are continuing to keep in touch with the French Govt concerning the disturbed situation in Indochina as indicated by Mr. Acheson in his press conference of 27 Dec last. Our deep concern that a pacific basis be found for the adjustment of the situation was voiced by Secretary Marshall in his press conference of Feb. 7.<sup>18</sup> Ambassador Caffery maintains contact with the French Govt on developments in the situation and has, of course, expressed similar views."

(Sent Paris as 2201; rept Saigon as 98, and Hanoi as 54.)

MARSHALL

851G.00/6-2447

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*CONFIDENTIAL  
No. 260SAIGON, June 24, 1947.  
[Received July 16.]

SIR: I have the honor to report, as of possible interest to the Department, the report appearing in the June 23 issue of the *Echo of Vietnam*, a daily advocating the cause of Ho Chi Minh and his Government, that one of the leaders of the National Union Front of Vietnam, the party advocating the return of Bao Dai, has been sentenced to death *in absentia* by a military court of the Executive Committee of Nambo, the control body of the Viet Minh in Cochinchina.

The leader in question, Mr. Nguyen Van Sam, self styled diplomatic delegate of the National Union Front, has been accused of (1) sabotage of the national defense, (2) dealing with the enemy, and (3) disobeying the order of April 18, 1947, dissolving the Social Democratic Party. The military court is reported to have consisted of Nguyen Binh, Commander in Chief of the 7th Military Zone, Ta Minh Kien and Le Dinh Chi, Assessors, and Nguyen Van Tri, Director of the Political Committee in the 7th Military Zone. While the court order

<sup>18</sup> See telegram 15, February 14, 5 p. m., p. 72.

reads that Nguyen Van Sam is to be brought before the court to make his defense, it adds that if he refuses to appear before the court the verdict of death may be carried out anywhere.

This is but one indication of the possible fate that awaits persons who are for one reason or another in opposition to the program of the Viet Minh Party and the publicity given to the verdict, and to the threat of assassination, may well be a hint to all those who oppose the aspirations announced by Ho Chi Minh and his Government. The fact that such pressure is brought to bear on political opponents is rather disturbing to those who do not want Cochinchina, or all of Annamite Indochina, at the mercy of the totalitarian group now holding forth in Tonkin.

In fact, native sources, who confirm there is a growing sentiment in Cochinchina away from Ho and his party, assert that just such intimidation may well influence many Cochinchinese to join what is now called a Cochinchinese front.

In this same vein there are reports to the effect that there is a split in the ranks of the Executive Committee of Nambo, that a number of the members, particularly Pham Van Bach, President of the Committee, are opposed to the terrorist activities of Nguyen Binh and have asked the Government in Hanoi to suppress the position of Commander in Chief and to place the resistance movement largely in the hands of the civilian authorities. These reports speak of the split as a grouping of the strictly Cochinchinese nationalists in opposition to the communist and extremist elements of the Viet Minh.

According to report there are 24 brigades in the resistance army in Cochinchina, of which four are composed of mostly Tonkinese, are the best armed, and are well provided with money. The Cochinchinese nationalists are said to be endeavoring to gain control of the remaining brigades but admit they do not have the funds to keep things going.

Well informed French sources are inclined to discount the above reports and are reasonably certain that, even if there are a few dissidents in the ranks, the Viet Minh and the so-called Army of Resistance are stronger than ever—these sources feel that while the numbers in that Army have not increased these troops have now advanced in training and have profited from many months of experience in actual warfare. These sources, and among these I may mention the Chief of the French *Sûreté*, also stress that the communist complexion of the Viet Minh and the Army of Resistance is becoming more and more apparent, even though Ho Chi Minh endeavors to show that he is a nationalist and not a communist.

Respectfully yours,

CHARLES S. REED, II

851G.00/7 347 : Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State* <sup>19</sup>

SECRET

HANOI, July 3, 1947—4 p. m.

213. Aide of General Salan <sup>20</sup> called this morning to offer use band and honor guard at July 4 reception.

Under cover this offer, he talked considerable length making following points:

(1) Viet Minh is exclusively communistic. French intelligence reports during last week indicate group of eight Russians now on Indochina border at unidentified spot under leadership character whose name phonetically spelled Karkov. Group designed reorganize Vietnam military forces which not operating too effectively.<sup>21</sup>

(2) If Viet Minh took power, there would be no democratic liberties (I remarked that French *Sûreté* here gave little evidence of respect for them also).

(3) Question of Indochina is question which affects entire white race and policy of "firmness" is necessary.

(4) Vietnam was really last part Axis set up by Japs which was proved by fact that Japs now fighting in Vietnam ranks (to this, I said that because Germans were fighting for French in Indochina, no one accused France being Axis creation and expressed doubt as to whether what Japs there may be among Vietnam military forces had important position, or if they did, French would certainly have great deal more difficulty militarily).

(5) Check Paris Conference on Marshall Plan made evident necessity for world choose between American and Russian philosophies.

I have noted in past 2 weeks increasing French official talk both here and in Saigon that Viet Minh is communistic. While it appears that there may be Communist flavor to troubles in Kwangtung and it reasonable to assume that Vietnam Govt will turn more and more toward Russia if aid not available other sources, there has been no recent evidence of high credibility which adds to what was known of character of Vietnam Govt 6 months ago.

This task [*talk?*], coming on heels Dept declaration re Indochina (Deptel 54, June 17 <sup>22</sup>) and recent note Indonesian Govt, seems designed prepare for new turn French policy probably of repressive

<sup>19</sup> Repeated to Paris as telegram 2529, July 10, 1 p. m., and to Saigon as 117.

<sup>20</sup> Gen. Raoul Salan, commanding officer of French forces in north Indochina.

<sup>21</sup> In airgram A-191, September 30, from Nanking, the Embassy in China reported on a group of White Russian musicians traveling in China as probably the reason for this report. The French Consul General at Kunming informed the American Vice Consul there that he regarded the report as a fabrication of French military intelligence in Indochina. (851G.00/9-3047)

<sup>22</sup> Same as telegram 2201, June 17, p. 106.

nature. What makes it doubly suspicious is fact French tried same tactics during months which preceded Haiphong incident in fall last year.

O'SULLIVAN

851G.00/7-947

*The Ambassador in Siam (Stanton) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

BANGKOK, July 9, 1947.

No. 463

SIR: I have the honor to report that Dr. Pham Ngoc Thach, who describes himself as Under Secretary of State of the Vietnam Government, returned to Bangkok about two weeks ago and that he departed for Indochina a few days ago.

While here Dr. Thach handed to Col. Law, Assistant Military Attaché who, on Dr. Thach's previous visit, had established informal contact with him, a questionnaire which is in the nature of a plea by the Vietnam Government for the assistance of the United States. For the information of the Department, copies of the questionnaire mentioned are enclosed herewith.<sup>23</sup>

It will be observed that the questionnaire, which is understood to have been prepared by Dr. Thach himself, poses the question of whether or not the United States would be willing to use its influence to mediate between the two parties. It is recognized that because of the present international political situation the United States could not adopt an anti-French position by supplying arms and munitions to Vietnam. However, the question is asked whether or not it would be possible for the United States to make a loan (\$10,000,000-\$20,000,000) for the purchase of textiles, medicines and machinery for the use of the Vietnam people. Reference is also made to lack of capital and of technicians for the reconstruction and modernization of the country, and inquiry is made as to whether or not the United States would be willing to render such assistance and the terms and conditions under which such aid might be granted.

Reference is also made to the possibility of Vietnam's case being presented to the United Nations and inquiry is made as to whether the Vietnam Government can count on the United States or the Philippines to place its case before that body. The further query is made as to the attitude of the United States in the event that their case were presented to the United Nations by some other nation.

Paragraph 7 of the questionnaire refers to the fact that American culture can now only be seen through a French "prism" and inquiry

<sup>23</sup> Not printed.

is made whether the United States would be willing to institute a cultural program vis-à-vis Vietnam.

The final paragraph makes reference to the Federation of South-east Asia which is characterized as an American idea and interest is expressed in receiving some indication of the American conception of such a federation.

I asked Col. Law not to answer any of the questions posed, but simply to explain orally and informally to Dr. Thach that as he well knew the United States Government is not unsympathetic toward the aspirations of the Vietnam people; that it is most anxious to see peace and tranquillity restored in Indochina; and that it has been endeavoring through appropriate diplomatic channels to be of assistance in effecting a settlement of present differences.

Respectfully yours,

EDWIN F. STANTON

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851G.00/7-1147

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

SAIGON, July 11, 1947.

No. 273

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of a memorandum of conversation between Mr. Charlton Ogburn Jr., of the Division of Southeast Asia Affairs, and Mr. William C. Bullitt, former American Ambassador at Paris, dated May 29, 1947,<sup>24</sup> in which the latter related his impressions of the attitude of certain French officials in France towards the present conflict in Indochina.

It is curious to note that, according to Mr. Bullitt, the present conflict, or war, appears to be popular in France, and that his contacts expressed optimism as to the ability of the French military not only to have the situation under control within two months but also that all questions will be settled within two years. With few exceptions the above does not represent the attitude of the French in Indochina, who are perhaps more realistic in their evaluation of the situation and of the ability of the French military to cope adequately with the situation. The few exceptions are, of course, the perennial optimists and the dyed in the wool colonialists, who, at any price, want to see the good old days restored, when natives had few rights and were subjected to an almost merciless exploitation. On the whole, the French in Indochina find the war too near to home to feel comfortable and life under existing conditions, while superficially hectic, is far from pleasant. In theory, perhaps, the conflict may be popular, as vindicating the

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<sup>24</sup> Not printed.



power and glory of France, but a person who has seen his life work go up in smoke is either determined to continue the fight at all costs or to pull out—and in the opinion of most observers the majority of French if not altogether of the latter frame of mind are convinced of the futility of an all out war.

The American Vice Consul at Hanoi has reported his opinion that the French military successes in the north are more apparent than real and, as I have reported, the French successes in the south have achieved but a very small part of the task that confronts the military. It would appear that the native strategy is not to force an open battle but rather to engage in hit and run tactics for which the terrain is well suited. So long as Vietnam has the will to fight the French will find themselves mightily mistaken if they think they can control the country and restore its shattered economy by holding only the larger urban centers and by using small mobile units for countryside cleanups. The present campaign, including the extensive use of parachute troops, has proved that by the time a French unit arrives at the scene of action the opponents have quitted the field and are many miles away. What generally happens then is that the French military summarily punish all the natives in the neighborhood, a practice which has not endeared them to the population. Frankly, with the forces now at their disposal the French have little chance to win a decisive battle or to make the countryside safe for living or for enterprise. The attitude of the French in France regarding the Indochina situation may, of course, be based on the optimistic utterances of persons like Tran Van Ty, Vice President of the Provisional Government of Cochinchina, or on the incomprehensible statement of the High Commissioner, Mr. Emile Bollaert, upon his arrival back in France, that the situation had improved. The latter appears to be far from the case.

The French contacts of Mr. Bullitt mentioned that the resistance would collapse with the exhaustion of arms and munitions at its disposal. This would appear to be somewhat of an exaggeration—the loss of arms and munitions might cause a decrease in an open type of warfare but enough will remain and filter in from China, or from other sources, to keep alive the flames of sabotage and guerrilla activities. That is the type of warfare for which the natives are best suited, the type of warfare the French are less able to combat successfully, and so long as the natives do not win at least the major part of their political and social desiderata there will always be the will to fight the French on the part of a not inconsiderable number of natives. The situation in Indochina will not be settled until the countryside is safe, until people can travel other than in heavily armed convoys, until the production of this rich and fertile land can be sure of reaching

markets and ports of exportation, and a very few active and determined resistants can prevent this from being achieved. Perhaps the French in France do not realize the heritage of hatred that their colonialists have created—nor do they realize that French actions and political manoeuvring since their return to Indochina under the cover of British arms have detracted nothing from that heritage. Moreover, alongside of this hatred runs a current of frank distrust that the French ever intend to give them the measure of liberty and self-determination that they claim.

