# Table of Contents

# Introduction

Most historians treat America's involvement in Vietnam with a glaze of inevitability. The argument is not always made explicitly, but the most popular word in Vietnamese history is "quagmire," implying that once American troops entered Southeast Asia, their fate became a foregone conclusion. Even good historical accounts typically discuss America's escalating involvement in terms of the five most relevant Presidents (Harry S. Truman through Richard M. Nixon), and argue that each man felt handcuffed by his predecessor's commitments in the region. Better historical scholars will usually isolate a series of key dates, specific moments in time when the history of Vietnam might have taken a decidedly different turn. Historians usually point to the French collapse in 1954, Lyndon Johnson's decision to escalate U.S. involvement in 1965, and Nixon's invasion of Cambodia in 1970 as specific windows of opportunity in which a change in American policy became possible. Few scholars, however, go back to 1945 and 1946, to Franklin Roosevelt and the true beginnings of the conflict in Vietnam.

This thesis argues that 1945 and 1946 were crucial years in the history of Vietnam, a time in which Vietnamese independence was a legitimate and real possibility. This possibility was thwarted, first diplomatically and then militarily, by Great Britain, the one Western nation historians never discuss in relation to Vietnam.

France held colonial control over Vietnam and all of Southeast Asia (or Indochina) for about 100 years before World War II. The Indochinese (or Annamites) initiated periodic revolts and French control was somewhat weak into what is today northern Vietnam, but France otherwise maintained firm and pervasive colonial authority. Everything changed during World War II. Germany invaded France early in the war, deposed the existing government, and installed Vichy France, a weak and collaborationist regime, in southern France. The new regime had a presence in Indochina, but it was very weak and essentially capitulated to all Japanese demands. As a result, Ho Chi Minh's

organization of Vietnamese nationalists (later consolidated into the Vietminh), operated in a political vacuum from 1941 to 1945. The regional power vacuum was mirrored on the international level, making Vietnamese independence a legitimate possibility for the first time in Indochina's colonial history. China and Russia supported Indochinese self-determination, the Japanese threat disappeared with the Allied victory in 1945, and the French were in no position to recolonize the territory without help.

The question of Vietnamese independence thus fell between the two remaining world powers, Great Britain and the United States. The two nations would spend most of the next four years ideologically polarized over Indochinese independence, yet strangely reluctant to confront the other over the issue. By the summer of 1944, a series of British diplomatic moves had eroded much of FDR's plan for eventual Indochinese trusteeship, and Britain sealed the return of French colonialism through the use of ground forces after the war. This diplomatic and military victory by Great Britain set back Ho Chi Minh's dream of Vietnamese independence, led to the reestablishment of French colonial rule in Indochina, and set the stage for America's own Vietnam War.

None of these outcomes were "inevitable." If the British had supported FDR's plan or even opposed it less vigorously, the resulting half-century of Vietnamese history would have likely unfolded quite differently. Much like the French collapse in 1954 and Johnson's decision to escalate in 1965, 1945-1946 represented a crucial period in the history of Vietnam, a moment in which the course of history might have a taken a dramatically different turn.

# FDR's Pursuit of Independence: American Policy Toward Indochina, 1941-1945

Britain and the United States did not start out at odds with one another over Indochinese independence. Throughout 1941 and 1942, U.S. policymakers assured France and Great Britain that the United States would support the post-war reestablishment of France's colonial empire. This policy eroded noticeably as the war progressed and the atmosphere in Washington changed. Although this assurance was informal and unofficial, it was explicitly promised in several written memos--documents the British Foreign Office carefully catalogued for use at a later date. The first came on October 14, 1941, in a letter from State Department officer Ray Atherton to Vichy Foreign Minister Rene Pleven. Acting Secretary of State Sumner Welles reaffirmed this support on April 12, 1942, writing to the French ambassador that:

> As this Government has informed Your Excellency's Government on several occasions, the Government of the United States recognizes the sovereign jurisdiction of the people of France over the territory of France and over French possessions overseas. The Government of the United States fervently hopes that it may see the reestablishment of the independence of France and of the integrity of French territory.[1]

Welles' statement clearly indicated that the U.S. would stand behind French recolonization, even in Indochina. Roosevelt re-emphasized this support on November 8, 1942, announcing, "I need not tell you that the ultimate and greater aim is the liberation of France and its Empire from the Axis yoke."[2] Finally, American support was most

---

[1] "Memorandum of Conversation by the Acting Secretary of State," March 11, 1942, in U.S. Dept. of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers 1942, Europe, p. 695. Quoted several times in British Public Records Office Foreign Relations Documents, notably FO 371/41723.