Apart from the attitude that a military solution is possible, the most interesting comment was that concerning the investment of United States capital in the rehabilitation of Indochina, and equally Mr. Bul-litt's thought that the French were in a frame of mind to relax their economic grasp and to allow the United States to participate in the commerce and production of Indochina. Observers here feel that any concessions the French will make, in admitting participation in what could be a most lucrative economy, will be forced from them or will be so conditioned as to ensure more than substantial benefits for the French. The past record certainly shows no willingness on the part of the French to lightly give up any part of her former policy of economic exclusivism—any concessions made in the past to American business and enterprise have been literally wrung from the authorities in Indochina. It is possible that the French, while in France, are more liberal minded, but something seems to happen to them when they get to Indochina and American businessmen can relate from bitter experience the difficulty of doing business here. The Department has only to recall the background and long drawnout discussions which finally resulted in the Metro-Goldwyn Mayer Company being allowed to open an office for the distribution of films in this country. *Inter alia* I might mention that the Department has reported that the French are not inclined to enter into a reciprocal agreement providing for duty free treatment of consular officers—this is a small matter but it is indicative of the French attitude of squeezing out revenue by all possible means.

There is of course a political aspect to this question of the investment of foreign capital. I am convinced that the French would not willingly encourage the investment of such capital, particularly American, for fear that the results of such investment would be to further emancipate the natives from French control. Thus, the Department is aware that many French, in Indochina at least, are suspicious of American motives and the Department will recall newspaper articles charging American interference in affairs in this area for the purpose of securing a position of economic domination. Many of these articles, if not officially inspired, were with the tacit blessing of the

authorities, for these articles appeared when the authorities exercised a very large degree of control over the press. The French, at least in Indochina, have always believed that the Americans favored the native cause and this belief has colored their actions and reactions to Americans and to American organizations and institutions. The Department has only to recall the difficulties that have beset the United States Information Service to be convinced of the suspicion that many of these French hold of the United States and American motives. Corroboration of this suspicion are the activities in Indochina of the *Sûreté* and the French Military Security Service, which for example have hinted to consular personnel that any information obtained in the consular establishments should be passed on. As mentioned above, the French in France may regard Americans differently from many of the French in Indochina, but the intrigues of these latter and their often open campaign against Americans are too apparent but to fail to instill any great amount of confidence in a sincere welcome of American investment and the correlative influx of American businessmen. Laws in the past have been, if not discriminatory, so phrased as to make it difficult for foreign companies to work in Indochina. Some of these are understood to be still valid although force of circumstances and their own financial and commercial plight have caused the French not to insist upon their enforcement.

An interesting comment was made to me recently by a French businessman, who has spent considerable time in the United States and who may be considered as definitely pro-American. He said you Americans are much too easy—you give help and financial support to many countries, including France, and what do you get out of it? You should publicize the help you are so generously extending and you should insist that some *quid pro quo* be given you. Instead, you Americans follow a straight path, open and frank, and you do not realize, or at least ignore, that many people do not like you just because you have done them favors or because you oppose those people trying to do things that are not exactly "according to Hoyle". He then spoke of the situation in Indochina and made the same comment as I have made above, regarding the difference between the French in France and the French in Indochina—some opposition to the Americans arises from the fact that the Americans did not back the French for the reconquering of Indochina, that the Americans wanted to be fair towards native aspirations, and because many French here fear that the United States, by opening up this country, will reap a part of the rich profits that formerly flowed into French coffers. The only saving grace, he added, was that in France there were a few sane people who recognized their debt to the United States and who might be willing, but they must be

pressed, to give the United States more commercial opportunity in Indochina than in the past. The only saving grace, so far as the French in Indochina are concerned, is the fact that they would prefer American participation in the Indochinese economy to Chinese participation, perhaps because they believe the Americans would be easier to deal with than the Chinese.

The reaction of Mr. Bullitt's contacts regarding dealing with Ho Chi Minh is, of course, stereotyped. The French do not want to deal with him despite the fact that he is still the outstanding representative of the native peoples and despite their heralded desire to treat with the real representatives of those peoples. Instead, stressing Ho's Communist background, they are still dicker with the idea of bringing Bao Dai back to power, to set up a government with a front of independence, but which will be completely French dominated and which will protect French interests, protect the business of those powerful French concerns which if they did not "play ball" with the Japanese at least made a handsome profit from their transactions with them. Thus, at the present time, we have in the press articles which appear to be building up to the return of the late Emperor, the reputed playboy of Hong Kong, whose only sincere following appears to be a few of his former cohorts in Annam and whose greatest following are those whose pockets will be benefited if he should return. If the French believe that their position is stronger than that of the British and the Dutch, as they explained to Mr. Bullitt, they can only be anticipating a French return to power in Indochina—and a French return to power will not be exactly for the benefit of the natives. I agree, however, with Mr. Bullitt that the alternatives are not entirely pleasing, i.e., (1) allowing an independent Vietnam State which would be run by orders from Moscow, and (2) keeping the natives down by force of arms. For the good of the world, as we Americans see it, perhaps intervention as discussed in my despatch no. 267 of July 1,<sup>25</sup> may be the only possible solution.

I say this with Mr. Bullitt's comment regarding the character of the Annamites in mind. Here too, the Annamites that Mr. Bullitt met in France are apparently different from those in their native land. While there are of course numerous exceptions I do not believe that many people find the Annamites attractive and even lovable. With the exception of the Tonkinese, whose poverty has forced them to be so, few of the Annamites are particularly industrious. Including the Tonkinese, the Annamites are generally not noted for their honesty, loyalty or veracity. As an example, before the war it was impossible to obtain burglary and theft insurance in Indochina, because of the

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<sup>25</sup> Not printed.

frequency with which native servants robbed their employers or were concerned with such robberies, and I am given to understand that the same condition exists today. Certainly theft and armed robbery are on the increase—and I must say that during the period following the fall of Japan few native servants showed themselves loyal to employers even after years of service. It may well be, however, that the above-mentioned lack of admirable traits is a direct and pernicious result of decades of French maltreatment and lack of consideration. The corruption, intrigues and scandals of the colonialist era, and even now, were certainly no moral lesson. Nevertheless, whatever the cause, most observers feel that the real trouble with the Annamite is that he lacks "face", and an Oriental who lacks this attribute is a pretty hopeless sort of person. That is not to say that there are not many worthwhile natives and that the natives should not have more of an opportunity than they have had in the past. They should! But knowing the rank and file it is queried as to what would happen in Indochina if they were given independence with no measure of check and control. A great many observers believe that there would be misgovernment and chaos and, as has been repeatedly proffered, a fine opportunity for a third party, be it Soviet or Chinese, to gain a foothold in this country. Perhaps the best way to obtain a fair deal for the natives, and also to protect legitimate French and other interests from a native oppression and venality, would be to insist upon some sort of intervention and subsequent period of control. As it is, settlement of the situation is no farther progressed than almost two years ago, the French are trying to regain their position by procrastination and double dealing, and the Tonkinese group is still intransigent in its desire to have complete power over all this land, despite what a substantial number of Annamese and Cochinchinese may think and want.

One cannot blame the French for wanting to return if not to the *status quo* of before the war then to a political setup in which they will still have the balance of power, nor for not wanting to turn this country over to a group which may indeed draw strength and direction from anti-democratic sources. One cannot blame the natives for wanting at least a substantial share in the determination of their lives and futures, nor, after years of exploitation and poverty, for wanting a fair share of the fruits of their own lands. But one must reconcile these two positions and, unless the High Commissioner is able to pull a political rabbit from his hat in the not too distant future, it seems that intervention and possibly a period of tutelage may be the only way to end this conflict equitably and, it is hoped, to prevent the creation here of a Soviet-dominated state. However, I am loath to believe that the French will be so foolish as to stubbornly insist on conditions

that can only mean a continuance of conflict and I am more inclined to believe that they will accept a Federated Republic of Viet Nam, as previously described. It then remains for the native leaders to make concessions, unless at all costs those leaders, like their Soviet mentors, will continue to insist on their program, come what may. In the latter contingency the only possible solution would appear to be pressure on the Vietnam to play the game fairly and reasonably.

Mention has been made of intervention and supervision. The form of this, if both the French and the natives should prove politically irreconcilable, might well be determined and imposed by the United Nations, under the urge of bringing security and peace to this troubled area. A neutral commission could be set up which would oversee the establishment of an acceptable form of government, which would watch that neither side encroached upon the rights of the other, and which would be able to guard, authoritatively, against the setting up of a totalitarian regime. Although the natives have agitated for some such intervention, but not for supervision, the French, I feel, would consider this a loss of prestige and would resist any such procedure so long as they have any cards to play, say the bringing back of Bao Dai.

Respectfully yours,

CHARLES S. REED, II

851G.00/7-1647 : Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Embassy in France*

RESTRICTED

WASHINGTON, July 16, 1947—7 p. m.

2621. *New York Times* despatch datelined Paris July 13 states Bollaert on return Indochina will offer terms to Indochina states including "full internal autonomy to the three countries of Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina" within French union, end French administration with French offering "technical advisers to Indochinese administrations and associated states, such as Cambodia" but with control of army and foreign policy vested in French High Commissioner. Vietnam army to be disallowed to prevent repetition December 19 revolt.

Despatch explains French consider Ho Chi Minh working for independence Indochina with sole purpose making country a vassal to Moscow and that Bollaert's policy has been "to dispute with Ho Chi Minh and the Communists the support of Indochina's nationalists". Contact with Boadai is mentioned connection with French effort "re-group nationalist parties to counterbalance Communism".

Can you confirm as indication French policy?

Sent Paris 2621. Repeated Saigon 121 and Hanoi 64.

MARSHALL



851G.00/7-1747: Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

HANOI, July 17, 1947—11 a. m.

229. French monitoring service reports Viet Nam radio, "Voix du Sudun", in French on July 14 stated that Giam made speech to cultural association of Tonkin and Annam. He reportedly said Moutet's recent declaration regarding cessation hostilities in Indochina contained errors of fact.

Textually radio reportedly stated:

"April 25 Viet Nam Government sent French Government note proposing cessation hostilities with view seeking solution for peace.

After note sent, about May 12, Paul Mus, delegate of High Commissioner, requested meeting with Ho, at which Giam was present.

Mus stated, Giam said, armistice conditions he brought, under reserve of confirmation by official note from French to VN Government.

Among conditions proposed by representative High Commissioner two are acceptable: (1) liberation of French hostages and (2) free circulation French troops on all territory of Viet Nam.

Regarding dissolution Viet Nameese Army and delivery of arms to French authorities, President Ho has already replied to Mus."

In absence full details of conditions proposed by French, it difficult make estimate the meaning Ho's reply, particularly acceptance second condition (freedom circulation French troops). If this true position of Ho, it may be indication weakness. However, there had been then no evidence to confirm that Viet Nam Govt weakening seriously.

Believe in absence of fuller details that Ho agreed to free circulation, knowing that French were not for military reasons interested in dispersing strength throughout country and multiplying supply problem in face of the then coming rainy season while Ho was able to wage fight. Ho in effect may have been trying to induce them to spread forces thin as in Cochin China.

O'SULLIVAN

851G.00/7-1747: Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Consulate General at Saigon*

SECRET

WASHINGTON, July 17, 1947—8 p. m.

122. Request your and Hanoi's appraisal implications relation US objectives stable Southeast Asia friendly to democratic West in event French should be forced deal present Vietnam Govt and this Govt

should eventually emerge as controlling power three Annamese provinces. Refer particularly the following:

1. Whether influence Communists in present coalition Govt and behind-scenes Communists like Dang Xuan Khu and Ha Ba Cang would be sufficient put Vietnam in Soviet camp.

2. Position Ho respect above. Whether your opinion evidence increasing opposition to Ho by militants tends substantiate repeated reports his abandonment Party line and to corroborate reported letter to Chiang Kai Shek in which Ho excused past Communists connections on grounds nowhere else turn, and stated only interest now independence his country. (Impression here Ho publicly attempting walk chalked line between nationalism and Communism effort retain backing both forces.)