[2] State Department memorandum, "Official Statements and Views Affecting the Future Status of France and the French Empire," Jan. 29, 1944, Stettinius papers. Quoted in John J. Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations and Colonialism in East Asia, 1941-1945, (New York: Garland, 1983), p 96.

explicitly reiterated in the fall of 1942 by Robert Murphy, an American diplomatic representative to France:

> I am in a position to assure you that the restoration of France in its complete independence in all its grandeur and the extent it possessed before the war in Europe as well as overseas is one of the war aims of the United Nations.
> It is well understood that French sovereignty should be reestablished as soon as possible over all the territories, continental and colonial, over which the French flag flew in 1939.[3]

Since the French flag had obviously flown over Indochina in 1939, the American position seemed clear--the United States would stand behind her European ally after the war and support the reemergence of French colonialism in Southeast Asia.

In reality, however, the American assurances of French recolonization were based on complex motives of political pragmatism and did not represent a moral commitment or an official policy. Welles's April 1942 statement, for example, was designed to encourage French resistance against Japanese aggression on the island of New Caledonia.[4] In a similar fashion, Murphy's fall 1942 statement came as the Allies were trying to enlist French support for a planned invasion of North Africa. The two promises were calculated political moves designed to push French patriots in a particular direction, "spoonfuls of sugar to make the medicine go down," and did not represent a definitive American position.[5] In addition, FDR simply dismissed or ignored the earlier promises after 1942. When reminded of Welles' assurance of support in early 1943, Roosevelt thought it only applied to North Africa.[6] At the 1943 Casablanca Conference, and again while speaking to the British Ambassador Lord Halifax, Roosevelt chided Murphy's statement as presumptuous and overdone, and stated that he did not feel the least bit bound by previous

---

3 Quoted in Eden to Halifax, Dec. 29, 1943, PRO, Cab 122/812.
4 Edward R. Drachman, United States Policy Toward Vietnam, (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Press, 1970), p. 37.
5 Lloyd C. Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1988), p. 33.
6 Drachman, United States Policy Toward Vietnam, p. 46, and Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations, p. 98.

American promises to the French.[7] Through his words and particularly through his actions from 1943-1945, Roosevelt gave a clear indication that he would not be tied down by earlier assurances, and felt free to pursue a new policy in Indochina.

After rejecting the obligations made by Atherton, Welles, and Murphy, Roosevelt and his foreign policy officials displayed an ambiguous duality of opinion regarding Indochinese recolonization. FDR was at times a fierce, dogmatic anti-colonialist who did not hesitate to debate the evils of imperialism. At the same time, however, Roosevelt desperately avoided the trappings of official policy. He refused to formally confront Winston Churchill and the British government, and he never asked the State Department to study or draw up tentative plans for an Indochinese trusteeship. As Roosevelt foreign policy expert Lloyd Gardner argued in Approaching Vietnam, FDR "could hardly predict what the situation would be at war's end, what could be done immediately and what would simply have to be anticipated without a precise plan. So he *was* fuzzy-minded."[8] Despite Roosevelt's strong anti-colonial rhetoric, he was not willing to dedicate himself to Indochinese independence when the global political situation could change so drastically after the war. He put the Indochina question on the back burner, focusing on immediate war aims and delaying any substantive decisions until after the war, when the political situation would become clear.

Although U.S anti-colonialism had roots in Woodrow Wilson's World War I appeal for self-determination, it was focused and intensified by the beginning of World War II. U.S. foreign policy experts enunciated three important linkages between imperialism and the onset of WWII:

---

7 Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations, p. 97, and Halifax to Eden, Jan. 18, 1944, PRO, Cab. 122/812.
8 Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 22.