3. Whether intellectuals backing Vietnam realize what Communism means as international political force distinct its economic aspects and whether nationalists among them feel they can cope in future with Communist leaders Vietnam.

4. Whether, with removal solidifying effect French pressure, coherent Govt likely be extended over Vietnam representing real interests Annamese and allowing reasonably free political expression or whether coalition would break in factions which would settle differences by terrorism and armed force, resulting chronic disorders or eventual police state under one-party rule.

5. Sensitivity Vietnamese to US opinion and importance this factor future orientation Vietnam Govt. While French Communists exploit every show of US interest developments Indochina to warn of US intervention, Vietnamese apparently welcome this interest.

6. Effect on Laotians and Cambodians should Soviet-oriented Vietnam emerge.

Dept fully realizes paucity solid info on which base appraisal.

Sent Saigon 122. Repeated Hanoi 66. Repeated Paris for info 2649.

MARSHALL

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851G.00/7-1847 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

PARIS, July 18, 1947.

2865. Deptel 2621, July 16. *New York Times* dispatch from Paris, July 13, re Indo-China is believed to give fairly accurate but superficial presentation of present French thinking. French policy in recent months has centered on attempt to get around dilemma with which they are faced, to wit, (a) Ho Chi-Minh is only native leader with any widespread following and support; (b) French are convinced events

of December 19 proved Ho Chi-Minh cannot be trusted and any government headed by him would be under Communist control.

High Commissioner Bollaert's activities during his stay in Indo-China show clearly his main objective was to find other elements or groups of elements with which French could safely deal (see Saigon's excellent despatch 256, June 14). Judging by info recently received in Paris from Ministry of Overseas France and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bollaert's efforts have not been crowned with success and there is considerable soul-searching going on among officials connected with Indo-Chinese affairs as to what next step should be with growing awareness of seriousness of situation both from French and international point of view.

[CAFFERY]

851G.00/7-1947 : Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

SAIGON, July 19, 1947—noon.

226. Commenting re Deptel 121, July 16,<sup>26</sup> may say *Times* despatch closely parallels my reported beliefs (despatch 256, June 14, mytel 207, June 27<sup>27</sup>) re terms French will offer substantially federation three autonomous "Kys". However, in place strong central government demanded by Ho and Liaison Committee advocated by popular movement nationalists, French appear to be proposing over-all French administration in re which difficult to evaluate reaction until its power and scope are defined. But in the main such administration will be opposed by Ho and by most nationalists, for keynote both Ho and nationalists is independence. Opposition will be the more pronounced with French endeavoring retain control army and foreign affairs and insisting disbanding Vietnam Army.

Unquestionably *Times* despatch correct, French do not want Ho to have over-all power in FIC and proposed administration is to block Ho getting control of any central government that might be established. Proposed administration may be admission failure French to win over Bao Dai or to gather behind him any important nationalist following—but French are certainly still trying to build up such following (petitions, manifestos, declarations) which would give them excuse treat with that following rather than with Ho. While French publicize their dislike treat with Ho because of Communist danger and their duty protect interests other peoples FIC, little doubt they have eye to their own interests and future, hence divide and rule.

<sup>26</sup> Same as telegram 2621, July 16, p. 116.

<sup>27</sup> Latter not printed.

Most French officials in one form or other admit above but comment difficulty by-pass Ho who does represent very considerable element. They believe only solution treating with Ho, Bao Dai and any other leaders they can dig up so as to reduce Ho's power to minimum and also not lose face by treating with him alone. Those officials well as neutral observers query possibility workable solution until representatives all political elements can be brought together.

My personal comment: in justice to French, Ho and his group controlling FIC to be avoided but proposed setup (overall administration control Army, Foreign Affairs, possibly Customs, Finance) approaches pre-war setup or at most is form of tutelage to which natives object as they feel French not to be trusted. If French terms are on take-it-or-leave-it basis, fear settlement situation will be long deferred with Vietminh turning more and more to Communists for support—if terms on that basis may be French feel can reconquer country or at very least feel can so divide country as to counteract militant objections to their policy.

Please pass to Paris.

REED

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851G.00/7-1947: Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*<sup>28</sup>

RESTRICTED

HANOI, July 19, 1947—6 p. m.

233. ReDeptel 64, July 16.<sup>29</sup> Indications here of future French policy are obscured by virtual state of siege which exists and struggle between French military and civil authorities.

However, it remains curious that French discovered no Communist menace in Ho Chi Minh Govt until after September 1946, when it became apparent that VN Govt would not bow to French wishes. Break between French and VN Govt developed not because VN Govt was Communist but because it was too strong for French to impose conditions they desired. It is further apparent that Ho's support (which French to present have consistently underestimated) derives from fact he represents symbol of fight for independence. He is supported because he is acting like nationalist, not because he was or is Communist.

As stated in mytel 197, June 20,<sup>30</sup> I believe that French ability to diverse [*divert?*] nationalist support from Ho remains theoretical

<sup>28</sup> Repeated to Paris as telegram 2744, July 24, 6 p. m.

<sup>29</sup> Same as telegram 2621, July 16, to Paris, p. 116.

<sup>30</sup> Not printed.

possibility but that this will require giving to some govt what was refused VN Govt.

To present, if French policy is to win nationalist support from Ho Chi Minh, it is failure in Tonkin. With reinforced *Sûreté* using very repressive measures, arbitrary arrests, widespread torturing in prisons according to International Red Cross representative visited them, Administrative Committee which is literally laughing stock of populace, reestablishment of direct French administration by use of "*délégués*" etc., heavy handed custom controls, and widespread graft, particularly in lower echelons French services, French have gained very little support in zone they control.

French desire to set (built around Bao Dai or nationalists or Catholics or various combinations of this) up group in opposition to Ho seems clear. It is logical step, after admission by Coste-Floret<sup>31</sup> that French have insufficient forces to reconquer country, to increase their relative strength by dividing Vietnamese.

However, it seems improbable that French intend to offer "complete internal autonomy" (unless French define "autonomy" very narrowly) to Tonkin, Annam and Cochin China, particularly if this means leaving present "federal" services such as *Sûreté* and customs hanging in air. It is highly doubtful that colonial French would accept policing by Vietnamese nor would they accept that Vietnamese courts have jurisdiction over them.

There has been, however, considerably less talk of Indochinese federation in recent past. If French define control "military affairs and foreign relations" as broadly as to mean French control of *Sûreté*, customs and justice, there exists possibility that they intend eliminate federation at least in name.

O'SULLIVAN

851G.00/7-2147: Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*<sup>32</sup>

SECRET

HANOI, July 21, 1947—5 p. m.

235. Reference Department's telegram 66, July 17.<sup>33</sup> Department's assumptions do not make clear how much French influence it expects would remain event French are forced deal directly with Ho Chi Minh. But assuming French will deal with Ho only in last extremity and their control would tend become negligible thereafter:

1. Influence Communists in present government would not be sufficient to put Viet Nam squarely in Soviet camp although there would

<sup>31</sup> Paul Coste-Floret, French Minister of War.

<sup>32</sup> Repeated to Paris by the Department as telegram 2745, July 24, 6 p. m.

<sup>33</sup> Same as telegram 122, July 17, to Saigon, p. 117.

be pull in that direction. Agreement with French which would satisfy nationalism of Viet Nameese people would probably lead to decrease in under-cover activities of characters such as Ha Ba Cang and Dang Xuan Khu and Tongbo members who would tend to emerge from shadows. Geographic isolation Indochina from Russia and realization by Ho Chi Minh of United States power based in Philippines would be sufficient to prevent him or any government formed here from entering whole-heartedly Soviet camp.

2. Until further information available, am very skeptical regarding apparent opposition of militants to Ho. However, Ho's very great reluctance to admit that he is Nguyen Ai Quoc or to show any connection whatsoever with Russia is indicative of his realization that he must deal with West. Ho wrote 25 years ago that national revolution must precede Communist revolution in Indochina and it is obvious his first concern is get rid of French here. He is trying to obtain aid wherever he can and will tend be oriented toward source from whence assistance comes.

3. Have impression that intellectuals backing Viet Nam do not realize what is meaning Communism as international force and that they really would not care if it was thoroughly explained to them. They have been driven to Communism by French colonial policy here and they consider that nothing can be any worse. Hate for French blinds them to many things and makes them accept others they do not like. Intellectuals backing Viet Nam government hate French so much that any future without French is attractive.

4. Removal French pressure would unquestionably have effect of causing present government in first instance to break into factions which would then for time tend develop into more or less full-blown party movements as those understood in Indochina. There probably then would be demand use armed force to some extent as country has widely distributed arms, has held exactly one general election in last 80 years, has no democratic tradition (outside of villages) which would enable it withstand strain political differences. There unquestionably would be danger police state under one-party rule which danger would have to be combatted by whatever French influence might remain and by United States through propaganda, student exchange, etc.

5. Viet Nameese people here still regard United States as promised land and earthly paradise. American flag is still best protection available. Viet Nameese are exceeding sensitive to United States opinion and unquestionably would accept United States advice and/or advisers and would be more than willing to have United States intervene if such intervention were directed toward satisfaction their political and economic needs.



6. Should Soviet oriented Viet Nam emerge, Cambodia and Laos would probably be subjected to considerable pressure to overthrow present regimes there. Independent Viet Nam, whether Soviet oriented or not, and absence of protecting power such as France, could be expected to resume encroachment upon Mekong delta which was interrupted by French occupation in 1860. Viet Nameese migration to southern plains has gone on for ten centuries and probably will continue.

Independent Viet Nam, not oriented toward Soviet, would probably leave Laos to its own devices.

In effect, there are dangers in French dealing with Viet Nam Government. There are dangers equally as great in French dealing with series of puppets in continuing effort to establish, despite all statements to contrary, something which strongly resembles *status quo* of before war.

Problem was and remains primarily nationalist problem in overpopulated area with illiterate populace which has no democratic traditions on national level largely because colonial power gave populace no opportunity express itself politically. With middle-class small, intellectuals who are generally ineffective, and Catholics who are split, best possibility of retaining some stability and preventing development of police state seems to be retention some degree French or international control to act as arbiter between parties.

Communist problem here results from fact French have allowed Communist group to seize and monopolize fight for felt necessity of people and Communist problem will remain without hope solution as long as this necessity is not satisfied elsewhere.

O'SULLIVAN

851G.00/7-2447: Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State* <sup>34</sup>

SECRET

SAIGON, July 24, 1947—noon.

230. Have given considerable thought Deptel 122, July 17, and feel if French compelled treat with present Vietnam Govt their position in French Indo China will be definitely weakened, also if this Govt emerges as controlling power in three Kys gradual deterioration of ties with democratic West may be expected. Unquestionably aid from western democracies, especially US, will be welcomed at first but query whether this Govt and in fact any native govt not subject to check or control will not develop a definitely oriental orientation and will not become a prey for non-democratic influences. Such a govt

<sup>34</sup> Repeated to Paris by the Department as telegram 2780, July 28, 6 p. m.

without considerable economic and moral support will not be strong enough to resist the impact of a concerted move by either the Communists or the Chinese for both of whom this part of Asia is indeed a happy hunting ground, fertile field for the inculcation of anti-western sentiment, and expansion. However, it appears improbable that solution situation can be found without treating with present Vietnam Govt but as noted above and hereafter to treat with that Govt alone is a danger but there is equal danger in treating only with puppets. If French cannot reconcile all political elements or if they try to retain any large degree control, denying independence in regard which both present Vietnam Govt and Nationalist Front elements are united, only solution may be neutral intervention to establish a Vietnam state satisfactory to majority Annamites and to exercise control to see the state is run on democratic and equitable lines. If present Vietnam Govt is honestly nationalistic, it should welcome such solution but am reasonably sure French, particularly French Communists, will view such suggestion with alarm.

Replying *ad seriatim*.

1. While tendency is toward Soviet camp as result Communist orientation Vietnam leaders, do not believe Vietnam will come out openly on side of Soviets until ground is prepared; present Soviet policy toward Vietnam appears to be one of remote control rather than open support and such policy will probably be pursued until time is ripe for avowal Soviet affiliation; in meantime Ho is straddling the fence and hopes to win support of west on platform dedicated to fulfillment nationalist aspirations.