- They argued that unfulfilled colonial ambitions, such as Hitler's demand for the return of Germany's African colonies, would always lead to "secret diplomacy" and eventually to war;
- they considered the appeasement policy a craven attempt to buy off the dictator with Eastern Europe and protect the imperial empires;
- and they held a strong conviction that London had refused to stand up to Japanese ambitions on the Asian mainland during the 1931 Manchurian crisis in the hope of diverting Tokyo's ambitions away from British colonies.[9]

In 1941, these views were incorporated into the Atlantic Charter's call for self-determination for all peoples. Although Churchill almost immediately began to argue that self-determination was only intended for populations conquered by the Axis Powers, Roosevelt did not retreat, repeatedly stating that the Atlantic Charter applied to all nations. In a March 15 address, Roosevelt asserted that:

> there has never been, there isn't now, and there never will be, any race of people on the earth fit to serve as masters over their fellow men. . . . We believe that any nationality, no matter how small, has the inherent right to its own nationhood.[10]

Five months later, Roosevelt said, "I can't believe that we can fight a war against fascist slavery and at the same time not work to free people all over the world from a colonial policy"[11]--implying that America would take a direct, proactive role in ending imperialism. Throughout the war, Roosevelt continued to use WWII as evidence of the alleged moral bankruptcy of European colonialism While traveling to the Casablanca Conference of 1943, FDR answered his son Elliott's question about the fate of France's colonies by responding:

---

[9] Ibid., p. 24.

[10] "The Light of Democracy Must Be Kept Burning"--Address at Annual Dinner of White House Correspondents, quoted in Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., The Public Papers of FDR (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 10: 69.

[11] Elliott Roosevelt, As He Saw It, (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1946), p. 37. Most historical scholars accept Elliott Roosevelt's later transcriptions as largely accurate.

> How do they belong to France . . . ? Take Indo-China. The Japanese control that colony now. Why was it a cinch for the Japanese to conquer that land? The native Indo-Chinese have been so flagrantly downtrodden that they thought to themselves: Anything must be better than to live under French colonial rule! Should a land belong to France? By what logic and by what custom and by what historical rule? . . . Don't think for a moment . . . that Americans would be dying in the Pacific tonight, if it hadn't been for the short-sighted greed of the French and the British and the Dutch.[12]

Although it was often cloaked in the moralistic rhetoric of self-determination, Roosevelt's anti-imperialist stance also contained a large measure of mistrust and disrespect for France. Simply put, FDR believed that France had not provided effective colonial leadership in the past, and that it would be in no position to do so after the war. The collapse of the French resistance against Germany in 1940 convinced Roosevelt that France had become a decadent nation, which no longer deserved the status of a major power.[13] Roosevelt's antipathy grew in August 1940, when Vichy France's representatives agreed to allow Japanese air bases in northern Indochina, and again in July 1941, when they acquiesced to air fields in southern Indochina. FDR was also convinced France would not be a strong or stabilizing force after the war--he believed its political system was unworkable, and he found Charles de Gaulle egocentric and untrustworthy.[14] This animosity specifically crystallized around Indochina, where FDR maintained that the French had forfeited their rights by their mismanagement of the colony. Speaking to Secretary of State Cordell Hull in October 1944, Roosevelt delivered perhaps his strongest words on the subject:

---

12 Elliott Roosevelt, As He Saw It, pp. 114-116.

13 Gary R. Hess, "Franklin Roosevelt and Vietnam," The Journal of American History (Sept. 1972): 353-54.

14 Walter LaFeber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina: 1942-1945," The American Historical Review, v.801, Dec. 1975, pp. 1278-79.

> Indo-China should not go back to France France has had the country--thirty million inhabitants--for nearly one hundred years, and the people are worse off than they were at the beginning
> The case of Indo-China is perfectly clear France has milked it for one hundred years. The people of Indo-China are entitled to something better than that [15]

FDR's anti-colonialism combined idealistic support for self-determination with a fierce antipathy for Charles de Gaulle and France's record of colonial administration.

Roosevelt's comments, which were typically off-the-cuff contradictions of official U.S. policy, eventually coalesced into a plan to achieve eventual Indochinese independence through an international trusteeship, similar to that previously employed by the U.S. in the Philippines. Roosevelt's trusteeship plan originally did not have anything to do with France's record in Indochina. It first appeared in the summer of 1941 in response to Japanese pressure on the Vichy representatives in Indochina to cut off the flow of supplies traveling through the country to China. Under FDR's proposed agreement, Japan would refrain from sending its forces into Indochina, and Roosevelt would seek to bring about the "international neutralization" of Indochina and Thailand.[16] The Japanese, who were already planning their attack on Pearl Harbor in the summer of 1941, responded to FDR's proposal with a set of unacceptable counterdemands. When the attack on Hawaii came three months later, the trusteeship plan quickly faded into the background.

Roosevelt resurrected the plan in 1943 and lobbied heavily for it over the next two years. FDR first broached the subject at a January 1943 meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, explaining that not all French colonial possessions would be returned after the war and that he had "grave doubts" as to the restoration of French Indochina.[17] At the Casablanca Conference at the end of the month, Roosevelt launched into a dinner-party discussion with the sultan of Morocco, then a protectorate of France, about his sympathy

---

15 Cordell Hull, The Memoirs of Cordell Hull, 2 vols, (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 2:1,597.
16 Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 28.
17 Quoted in LaFeber, "Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina," p. 355.

for colonial self-determination. With Churchill seated nearby, FDR further indicated that "France" no longer existed to his mind, that he would not recognize de Gaulle as the leader of a government in exile, and that no French authority could be recognized until the liberation of metropolitan France.[18] FDR tackled the issue for the first time with the British two months later, when Foreign Minister Anthony Eden arrived in Washington to discuss postwar problems. Despite Eden's immediate opposition, Roosevelt pushed for international trusteeships for Indochina and Korea, and dismissed Welles's earlier promise of colonial restoration.[19] Several months later, the British Ambassador Lord Halifax met with Roosevelt, and watched in astonishment as FDR began redrawing prewar maps of regions across the globe, carving out various pieces of the French empire that he felt should be given to the United Nations as international trusteeships or as strategic bases controlled by one of "Four Policemen."[20] The Big Four--the U.S., Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China--were to serve as the executive committee of Roosevelt's model United Nations, to "take all the more important decisions and wield police powers" in the postwar world.[21]

Roosevelt began to line up international political support for the plan at the Cairo and Tehran Conferences of November and December 1943. At Cairo, Chiang Kai-Shek agreed to FDR's trusteeship plan, after Roosevelt had offered the colony to the Chinese leader.[22] At Tehran a month later, Josef Stalin wholeheartedly threw his support behind the trusteeship plan, meaning that two major powers now supported the president. Soon after returning home, Roosevelt received diplomatic representatives from Turkey, Egypt,

---

18 Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 36.
19 Hull, Memoirs, pp. 2:1,595-96.
20 Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 37.
21 Ibid., p. 36.
22 Roosevelt press conference aboard the U.S.S. *Quincy*, February 23, 1945, quoted in Rosenman, Public Papers and Addresses, p. 13: 562. According to Roosevelt, Chiang responded, "It's no help to us. We don't want it. They are not Chinese. They would not assimilate into the Chinese people." In "Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina," p. 359, historian Gary R. Hess suggests the offer may have been a test of the sincerity of Chiang's support for a trusteeship.

Persia, China, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain for an astonishing historical meeting FDR went on record to say that he had been "working very hard" to prevent Indochina's return to France, that he wanted "some United Nations trusteeship to govern those people," and that "peace must be kept by force. There was no other way and world policemen would be necessary who would need certain places from which to exercise their function without bringing up questions of changes in sovereignty."[23]

This international announcement alarmed the British and French foreign policy establishments. Eden quickly unearthed the documents relating America's early promises of French colonial restoration, and ordered the British Ambassador, Lord Halifax, to speak confidentially to Secretary of State Hull and determine whether the President's remarks represented a concerted White House-State Department policy.[24] Halifax replied that Hull "knew no more about it than I did," and that "this is all a bit woolly."[25] When Halifax met Roosevelt for lunch two weeks later, FDR made "the usual case for taking Indo-China away from France," again dismissed his government's earlier pledges about the French Empire, and referred to the French colonial administrators as "hopeless."[26] Halifax reminded Roosevelt that his comments were sure to get back to the French--"I hope they will," FDR responded. The exasperated Ambassador argued that taking Indochina would be an unnecessary "slap in the face" to France's rebuilding efforts. Roosevelt, who reportedly "was not taking it all too seriously, agreed about the general future of France, though he thought now they were pretty hopeless, and ended by saying: 'Well, tell Winston I've got three votes to his one as we stand today.'"[27] For Halifax, the most troubling aspect of an extremely troubling turn of events must have been the fact that Roosevelt was right--he did have Churchill potentially outvoted three to one. Although

---

23 Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 40, and LaFeber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina," pp. 1284.
24 Eden to Halifax, Dec. 29, 1943, PRO Cab 122/812.
25 Halifax to Eden, Jan. 3, 1944, PRO Cab 122/812.
26 Halifax to Eden, Jan. 18, 1944, PRO, Cab. 122/812.
27 Ibid.

the trusteeship plan was hardly formal Allied policy--the British and French had certainly not signed on to it--but official Indochinese independence was a legitimate possibility for the first time since France took over the country 100 years before.