2. As I have reported, very possible so-called militant opposition to Ho as being too moderate is only a blind; there is no proof he has renounced his Communist training but it is reasonably certain his indoctrination will be soft pedalled until independence is won and the French are out; a wily opportunist, Ho will take any aid coming his way to gain his ends without disclosing ultimate intentions.

3. Most Annamite intellectuals do not realize what communism means except that it symbolizes revolution, nor do they care; as their conflict with French is basically revolutionary, they will accept communism or any other "is[m]" as a means to the end.

This part 1—continued part 2 mytel 231, same date.<sup>35</sup>

REED

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<sup>35</sup> *Infra*.

851G.00/7-2447: Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*<sup>36</sup>

SECRET

SAIGON, July 24, 1947—5 p. m.

231. Continuing mytel 230, today: Pure nationalists among these intellectuals want independence and the future can take care of itself; average Annamite not good Communist prospect but strong leaders of aggressive minority can easily bring about evolution Communist state.

4. Removal French pressure and absence Western democracy control will result in chaos as factional fighting with accompanying terrorism will ensue; great bulk of population not prepared for self-government and destinies of country would be in hands of few, those now strongly suspected of Communist leanings; unless active steps were taken, through economic and political pressure, there would be little possibility preventing and combatting resultant police state.

5. American opinion still highly valued by all Annamites, including present Vietnam Government, and American aid is definitely desired to any other; however, if American advice and action run counter to what they think is full sum their desiderata, US might not be so popular; this difference must be noted—present Vietnam Government welcomes American aid in gaining independence, getting rid of French and helping establish national economy but Nationalist Front elements in addition to foregoing want American aid to get rid of present Vietnam Government and Communists; if firmly applied, American pressure can be the strongest influence in the country but there can be no temporizing.

6. Strong Vietnam state whether or not Soviet oriented will bring pressure on Laos and Cambodia and definite political and economic encroachments are to be expected; unless full protection given those countries, they would be forced into orbit Buddhist countries to the west and there would follow indefinite period political readjustment and dispute.

While Communist danger exists, it is future one and only when Vietnam Government is firmly established and in position disregard opinion and aid Western democracies will such government align itself with Soviet satellites—events elsewhere may make such alignment only far distant possibility. French overstress this danger. Present dangers are (1) French terms will be such as to prevent any peaceful solution and (2) if Annamites turned loose, only way combatting resultant economic and political chaos will be totalitarian police state,

<sup>36</sup> Repeated to Paris by the Department as telegram 2778, July 28, 6 p. m.

with ruthless suppression opposition. Both alternatives are alarming. Also must not overlook Chinese ambitions in this area which are only inactive because of China's internal situation.

REED

851G.01/7-2847: Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

HANOI, July 28, 1947—3 p. m.

244. Radio Viet Nam today, in English, French and Viet Nameese, announced following changes result decree July 19 by Government and approved by permanent committee of National Assembly: (compare with my A-4, May 7<sup>37</sup>).

1. Communist Minister of Interior, Ton Duc Thang, made "inspector general" (which puts him on political shelf) and will be replaced by "someone from Cochin China" as yet unnamed.

2. Ta Quang Buu, Vice Minister of National Defense, replaces Vo Nguyen Giap who is named Commander in Chief Armed Forces including Tuve.

3. New Ministry War Invalids and Victims created with Minister Vu Dinh Tuy (Catholic said be ablest Viet Nameese surgeon), Vice Minister Ngo Tu Ha, Catholic (both politically unimportant).

4. Ton That Tung, head of Red Cross, replaced Nguyen Kinh Chi as Vice Minister Public Health "during latter's absence".

5. Cu Huy Can, Vice Minister of Agriculture, becomes Second Vice Minister National Economy and is replaced in Agriculture by Nghiem Xuan Yem, irrigation expert and non-Communist.

6. Le Aung (from Annam) replaced Dang Phuc Thong (who still retains title apparently) as Vice Minister Public Works during "temporary absence of latter".

Internally changes represent swing from Communists and attempted appeasement Cochin Chinese resistants (who will have important Ministry of Interior) as well as Catholics and particularly Bishop Le Huu Tu. Giap still runs army but some concession apparently made to prepare grounds for regulation of latent conflict between Giap and Nguyen Kinh which may break out in future. Changes represent no fundamental shift in power, however.

Externally reorganization is apparently designed to open way for talks with French (see last paragraph my telegram 63, February

<sup>37</sup> Not printed.

19<sup>38</sup>). One well-informed Viet Nameese believes reorganization also indicates Ho's advances to Bao Dai have fallen through.

Repeat to Paris.

O'SULLIVAN

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851G.00/7-2947 : Airgram

*The Secretary of State to the Embassy in France*<sup>39</sup>

RESTRICTED

WASHINGTON, July 29, 1947.

A-1044. The following is a report from the US Military Attaché, Bangkok, Siam, dated July 3, 1947:

"Mr. Charles Aeschlimann, International Red Cross, stated that he still intended upon arrival in Switzerland this week, to report to the International Red Cross the absolute necessity of having a cessation of hostilities in French Indo China. He, however, will continue to try to force arrangements for the import of medical supplies to Vietnam. This is still an embarrassing matter to the French who see complications arising out of permitting the International Red Cross to operate in what is strictly an 'affaire intérieure'."

MARSHALL

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851G.00/7-3147 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

PARIS, July 31, 1947—1 p. m.

3046. Embassy has read with interest Hanoi's 233<sup>40</sup> and 235, July 21st, to Department, and would like to make certain comments. It is not believed curious that French first became particularly aware of Communist menace in Ho Chi-Minh Government after September 1946. It will be recalled that beginning shortly after withdrawal of Chinese forces from Tonkin in March 1946, change began in Vietnam Government tending to eliminate both pro-Chinese VNQDD<sup>41</sup> and other moderate elements, which culminated in reorganization of Government by Ho Chi-Minh upon his return from France in September. This resulted in considerable increase in influence of Extremist and pro-Communist elements in Viet-Minh.

It must further be remembered that in France itself realization of world-wide menace of Communism developed rapidly from about end of Paris Peace Conference. Eviction of Communists from French Government, increasingly open anti-Communist stand of all other

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<sup>38</sup> Not printed.

<sup>39</sup> Copies sent to Saigon and Hanoi.

<sup>40</sup> Dated July 19, p. 120.

<sup>41</sup> Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang, the Vietnamese Kuomintang (Nationalist Party).

French political parties have naturally increased interest and distrust of Communist tendencies in Ho Chi-Minh's Government. In addition, knowledge of Ho's long and prominent connection with world Communism has only slowly become generally known in France.

Evidence of Communist confidence in political views and aims of Ho Chi-Minh and his Government is furnished by attitude of French Communist Party. In conformity with fundamental Leninist doctrine, French Communist Party supports nationalist movements in all French colonies but it is only in Indochina that this support is given exclusively and openly to one man and one party. French Communists have never varied in their slogan that independence of Vietnam must be entrusted to Ho Chi-Minh and to Viet-Minh and to no others. In North Africa they support nationalist aims of oppressed Arab people but they do not support Istiqlal<sup>42</sup> or Bourguiba<sup>43</sup> or Messali Haj (who also has Communist background).

Absence of any widespread belief in or sympathy for Communism among masses of Ho Chi-Minh's admirers and their apparent apathy towards Communist teachings cannot seriously be regarded in these times as potent factors against establishment of government which would follow Moscow's directions. Recent experiences have shown only too well how relatively small, but well-trained and determined, minority can take over power in area where democratic traditions are weak. Nor can remoteness of Moscow be regarded as adequate safeguard. From Ho Chi-Minh's past career there can be little doubt but that he maintains close connections in Communist circles not only in China and India but throughout world.

Department please repeat to Hanoi as Paris 8 and Saigon as Paris 19.

CAFFERY

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851G.00/7-3147

*Memorandum by the Assistant Chief of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs (Landon) to the Deputy Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs (Penfield)*

SECRET

[WASHINGTON,] August 4, 1947.

The underlying telegram to the Chief of Naval Operations from the Assistant Naval Attaché in Bangkok (Saigon's 239 of July 31<sup>44</sup>) refers to a possible good will visit to Indochina by units of the US Navy.<sup>45</sup> Despite Reed's reported opinion that such a visit would be desirable, I feel that any action by the United States at this time that

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<sup>42</sup> Independence Party in Morocco.

<sup>43</sup> Habib Bourguiba, leader of Independence Party in Tunisia.

<sup>44</sup> Not printed.

<sup>45</sup> There was no goodwill naval visit to Indochina in 1947.



could possibly be construed as lending moral support to the French in Indochina would be most ill-advised—particularly since developments in Indochina appear to be coming to a head, with the French reported preparing to set up a constitutional monarchy under Baodai in opposition to Ho's Government. It may be recalled that last May we expressed our concern to the French that a restoration of Baodai might be attempted and were assured that the French were not contemplating any sort of puppet government under Baodai.

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851G.00/8-547 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

PARIS, August 5, 1947—1 p. m.

PRIORITY

3103. In conversation with Baudet regarding situation Indochina, he said while recent reorganization of Ho Chi Minh's government did not fundamentally make much change, nevertheless it was obviously conciliatory gesture and he "felt sure" it would be followed shortly by announcement either by Bollaert in Saigon or Ramadier in Paris redefining French policy regarding Indochina. Baudet hopes this will be followed by armistice and reopening of negotiations. Regarding reported appointment of Bao Dai as "Supreme Counselor",<sup>46</sup> Baudet pointed out this represents no change since Bao Dai held this position in theory since his abdication in 1945.

It is obvious from conversation with Baudet, as well as recent comment in press, French are following with great attention and some nervousness developments in Indonesia,<sup>47</sup> since there are many parallels between situation there and that in Indochina.

Department please repeat to Saigon as Paris' No. 21 and Hanoi as No. 9.

CAFFERY

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851G.00/8-847 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in Siam (Stanton) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

BANGKOK, August 8, 1947—5 p. m.

603.1. In long conversation with Gilbert, new French Minister, he expressed following views and observations re Indochina. He said in

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<sup>46</sup> In the regime of Ho Chi Minh.

<sup>47</sup> For documentation on the situation in the Netherlands East Indies, see pp. 890 ff. In July the Netherlands resorted to force in the East Indies, and the matter was then brought up in the United Nations Security Council.

his opinion which perhaps reflects view some portion of French Foreign Office settlement difficulties with Vietnam could only be accomplished by dealing with Ho Chi Minh. He said that although there danger dealing with Ho view his well-known Communistic leanings that was possible he could be induced reorganize government to exclude more radical elements and include conservatives and liberals. He added recent reorganization Vietnam Government on July 19 eliminating Giap no doubt represented gesture by Ho. He went on to say that in any event settlement this problem must be effected without delay since present stalemate serious disadvantage to France and was subject constant criticism by Communist and other elements in France.

2. Re Laos and Cambodians, he stated new constitution granted these states within recent months giving them greater autonomy. He said goal was grant them same measure independence granted Philippines<sup>48</sup> with orientation in economic and political matters toward France. Gilbert continuing efforts initiated by Daridan persuade Free Cambodians and Free Laos leaders Bangkok to return their respective countries; these efforts believed meeting with some success but these representatives insist any formal agreement reached with authorities Indochina must be certified in presence French Minister here, indicating little confidence French authorities Indochina.

3. Gilbert mentioned recommendation conciliation commission regarding establishment international consultative commission with headquarters Bangkok and inquired our attitude re such commission. I replied no instructions received re this matter. Thompson<sup>49</sup> informed me later he had made similar reply Gilbert. For Department's information, I gather Siam attitude is that such commission would be of little value inasmuch as Vietnam, Laos and Cambodian Governments would not under present conditions be able participate as free and independent states. Understand this and other recommendations conciliation commission be submitted to Parliament by Siam Government in next week or 10 days. At such time full report of work of Siam representatives to conciliation commission will be submitted. Understood government intends leave up to Parliament decision whether commission's recommendation should be accepted and position Siam Government should adopt.

This repeated Saigon as No. 30, to Hanoi as M 80 by courier.

Department please repeat Paris.

STANTON

<sup>48</sup> Telegram 458, August 13, 5 p. m., to Bangkok, asked that the French Minister be informed that the Philippines was wholly independent and that any special arrangements with the United States were based on the free decision of the people through plebiscite or their elected representatives (851G.00/8-847).

<sup>49</sup> Geoffrey H. Thompson, British Ambassador in Siam.

851G.00/8-1147 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

PARIS, August 11, 1947—1 p. m.

3202. Bidault tells me that there is very general disagreement in the Government as to what should be done about Indochina. In fact, no two Ministers are in accord, not even he and Ramadier. However, they have decided to get together before the 15th and send Bollaert policy instructions for the important speech he is to make on that date. Also Bidault says there is a possibility that the French Govt will change its attitude to Bao Dai as there would now be no question of his being a French puppet in view of fact that he may be put forth by Viet-Nam as their candidate; but no definite decision has yet been taken by French in that regard.

CAFFERY

851G.00/8-1247 : Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

HANOI, August 12, 1947—8 a. m.

257. Bollaert's precipitous departure, official announcement of which delayed until his plane left this morning, still not fully comprehensible. "L'Entente" states simply that he wishes to "mettre au point" with govt "important" speech he scheduled to make near future.

It now seems clear that night August 8 or morning August 9 he received orders from Paris, presumably Moutet and/or Ramadier, to clear text fully his "important" speech with Govt. Bollaert then decided to return, with scheduled ETA Indochina August 25.

I am inclined to believe, however, that his return due to differences of opinion between Bollaert and officials in Paris, probably along lines indicated mytel 247, August 1.<sup>50</sup> Bollaert, I feel, not wanted treat with Ho and is prepared make proposition similar to Mus proposal in May with such conditions that Ho would refuse. He was then prepared to inform Paris that no agreement with Ho possible and have French military authorities launch full scale military campaign in dry fall season. It seems probable that he wishes to support this policy in Paris personally. In this connection, ranking brass now in Hanoi, possibly planning details of such autumn campaign in event negotiations fail. Prevalent French military opinion which Bollaert may have accepted, altho it has been consistently wrong in past 18 months,

<sup>50</sup> Not printed.

is that, in 3 months' fall campaign, Viet Nam Government would be crushed. In this connection see my telegram 159, May 10.<sup>1</sup>

Repeat to Paris.

O'SULLIVAN

851G.00/8-1947: Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

SAIGON, August 19, 1947—noon.

260. There has been increasing political activity in last week with each party trying create impression it has support population, all this possibly to influence attitude Paris will adopt vis-à-vis French charter for French Indochina. National Front especially active with large gatherings Hue on 10th and elsewhere while party leaders, particularly Nguyen Van Sam, are negotiating with Hoach for share in his govt, having asked for Ministries Interior and Defense. Hoach still somewhat undecided what to do re his new govt but certain he has connections with all political camps. One result this manoeuvring is acceptance on August 16 of Cochinchina front (hitherto strongly separatist) of principle of union of three Kys but still holding out for central liaison committee to deal with cultural and economic matters rather than strong central govt. This swing was anticipated in Hoach's interview with Paris correspondent in which he spoke of federation with annual revolving presidency among three Kys and Congress dealing only with cultural and economic matters. While local Vietnam press finds Hoach's idea of federation too narrow, it suggests signs of *rapprochement* between Hoach's and his views with National Front holding middle ground. Interesting development is statement [Cao daist Pope] Pham Cong Tac,<sup>1a</sup> hitherto noncommittal re politics, in favor National Front, also return Bao Dai as constitutional monarch. Sam (see above) told me yesterday that despite growing strength his party there might have to be some compromise with Ho but Sam's front definitely anti-Communist and would fight prevent Ho getting absolute control FIC, said front now has some 10,000 armed troops. *Inter alia*, new French general Boyer de la Tour, commanding in south, using these troops extensively. Sam as well as others deplore seeming ignorance in France re actual conditions in FIC, also seeming unwillingness of French [High Commissioner] to accept realities and his resentment of opinions contrary to his own. Thus, he willingly granted leave to Dufour, French Commissioner in Cochinchina.

<sup>1</sup> Not printed.

<sup>1a</sup> This Vietnamese religious sect had its holy seat at Tayninh and also had an armed force commanded by Tran Quang Vinh. Another religious sect, likewise with an armed force, was the Hoa Hao, which followed similar aims.

China, and replace[d] him with General Boyer as from August 16. From this welter political agitation following points stand out: (1) Ho is still strongest figure; (2) National Front with French backing gaining some ground; (3) French exhausting all means get Bao Dai return and obviate their having to treat with Ho; (4) part National Front wants Bao Dai and constitutional monarchy but other part wants republic; (5) Hoach playing his cards to remain on but his government most embarrassing for French; (6) any idea French military operations can succeed restore prewar status or enable French dictate terms untenable; (7) all native parties united for union and independence.<sup>2</sup>

Please pass Paris.

REED

851G.00/8-3147 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

TOP SECRET

PARIS, August 31, 1947—noon.

3542. For Department's eyes only. Chauvel<sup>3</sup> told me last evening that on condition it was not disclosed to our representatives in Indochina he would tell me about the present plans of the French Government for Indochina. He gave me an account of the recent difficulties within the French Government as to whether or not Bollaert should make a speech and if he made the speech what he should say. It was finally decided that he should make the speech on September 7. He will say that it is up to the populations of the three Kys to decide whether or not they want to "fuse" the Governments of the three Kys, and in any event for foreign affairs and defense "Indochina would act as a unit within the French Union". Otherwise the speech will be along the vague lines set out in my 3419 of August 23.<sup>4</sup> On September 17 he will set up provisional governments in the three Kys. Chauvel asked Bollaert if these would be puppet governments. Bollaert said no, they would be representative governments, but did

<sup>2</sup> Telegram 268, August 23, noon, from Saigon, reported the National Union Front Committee had delegated its powers to President Hoach to contact the former Emperor Bao Dai with a view to directing the nationalist movement for independence and territorial unity (851G.00/8-2347). Despatch 332, September 10, from Saigon, reported that on September 5, Bao Dai announced he wished to consult with Indochinese leaders before taking a position, and the Front delegated Nguyen Van Sam to visit Bao Dai in Hong Kong (851G.00/9-1047).

<sup>3</sup> Jean Chauvel, Secretary-General of the French Foreign Office.

<sup>4</sup> Telegram not printed; the lines set forth were as follows: "a) Form in which union of the three Vietnam provinces is to be achieved, b) the question of separate diplomatic relations, c) the question of joint federal services in Indochina, d) question of how the overall authority of France is to be exercised, which of course includes question of military bases." (851G.00/8-2347)

not say exactly how he would bring that about. Chauvel asked Bollaert if the present government in Cochinchina would continue. He replied "probably".

Chauvel then said, "What will you do next?" Bollaert replied, "Obviously if we negotiate with Ho Chi Minh, that will inevitably end in setting up a Soviet state in Indochina and we will be ousted. Strong sentiment has developed recently in favor of Bao Dai and practically everyone who is not pro-Communist is turning towards him, not that they think highly of Bao Dai, but because they are afraid of the Communists and he is the only man in sight we can build up to face Ho Chi Minh and his Communist gang. Therefore, inevitably the provisional governments in the Kys will desire to enter into communication with Bao Dai, and if negotiations with him progress he will eventually be invited to return as head of the three Kys."

Chauvel went on to say that the French are not enthusiastic about Bao Dai. When he was Emperor he took little or no interest in government affairs, preferring "to play tennis and drive his car and stay a lot around the palace with his wife, to whom he is devoted".

I repeat that Chauvel stressed the top secret character of this information.

CAFFERY

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851G.00/9-1147 : Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

RESTRICTED

SAIGON, September 11, 1947—noon.

290. Full text Bollaert's speech going forward tomorrow by air.<sup>5</sup> In essence, speech is as follows:

Defines status of states associated in French Union; states diplomatic representation and defense is matter for Union and not for individual states; accepts question of union of three Kys for people to decide themselves; promises full internal autonomy but exacts high commissioner and commissioners shall oversee relations of the states and safeguard French interests; proposes common money customs and immigration policy; intimates Vietnam would do well follow example Cambodia and Laos and suggest same states; asks people to choose representatives for negotiation but says choosing certain leaders may

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<sup>5</sup> The speech was delivered the night of September 10 at Hadong; text transmitted to the Department in despatch 335, September 11, from Saigon, not printed. Telegram 286, September 11, 8 a. m., from Hanoi, remarked that the speech indicated a "very considerable retreat from even most narrow interpretation March 6 agreement". (851G.00/9-1147)



not be to advantage of Vietnam; declares peace cannot be reestablished through medium only one political party; and appeals all parties come forward and accept full share responsibility in reconstruction of country. Noteworthy speech states must accept French offer in entirety and must be no haggling; also that appeal is made for last time.

Comment and reaction to follow.

REED

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851G.00/9-1147: Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

SAIGON, September 11, 1947—5 p. m.

291. Most apt comment Bollaert's speech is "one begins to see what French Union will be but one does not see a solution to the conflict". General comment is to effect political setup envisaged in speech is practicable and in many ways fair both to natives and French but it falls far short of independence and contains parts which are seemingly contrary to assertion that Union of three Kys is internal problem; statement that French offer must be accepted in entirety or not at all and that this is last appeal sound like threats. In summary speech presents no solution and as there is no mention armistice, French military plan will go into effect unless Bao Dai comes forward "if my presence is desired by the people". It would be embarrassing for French if Ho accepted cooperate along lines of speech but most people think this unlikely and terms of speech appear preclude any dealings with Ho alone. More change [*chance*] Bao Dai accepting what appears to be return to virtual pre-war status under new guise but if does so he will believe [*belie*] his vaunted desire achieve independence for his people.

Please pass Paris.

REED

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851G.00/9-1147: Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Embassy in France*

SECRET

WASHINGTON, September 11, 1947—6 p. m.

US URGENT

3433. For the Ambassador. We have read with concern recent telegrams from our officers in Indochina (repeated to you) to the effect that local French military are seriously contemplating an offensive against Vietnamese in dry season beginning at end this month. It is difficult for us give credence these reports in light French economic,

financial and food position. It is obvious that such an offensive, if it took place under these conditions, would have serious effect on public opinion here which would be reflected in a Congress which will be called upon to consider extensive financial aid for western European nations, including France.

Please make appropriate informal inquiries and report urgently.<sup>6</sup> For your info Dept considering approach French on apparently rapidly deteriorating prospects for Franco-Vietnam settlement and is awaiting your reply this point.

MARSHALL

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851G.00/9-1547: Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

HANOI, September 15, 1947—4 p. m.

291. At his request, I called on Bollaert this afternoon. After exchange pleasantries, he talked of Indochina. Said he thought Ho Chi Minh had lost ground past 6 months but that he unsure this giant [meant] gain for Bao Dai. He said he thought peasants really wanted only security, order, peace, that politics were played only by small group elite.

He asked my impressions country. I said unfamiliar Cochin-China, that Tonkin composed 7,000 villages, each one closed entity, that had seen only few of them, that was impressed by difficulties discovering sentiment people. I noted, however, that educational program, as I had seen it last year, was very widely developed and I believed it possible sentiment villages might well be profoundly affected.

He said he had stopped at various places during his several trips to and from France (Cairo, Karachi, New Delhi, Rangoon, Calcutta) and that he found situations with which that of Indochina compared favorably.

He asked whether I had noted any connection between Viet Nam and Moscow. I replied that while I considered Ho was Nguyen Ai Quoc and that I thought there was Chinese Red network in Hong Kong [*Haiphong?*], I was unable discover any direct connection Viet Nam and Moscow. He said he agreed with me and that he was unable himself to find any direct connection. However, he warned that US

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<sup>6</sup> In telegram 3715, September 12, 4 p. m., from Paris, Ambassador Caffery reported his talk with Foreign Minister Bidault who said he understood the American viewpoint and that he knew of no plans for a military offensive against the Vietnamese in the dry season. The French Minister (Lacoste), in a lengthy conversation on September 12 with Charlton Ogburn, mentioned, *inter alia*, that only the French army in Indochina was preventing creation of a Soviet satellite state forming part of a Red band around nationalist China. (851G.00/9-1247)

should be wary Russian influence in Asia and pointed Russian representation India and Singapore.

He said was prepared remove French administrators when local government so requested, that if independence came too quickly to any people disorder resulted. I asked if that meant France was prepared to give Viet Nam independence at some future time date when people more prepared. He promptly hedged and said that when people learned to use liberty they would be given more. He added he was preparing statute for currency emitting agency of which all states would be represented. He concluded he thought Viet Nameese gave impression being disappointed with his Hadong speech. He noted however that so far he had detected no questioning of his good faith in what he promised.

Had distinct impression that he felt revolutionary sentiment was declining, that the [he] prepared play waiting game long time if necessary.

Copy sent Saigon air courier.

Repeat to Paris.

O'SULLIVAN

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851G.00/9-1547 : Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

SAIGON, September 15, 1947—5 p. m.

299. Continued study Bollaert's speech and talks with many natives (both pro-Ho and pro-Bao Dai), French and others lead to following conclusions:

French now offer less than March 6 agreement, deliberately so in order to make offer unacceptable, so army can put its plan into operation to try eliminate Ho. French putting pressure on Bao Dai to accept negotiate with them but although they probably prepared enlarge terms of offer (member High Commissariat's [admits?] poor offer as point of departure for negotiations) there is no question of independence. Accordingly French continuing divide and rule policy and show little inclination go much beyond pre-war status.

On other hand, natives are not united and even in National Front ranks there is dissension. Also so far Ho has adopted negative attitude to National Front invitation form new combined government, Ho claiming he represents people and National Front must come to him. Until natives can agree, French have some justification at this stage limiting offer to internal autonomy with supervision to see one party or another does not gain control by totalitarian methods. Moreover number of native personalities admit French offer not too bad if

could be sure French would be honest in carrying out terms of offer and could be counted on to progressively accord further attributes independence. This lack of confidence in French is keynote native attitude.

Unless French prepared act honestly, sincerely, to enlarge terms of offer to place natives on equality with French in internal matters, and unless natives can sink differences and can insure internal liberty will not be signal for civil war, it does not appear there can be any immediate acceptable solution FIC situation derived through direct French-Annamite efforts. If present trouble conditions drag on, perhaps intervention (my despatch 267, July 11[1])<sup>7</sup> may be desirable and necessary, as it is inadmissible for American prestige in this part Asia let French restore virtually pre-war *status quo* by arms and equally bad let natives run wild, which would be signal for civil conflict and possible Communist or Chinese intervention of a kind [*sic*].

Please pass Paris.

REED

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851G.00/9-1547 : Telegram

*The Acting Secretary of State to the Consulate General at Saigon*

SECRET

WASHINGTON, September 19, 1947—2 p. m.

160. In telegram to Paris,<sup>8</sup> Dept (1) expressed concern recent telegrams from you and Hanoi indicating French military contemplating offensive with start dry season, (2) stated difficult believe French contemplating such action view their economic situation, (3) noted serious effect military offensive would have on public opinion here and hence Congressional consideration US financial aid Western Europe, including France, (4) requested Emb make informal inquiries.

French FonOff has informed Emb while local military actions might take place view improving communications and eliminating Vietnam salients, it knew no plans for military offensive, for which sufficient French forces lacking. Dept assumes, however, in absence negotiations Ho's Govt, hostilities will continue.

Paris Mil Attaché report Aug 27, based apparently authentic figures, shows French Army Indochina composed 95,000 whites and 25,000 natives with additional 22,000 natives in para-military organizations and 3,000 amphibious naval troops.

Your excellent appraisal Sep 15 (urtel 299) states inadmissible for American prestige this part Asia let French restore virtually pre-war *status quo* by arms. Have French in fact this capability? Urtel 285

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<sup>7</sup> Not printed.

<sup>8</sup> No. 3433, September 11, 6 p. m., p. 135.

Sep 9<sup>o</sup> quotes Chief of Staff as believing campaign would take only 3 or 4 months. O'Sullivan, noting amazing confidence French officials regarding outcome renewed military actions, has doubted possibility success but in tel 290 Sep 13<sup>o</sup> indicates French may have info military situation Tonkin not available him, perhaps including possibility large scale disaffections from Ho.

Your and Hanoi's opinion requested.

Sent Saigon 160. Repeated Hanoi 73.

LOVETT

851G.01/9-2247 : Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

SAIGON, September 22, 1947—4 p. m.

307. Chief of *Sûreté*, just back from Hanoi, called and in brief conversation told me: Bao Dai had agreed to come back negotiate some time ago but was agreed with French he not to do so at that time to avoid appearance his agreement put-up job; not optimistic Bao Dai can succeed but under present plan Bao Dai will set up provisional government and try win over sufficient supporters to insure outcome any possible referendum in his favor; French military still want take things their hands but now seems possible military operations will be in cooperation Bao Dai's govt and political manoeuvrings; seems clear certain amount defection from Viet Minh ranks but not enough greatly weaken Ho and no lasting peace solution FIC situation without taking Ho in consideration—this why French military hope "unfortunate accident" may happen to Ho.

Source stated he now being consulted by Bollaert whereas formerly was ignored, also latter somewhat "disgusted" with "childish" political manoeuvres present Councillor Political Affairs who has been carrying out some negotiations with "Petsaratjue" [*Phetsarat?*] which have disturbed matters in Laos.

Source said situation vis-à-vis Chinese in Tonkin rather disturbing as in place former congregations Chinese forces brought about dissolution these congregations and installed association of overseas Chinese which is organ "Kuomintang" and to be feared. French trying to reintroduce congregation scheme but this opposed by Chinese, especially Consuls in Tonkin, and matter has been referred to Foreign Office Paris.

Hope see source again tomorrow when he has more time but may comment that while some progress made toward solution everything

<sup>o</sup> Not printed.

not yet clear and French are still trying put over their ideas. Source concluded Bollaert deliberately staying away from Saigon so as to avoid being drawn in local squabble in Cochin Chinese Govt.<sup>10</sup>

This telegram answers in part Deptel 160, September 19.

Another source just in from Hong Kong says Bao Dai, despite certain measure working with French, will insist much larger degree in-dependence than that offered by Bollaert.

Please pass Paris.

REED

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851G.00/9-2447 : Telegram

*The Vice Consul at Hanoi (O'Sullivan) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

HANOI, September 24, 1947—8 a. m.

301. ReDeptel 73, September 19.<sup>11</sup> French military in both Saigon and Hanoi, when they speak campaign 3 or 4 months, seem refer campaign in middle and upper Tonkin directed against present Vietnam Government.

Believe military feels confident such campaign would result (1) seizure Lao Kay and Caobang, thereby closing Chinese frontier to in-trickle arms and supplies Vietnam Govt; (2) disruption Vietnam Government with at least some if not most leaders such as Ho and Giap killed, captured or effectively neutralized; (3) destruction of major portion regular Vietnam army and capture most its arms; (4) destruction Vietnam communications including broadcasting facilities.

Throughout summer, felt French unable with troops then here to accomplish this campaign. In light reports of recent influx troops in apparently sizable numbers from south, believe it possible French have capacity at least close Chinese frontier and serious[ly] disrupt Vietnam Government.

Doubt, however, if even French military feel situation can be stabilized on their terms immediately following such campaign. They point out complete pacification Morocco took 20 years, and Tonkin took 10 or more. However, they believe after organized Vietnam Government dislocated sufficiently, armed units will tend disintegrate to piracy.

While elimination present Vietnam Government as organized armed force would seriously weaken position other Nationalists vis-à-vis French (which Bao Dai from his recent Hong Kong statement regard-

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<sup>10</sup> Dr. Hoach, having been outvoted, was replaced on October 1 by General Nguyen Van Xuan as President of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Cochin China.

<sup>11</sup> Same as telegram 160, September 19, p. 138.



ing urgency of opening negotiations seems to realize), it would not enable French immediately reinstall something which resembles prewar regime. However, French administrative history Indochina such that promised concessions are eaten away by administrative practice despite sincerity in which concessions originally offered. This tendency has shown no evidence changing in past 2 years.

French ability reinstall prewar regime in coming years would depend largely on factors external to Indochina. Am inclined believe, however, in long period, given among other things a [no?] third world war or third party intervention, continued instability China and India, reasonable economic recovery France and world, French could reinstall something which minus trimmings would resemble *status quo* before war.

Such action would, of course, be catastrophic US prestige, would turn Vietnamese who distrust and hate French into violent anti-white bloc, and would insure irretrievable orientation intellectuals and people toward communism and Moscow and against West.

Summary sent Saigon.

Repeat to Paris.

O'SULLIVAN

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851G.00/9-2647 : Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

SAIGON, September 26, 1947—11 a. m.

318. ReDeptel 160, September 19. While French at present do not have capability restore prewar status by force arms, their overall tactics, combining military operations with political manoeuvring, give rise grave suspicion that restoration that status by any means possible is the end in view—and great majority natives are convinced of this. French record in past, especially past 2 years, impingement on and unilateral derogation of native rights, certainly inspires no great confidence that French will willingly grant more than such minimum as will satisfy world opinion. Unless some international element should intervene, it seems likely French will achieve eventually and substantially the end in view, although certainly under superficially different setup than prewar regime.

French are aided to this achievement by various factors: (1) strongest opponent is Communist and at this stage in world politics the elimination of Communist menace is to be welcomed; (2) other leaders are wasting time bickering and scrambling for positions of prestige and profit and seem to have in common only the catch phrase "union and independence"; (3) time element, as French well know if they can

only hang on their chances for obtaining more favorable peace are greatly bettered—hence present sit-tight attitude.

Morally, end French believed have in view and tactics to achieve such end are to be condemned and US cannot be party to return pre-war status or even give such appearance without risking destroying large amount confidence natives still have in US. Practically, however, it is of paramount importance that Indochina does not become prey to an imposed totalitarian regime by use recognized weapons of repression, reprisal and terrorism—natives are divided and majority unprepared for democratic freedom and in such division and unpreparedness the single-minded purpose of the 80 to 100 real Communists could easily gain upper hand. No brief can be held for any solution that would put France and Western democracy influence out of Indochina or lead natives believe US indifferent.

Factually situation is substantially same as in mytels 299 and 307, September 15 and 22—big questions being if Ho can be successfully by-passed and if Bao Dai despite reported agreement with French will hold out for real independence.

Meantime, all sources agree French military believe they can work serious damage Ho's organization, mainspring of resistance, in 3 or 4 months, especially cutting flow supplies from China and by sea, also agree French military appear be on point putting their belief to trial in Tonkin and further agree military operations may have fair measure success. Present increased native activities in south aimed prevent French sending large reinforcements to north.

Please pass Paris.

REED

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851G.00/9-1747

*The Secretary of State to the Consulate General at Saigon*

RESTRICTED

WASHINGTON, September 29, 1947.

The Secretary of State informs the Officer in Charge that a telegram from the Vietnam National Union Front addressed to President Truman datelined Hong Kong September 17 requesting United States intervention in Indochina has been received. The text of the telegram, in translation, is as follows:

"Faced with unacceptable peace proposals of French Government set forth in address of High Commissioner of Indochina Bollaert September 10, disregarding principles Atlantic Charter, we beg your intervention in the Franco-Vietnamese problem for establishment lasting peace on foundations of justice and equality. We appeal to American people, champion of liberty, for support in struggle of people of Vietnam for same ideal."

The Officer in Charge is authorized, if he deems it advisable, to inform a suitable officer of the National Union Front that the telegram had been received, and has been transmitted to the appropriate officials of the Department of State.

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851G.00/10-647 : Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

RESTRICTED

SAIGON, October 6, 1947—noon.

329. Little change overall situation, French sitting tight and next move up to natives who don't seem to be getting together. Conflicting reports re Bao Dai and his attitude but some native contacts complain he doing nothing but talk, all of which in French favor. More and more French businessmen disgusted with whole show and want action, attitude being give natives what they want if French interests really protected. New Cochinchina-Govt being organized with perhaps better overall political party grouping than under Hoach regime. Hoach will be one of two Vice Presidents and Govt will include National Union Front Minister of Information and Propaganda as well as Popular Movement Minister of Education. Very little publicity given renewal Bollaert's mandate as High Commissioner but much given Ho's statement Bao Dai does not speak for country. Seems to be some political activity Cambodia with cousin of King trying organize party in opposition Democratic Party.

REED

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851G.01/10-1847 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State*<sup>12</sup>

SECRET

NANKING, October 18, 1947—2 p. m.

2096. In conversation with Embassy officer on subject of Indochina, Vice FonMin George Yeh and Director of European Dept FonOff expressed following views:

It is difficult to foresee a settlement of Indochina question under current French policy, which is making position of other powers, particularly China and US, extremely difficult. It is unlikely that a govt can successfully be formed without participation of Ho Chi Minh, as Ho and his group are the only ones having a genuinely popular following. Attempts to alienate Ho's adherents under present circumstances unlikely of success. Persistence of French in present

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<sup>12</sup> Repeated to Paris as telegram 4003, October 22, noon.

military course carries danger of forcing entire freedom movement into hands of extreme, Communist elements.

Ho is regarded as Communist but many Vietminh leaders are not. Vice Minister is impressed with Ho's personality and commented that Ho was an abler individual for example than Sjahrir<sup>13</sup> of Indonesian Govt, both men being personally known to him. The question of possible danger to China from a Communist-influenced regime adjacent to her southern border did not appear to be of critical importance.

The National Union Front does not have a solid popular base. It consists in the main of a group of prominent figures and if these leaders were removed from the picture (the recent assassinations in Saigon and Hanoi were recalled<sup>14</sup>) the movement would probably have little force left. As regards Bao Dai, "the Chinese people" would not regard favorably the reestablishment of a monarchy in Indochina. Bao Dai has not recently been in Nanking (reDeptel 1205, September 29<sup>15</sup>) and FonOff officials made oblique reference to a "French story" to that effect.

Embassy comment: While no direct statement was vouchsafed by FonOff officials as to Chinese attitude toward National Union or Nguyen Hai Than,<sup>16</sup> foregoing would appear to indicate FonOff does not contemplate support of Bao Dai who would seem to be an indispensable element in present French plans and that a dubious view, at best, is taken of National Union movement. As Dept is aware, there are diverse Chinese elements interested in the Indochina situation and views given above do not purport to represent crystallized Chinese attitude. No allusion was made during interview to possible mediation by third power or powers.

STUART

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851G.00/10-1747 : Telegram

*The Acting Secretary of State to the Consulate at Hanoi*

CONFIDENTIAL

WASHINGTON, October 22, 1947—noon.

78. Following is Embassy Paris comments on Ministry of Overseas France communiqué on Indochina Oct 17 :<sup>17</sup>

"As far as the Embassy is aware the word 'independence' has not previously been used in any official communiqué dealing with the fu-

<sup>13</sup> Sutan Sjahrir, Indonesian Prime Minister, November 14, 1945–June 27, 1947.

<sup>14</sup> Nguyen Van Sam, leader of the National Union Front Party, and Dr. Truong Dinh Tri, president of the Hanoi Comité Provisoire de Gestion Administrative et d'Action Sociale, were both assassinated on October 10.

<sup>15</sup> Not printed.

<sup>16</sup> Formerly leader of the Vietnam Revolutionary League (Viet Nam Cach Menh Dong Minh Hoi).

<sup>17</sup> Telegram 4480, October 17, 2 p. m., not printed.

ture Vietnam Government. In commenting on this, Baudet, Chief of the Far Eastern Division of the Foreign Office, pointed out that in the context the word does not indicate that France is prepared to give independence to the Vietnam at this time. But he agreed that the use of the word was deliberate and indicated a more liberal attitude on the part of the Ministry of Overseas France which would make more easy negotiations with the numerous non-Communist nationalist groups which include independence in their program."

LOVETT

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851G.00/10-2847 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*<sup>18</sup>

SECRET

PARIS, October 28, 1947—5 p. m.

4618. In a conversation with Baudet, he stated that Foreign Office is now much better informed regarding recent developments in Indochina following conversations with Messmer,<sup>19</sup> who explained that recent military operations are not a major offensive but have been in the nature of extended but small scale raids with following objectives:

1. To seize the Vietnam radio broadcasting posts. Three of the four main posts have been captured and the fourth is no longer operating.
2. To seize and destroy certain known arms and munition dumps. Over 5,000 tons of small arms and munitions have been captured.
3. To occupy certain posts along the Chinese frontier and thus cut off arms smuggling and communications with friendly forces in China.

These successful operations have been carried out with small forces and in many cases through parachute action. Total French losses have been only 50 killed (20 were in one airplane accident) which is little larger than would normally occur in a similar period. There is no intention of occupying and holding any territory and even the posts on the Chinese frontier will probably eventually be withdrawn.

Baudet stated that the political situation looks somewhat more promising. The groups supporting Bao Dai consist of the two pro-Chinese parties, the religious communities of Bao [Cao]-Daists and the Hoa Hao, various groups of "intellectuals" and Bao Dai's personal following in Annam. These groups are united in their opposition to the Vietminh and while small individually taken together form an important minority, perhaps a third of the entire population.

In spite of Bao Dai's statements regarding complete independence, etc., indications are that it will be possible to reach an acceptable agreement with him. Baudet indicated that the French would probably have to make some additional concessions regarding diplomatic represen-

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<sup>18</sup> Repeated to Hanoi as telegram 86, October 30, 7 p. m.

<sup>19</sup> Pierre Messmer, director of the Bollaert Cabinet in Indochina.

tation and control of the army and that the negotiations will have to be carefully and skillfully conducted. Once an agreement with Bao Dai has been reached, the French anticipate two developments: (a) a considerable increase in the strength of Bao Dai's followers. (b) A tendency for elements of the Vietminh and perhaps Ho Chi Minh himself to reach an agreement with Bao Dai and the French.

Referring to the internal political situation in France, Baudet was uncertain of the effect on the above perspectives of a return of de Gaulle to power.

Sent Department as 4618, repeated London as 814.

Department please repeat to Saigon.

CAFFERY

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851G.00/11-1747 : Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

SAIGON, November 17, 1947—4 p. m.

382. Mytel 378, November 14.<sup>20</sup> Considerable comment President Xuan's plan for Dalat meeting of representatives all political elements and reaction guardedly favorable. Minister for Information and Propaganda called to explain plan more fully and stated about 160 delegates to be named, meeting scheduled late December [or] early January, appeal to Ho and other Resistance leaders to name delegate already in process, in meantime propaganda to inform populace of purpose and scope of plan.

Critics of plan (1) question how delegates to be apportioned to various parties and groups and how to be named and (2) suggest plan might better be worked out on smaller scale, say in Cochinchina, before trying it for whole country.

Leaders two groups intellectuals also called and while not optimistic of plan's success said they would not oppose and would even cooperate. They voiced belief, unless French made arms available to Nationalist forces to offset strength Viet Minh forces in countryside, Viet Minh would effectively control countryside in (1) naming delegates, (2) influencing result referendum and (3) winning elections. In comment may say there is widespread complaint that French arm partisan forces of uncertain loyalty but refuse to equip Nationalist anti-Communist forces.

Department will be interested in comment these leaders that complete withdrawal France from FIC would be disaster and lead to internal conflict (mytel 231, July 24), that France had a place in FIC,

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<sup>20</sup> Not printed.



but that France cannot be trusted to apply honestly and loyally any agreements she may enter into. In comment may stress again that this lack of trust in France is keynote present impasse and present French manoeuvring and procrastination inspires no great confidence that policy divide and rule is in discard.

Believe Xuan's plan has some small chance success and from conversations with both French and Vietnamese personalities consider that federation plan mentioned mydes 256, June 14, is in process of being worked out but realization this plan will be long delayed particularly as Vietnamese so divided. Fuller details plan forthcoming.

Please pass Paris.

REED

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851G.50/11-2047

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL  
No. 395

SAIGON, November 20, 1947.

SIR: I have the honor to report, in advance of a detailed report upon the recent Economic Conference at Dalat, a resolution adopted unanimously by the assembled delegates of the States of Indochina (Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos) and of France, addressed to the Government of the French Union, in which it is asked that a part of the reparations in kind due from Japan to the United States be diverted to Indochina in the form of a loan.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

"Fully conscious of the immensity of the task of reconstruction and of re-equipment in an Indochina ruined by Japanese aggression and its consequences and of the paucity of primary resources of the Federation it is strongly insisted that the Government of the French Union:

1. Defend in international conferences with absolute firmness the right of Indochina to reparations and to obtain that the needs of reconstruction of victim peoples be satisfied before those of the Japanese aggressors;

2. Undertake when the moment is propitious negotiations with the Government of the United States with a view to borrowing a part of the Japanese reparations in kind which will be allocated to that Government and which it will not use;

3. Ask in the course of the peace negotiations that the peacetime level of the Japanese economy be fixed in such a way as to prohibit to Japan the reconstruction, directly or indirectly, of its war potential and of an economy not corresponding to its natural resources; and

4. Prohibit upon the occasion of those negotiations the pre-war Japanese commercial practices which, specifically through dumping,

constituted economic aggression and which resulted, as has been shown, in compromising the peace."

There is no doubt but that such a loan would serve a most useful and worthy purpose, as the progressive and systematic rehabilitation and re-equipment of Indochina is being hampered by the lack of primary products from France and by the lack of foreign exchange with which to purchase such products from foreign countries. However, until political stability is obtained in Indochina it would appear to be a wasted effort to make available large amounts of primary products which might only remain on the docks and deteriorate, as has been the case with many items shipped to Indochina during the past two years.

It would also appear that coincident with such a loan it should be exacted that American business and enterprise be given equal opportunity in this country and that it not be permitted that the French economic exclusivism of the pre-war period be re-established. That the French will endeavor to do so is reasonably certain, despite protestations to the contrary, and, after almost two years of observing French tactics to regain and maintain their economic ascendancy and monopoly, I feel that all possible means should be invoked to prevent that any loan, in kind or in money, obtained through American cooperation and generosity be used to further French economic and commercial interests to the detriment of legitimate American interests, not to mention to the detriment of Vietnamese interests.

At the present time, although French interests are being granted licenses to import films from the United States, the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Company has been refused such licenses, even though the American company has offered not to ask for exchange to remit its profits until conditions are more favorable. From what the representative of that company relates it is reasonably patent that French interests are behind the refusal. This is but one example of the difficulties that American companies encounter under an economy directed to regain and maintain the French economic hegemony.

The above is not to say that I am unsympathetic to the French in their efforts to re-establish the shattered economy in Indochina. As a matter of fact it is in the interest of the world that that economy be put upon its feet and that its many products again flow into world markets. But having in mind the waste and the senseless expenditure of foreign exchange in the past two years I am inclined to believe that to give vast amounts of material goods to this country, without any degree of control, is but to repeat this waste and to stimulate what a French observer termed a seemingly systematic mismanagement. Notoriously, the French Purchasing Mission expended large sums for

items not required nor useful in French Indochina—as witness some thousands of drums of asphalt purchased at a high price for one purpose and now found to be useless for any purpose.

Today all French of position and all Vietnamese in the good graces of the French have their new American automobiles and their new frigidaire, while the bulk of the population is struggling along as best it can and the city of Saigon does not have running water half of the time. How can the touted French directors of Indochina's economic program explain that medicines are lacking but there is no rationing of gasoline? How can they explain that many basic items of life are unavailable whereas the shops of Saigon are glutted with luxury items, perfumes, costume jewelry, brandy and champagne?

The loan of the nature in mind has much in its favor as there are many items of Japanese manufacture which the United States would not want but which would assist the restoration of the economy of French Indochina. But until the political situation is settled and there is definite assurance that the flow of such goods will not be directed through the hands of a favored few, for their exclusive benefit, the possibility of such a loan is a matter of future consideration. In any event a loan in the form of material items appears to have more in its favor than a loan of money.

Remarks upon French shortcomings should not be taken as an endorsement that the Vietnamese would do better by themselves and the majority of unbiased observers view with doubt any appreciable amount of materials or any substantial sum of money being turned over unreservedly to a strictly Vietnamese regime. The same waste would occur, the same channeling of distribution for the profit of a favored few would take place, the same misappropriations would be noted—with the added danger that the ubiquitous Chinese man of affairs would soon have the commerce and economy of Viet Nam in his capable hands.

The Vietnamese are not to be blamed entirely for what one might call economic and financial untrustworthiness. They have, under the French "colonialist" regime of the past 60 years, witnessed the creation of a most efficient machine of exploitation and self-interest, centering in the Bank of Indochina and the fabulous French import-export firms, but also extending throughout all grades and ranks of French commerce and officialdom. The laxness and self-seeking of the past has had its effect, the present day example has strengthened this effect. And, with this in mind, who can blame the Vietnamese, from the highest to the lowest, for wanting to get aboard the "gravy train."

The above is a pessimistic picture, but it is a reality, and much must be done to create a sense of responsibility, an atmosphere of confidence,

and a basis for uncontrolled credit, before one can be certain that Indochina, either under its present ruling class or under a native regime, will be a sound and going concern. It is a pity, as both the French and the Vietnamese have much in their favor and as the country itself, if properly ruled and developed, would be a rich source of many things for which the world has need in these critical times.

There are men of good will and of honest intentions in both French and Vietnamese ranks. But the confusion of the political situation makes it difficult for these to emerge to the foreground and to take the necessary steps to ensure an economy directed not to the benefit of the few but to the benefit of the country as a whole.

Respectfully yours,

CHARLES S. REED, II

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851G.00/12-447 : Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

SAIGON, December 4, 1947—4 p. m.

400. Provisional Deliberative Committee Annam on 24 November adopted resolution asking Bao Dai appoint liaison committee for three Kys which will study possibility convening Nationalist Congress and, with reference Xuan's proposal Dalat Conference, resolution states Bao Dai only person who should take initiative in such matter. Xuan's plan has evidently inspired various elements with idea uniting various political elements to study situation, make suggestions but any idea of strictly Nationalist Conference without Ho representation can hardly reach satisfactory overall settlement nor any conference which insists unreservedly that Bao Dai come back as emperor as many want republic.

REED

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851G.00/12-1647 : Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

PARIS, December 16, 1947—6 p. m.

5398. Following is Foreign Office version of meetings on December 6 and 7 between Bollaert and Bao Dai. Additional reports will follow.

Bollaert and Bao Dai reached agreement in principle on future status of Vietnam (Embtel 5282, December 9<sup>21</sup>). At outset Bao Dai demanded as prerequisite to any understanding guarantee that French will not negotiate with Ho Chi-minh at any time and make public announcement to this effect.

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<sup>21</sup> Not printed.

Under agreement Bao Dai is to return to FIC and establish new government. Vietnam, which will include Tonkin, Annam and Cochin-China, is to be granted independence within French Union; foreign relations are to be conducted by France with Vietnamese being incorporated in French Foreign Service. Vietnam will have independent army which will, however, be "available for defense of any part of French Union". There will be common customs and integration of transportation and communication systems.

Details of agreement presently being studied by French Government and no public statements will be made until Bollaert returns to Indochina and Bao Dai government established. Foreign Office source sees as principal difficulties the formula for return of Bao Dai to FIC without being branded as French "stooge" and formation of representative and effective government. Source adds that inclusion of Cochin-China (because of its constitutional status as a "Crown Colony") in Vietnam will require act of Parliament and expects that this bill would be subject of attack by Communists. Latter who up to now have actively campaigned for union of "three Kys" as part of their all-out campaign of support for Ho Chi-minh would doubtless reverse themselves on this issue if uncompromising anti-Ho statement as demanded by Bao Dai is made.

Department pass to Saigon as Paris 37.<sup>22</sup>

CAFFERY

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851G.01/12-2447: Telegram

*The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State*

SECRET

PARIS, December 24, 1947—3 p. m.

5536. Mytel 5398, December 16. Council of Ministers yesterday issued communiqué announcing Bollaert given "full powers to undertake all action and negotiation necessary for re-establishment of peace and liberty in Vietnam". Communiqué states that in view of failure of government of Ho Chi-minh to reply to offer of negotiations made in Bollaert's September 10 Haiphong [*Hadong*] speech and Viet-minh radio's rejection his offer, no negotiations will be undertaken with government of Ho Chi-minh.

Auriol, as President French Union, informed Council yesterday of receipt of "active adherence" of Kingdoms of Cambodia and Laos to French Union.

Department pass to Saigon as Paris 38.

CAFFERY

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<sup>22</sup> Also to be repeated by Saigon to Hanoi.

851G.00/12-2647 : Telegram

*The Consul at Saigon (Reed) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

SAIGON, December 26, 1947—11 a. m.

422. News of Bao Dai's actual departure for Europe<sup>23</sup> given much publicity, also fact that he and President Xuan said to have agreed re status Cochinchina, latter to have large measure autonomy, but comment very guarded awaiting Xuan's return from Hong Kong. Manoeuvres Hoach being watched with interest as generally believed he has organized support of many Caodaist and Hoa Hao troops and he remains very anti-Xuan. New President Cochinchina Council is Beziat, unquestioned colonialist, and an informed liberal candidate defeated by "inducements" to vote for Beziat.

REED

851G.00/12-3047

*The Consul General at Hong Kong (Hopper) to the Secretary of State*

CONFIDENTIAL

HONG KONG, December 30, 1947.

No. 450

SIR: I have the honor to inform the Department that on December 24, 1947, I received a visit from Mr. Ngo-Dinh-Giem<sup>24</sup> of Saigon, who stated that he had come to Hong Kong for the purpose of consulting with Bao Dai, ex-Emperor of Annam, and that while in this city he wished to talk with me about conditions in Indo-China. Ngo-Dinh-Giem stated that he knew Mr. Charles S. Reed, American Consul at Saigon, and understood that I was a friend of Mr. Reed. I may state that on December 18, I received a telegram from Mr. Reed to the effect that Ngo-Dinh-Giem was coming to Hong Kong to see Bao Dai, and that he might call on me while here.

Ngo-Dinh-Giem stated at the outset of our interview that while he was aware that my duties did not concern affairs in Indo-China he wished to take advantage of his visit to Hong Kong to talk with me and to let me know his views concerning the protracted negotiations which French authorities have been conducting with Bao Dai and other political groups in his country in an effort to put an end to the strife and to set up a stable government.

Ngo-Dinh-Giem impressed me as a nervous young man of about forty years of age, but who was very serious in his desire to help to

<sup>23</sup> Bao Dai left Hong Kong by air for Switzerland via London and did not expect to visit France.

<sup>24</sup> Usually known as Ngo Dinh Diem.

solve the impasse prevailing at present in the above negotiations. He was suffering from a bad cold, but spoke fairly good French, as he did not desire that an interpreter or third party be present during our interview. He stated that he believed it to be in the interest of his cause that American officials everywhere be fully informed as to developments. I replied that I would be only too glad to learn his views.

Ngo-Dinh-Giem stated that Bao Dai had sent for him in order to have reliable and current information on present conditions in Indo-China as both of them had found that due to strict censorship in Indo-China on communications of all kinds it was very difficult to communicate with Hong Kong and other places, particularly on subjects of a political nature. As the Department is probably aware, Bao Dai left Hong Kong on December 24 for Europe to join his family in Switzerland, I am informed.

Ngo-Dinh-Giem asked me if I had followed the course of negotiations in Hong Kong among various political groups from Saigon within recent weeks. I replied that at first I attempted to keep informed but that as the conference dragged for weeks without any apparent result, I had to curtail my interest due to pressure of work, but that I naturally read with deep interest the daily press reports on the progress of the conferences. (As a matter of fact I have forwarded Hong Kong press articles, and other notes obtained from various sources, to Consul Reed at Saigon, in view of French censorship of mails entering that country.)

Ngo-Dinh-Giem gave me his opinion of the terms of the offer submitted some time ago by the French Government to Bao Dai and to the political groups in Indo-China. In brief Ngo-Dinh-Giem considered the terms of the proposal as falling far short of real independence, which is the ultimate desire of his people; he stated that the Bollaert offer was entirely unacceptable to his chief, Bao Dai, but he then stated that Bao Dai was a poor man without resources with which to conduct a political campaign. I gathered the impression at this point that Ngo-Dinh-Giem was worried lest Bao Dai might accept the French offer for personal and financial reasons, plus his desire to regain his throne as emperor of Annam. Ngo-Dinh-Giem claimed that he was an old friend of Bao Dai, had served as his Prime Minister in former years, and that their families enjoyed close relations. He said that when Bao Dai left Hong Kong he suggested that if Ngo-Dinh-Giem found conditions ripe upon his return to Saigon he might go ahead and attempt to form a government within the framework of the French proposal, with as many amendments as possible in order to satisfy nationalistic aspirations. When I asked Ngo-Dinh-Giem if



this meant that Bao Dai intended to accede to the French terms regardless of public opinion in his country, he replied: "I hope not as it would mean continued slavery for my people." He then said that an outright refusal to accept the French offer might result in continued strife in Indo-China. He said that even though a compromise solution may be reached with the French they still had the Communist group to reckon with; and that this group seemed well supplied with money and arms, and had received much help from "foreign sources". He feared that if an agreement was reached with the French that the latter would expect the newly organized government to assume most of the burden of exterminating the Communists, as the French were "getting fed up" with fighting and the continued losses which they have suffered. I might observe at this point that the French Consul in Hong Kong, M. Jobez, had remarked to me some time ago that he thought that French authorities would be only too pleased to turn over the job of fighting Communists in Indo-China to any newly organized native government, as the present guerrilla style of warfare was something the French did not relish, and had proved very costly in men and material.

Ngo-Dinh-Giem spoke then of the sad state of the economy of his country; that the French had for many years exploited the riches of Indo-China, without giving much in return; that although the French realised that they could no longer continue exploitation in such high-handed manner as before they had no intention of turning over the resources of Indo-China to all comers, and that they would never agree to an "Open Door" principle. Ngo-Dinh-Giem then stated that the only hope for his country, if it ever expected to escape from French domination, is to enlist the sympathy and support of the other great democracies and that the United States was in best position to extend the needed aid. I then realised that my visitor was approaching the actual purpose of his interview, and that he was appealing to me as an American official to use my influence in his behalf. He spoke of how we had extended moral and financial aid to other "small oppressed countries" in order to prevent their exploitation by a great power, and, more recently, to prevent the spread of Communism. I refrained from expressing any opinion on these statements of my visitor, but asked him if the majority of the people of Indo-China were united in their efforts to reach an agreement with the French. He hesitated before replying, but finally stated that he "thought that unity might be reached were it not for the Communist element".

The opinion of Ngo-Dinh-Giem may be summarized as follows:

1. That the French offer made sometime ago falls short of native aspirations in that the French wish to retain control of foreign

relations and defense (meaning retention of troops in the country).

2. That the French do not honestly intend to relinquish control of the economy of Indo-China, but expect to keep it within the "French Union".

3. That Bao Dai may weaken and be more directly under French influence, as he naturally desires to revive his dynasty and lead his people into better days.

4. That any native government must look to outside sources for means to exist—at least for a few years.

5. That the Communist danger is very evident, and that any seizure of power in France by the Communist Party would result in similar action in Indo-China.

6. That continued resistance to French proposals to join the "French Union" will only make matters worse in Indo-China, and will not improve the tragic condition of the people, with increasing numbers turning to Communism.

7. Finally, that only concerted representations by other great powers will cause the French to agree to more acceptable terms for the formation of a local government, and that such a new government must obtain financial aid from abroad until such time when it can stand upon its own feet.

Respectfully yours,

GEORGE D. HOPPER