Curiously, Roosevelt seriously discussed the trusteeship idea with everyone except Churchill and his own State Department. Roosevelt knew Churchill and the British Foreign Office would vigorously oppose any Indochinese trusteeship, and he did not wish to create a formal schism between the two powers. Cordell Hull reports in his Memoirs that the U.S. could not press the issue too far because "we were seeking the closest possible cooperation with them in Europe. We could not alienate them in the Orient and expect to work with them in Europe."[28] Although FDR never officially argued the case for Indochinese independence with the British, he had no qualms about bringing the matter up as an informal conversation topic. Roosevelt told Halifax that he had discussed the issue with Churchill 25 times, "or perhaps discussed is the wrong word. I have spoken about it twenty-five times but the Prime Minister has never said anything."[29] FDR had a tendency to drop formal diplomatic language when talking with Churchill, telling him at one point that "the trouble with you is that you are thinking that Burma might want to be independent, that the Straits Settlements might want to be independent, or the Dutch East Indies might want to independent after they have gone through an apprenticeship under a trusteeship."[30] Roosevelt felt comfortable with taking informal jabs at Churchill, but both he and the Prime Minister avoided official policy discussions because neither wanted to risk an Anglo-American rupture over something both considered remote and contingent. The point was made clearly in an amazingly frank press conference on February 23, 1945. Meeting with reporters from all three major wire services, Roosevelt admitted offering Indochina to Chiang and explained the obstacle confronting his trusteeship plan:

---

28 Hull, Memoirs, p. 2:1,599.
29 Halifax to Eden, Jan. 18, 1944, PRO, Cab. 122/812.
30 Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 23.

Stalin liked the idea. China liked the idea. The British don't like it. It might bust up their empire, because if the Indo-Chinese were to work together and eventually get their independence, the Burmese might do the same thing to England. The French have talked about how they expect to recapture Indo-China, but they haven't got any shipping to do it with. It would only get the British mad. Chiang would go along. Stalin would go along. As for the British, it would only make the British mad. Better to keep quiet just now.

Q. Is that Churchill's idea on all territory out there, he wants them all back just the way they were?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, he is mid-Victorian on all things like that. . . . Dear old Winston will never learn on that point. He has made his specialty on that point. This is, of course, off the record.[31]

Avoiding a split with "dear old Winston" also meant that FDR never took any steps to translate his generalized statements into formal State Department policy. Roosevelt's 1943 meeting with Eden represented a perfect policy window--a directive to the State Department to study implementation of the trusteeship plan would have been logical and perhaps even expected, but none was sent.[32] Halifax's later meeting with Hull furthermore revealed that the "President's remarks did not represent any settled policy in which [the] State Department has concurred."[33] In reality, the State Department and some of Roosevelt's top officials had begun examining the policy just prior to the Cairo and Tehran Conferences, with mixed results. Secretary of State Hull and Undersecretary of State Welles supported the return of Indochina to France, as long as the French agreed to eventual independence.[34] Several State Department policymakers for Western Europe were not interested in extracting even that promise from the French.[35] On Oct. 22, 1943, the State Department's Division of Far Eastern Affairs likewise endorsed French

---

31 "The Nine Hundred and Ninety-second Press Conference - Held En Route From Yalta." Aboard the U.S.S. *Quincy*, February 23, 1945, quoted in Rosenman, Public Papers and Addresses, pp. 13: 563-4.
32 Hess, "Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina," p. 356.
33 Halifax to Eden, Jan. 3, 1944, PRO Cab 122/812.
34 Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations, p. 112.
35 LaFeber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina," pp. 1287.

reestablishment even without gradual independence, only to be overturned 11 days later by Joseph W. Ballantine, the division chief.[36]

Without a clear directive from the President, the State Department's views became conflicting and uncoordinated. Even after he gathered the support of Chiang and Stalin, Roosevelt still made no effort to induce the Chinese, Russians, or his own State Department to consider the details of a trusteeship--the administering powers, the process for attaining independence, the level of international supervision.[37] In fact, at one point Roosevelt's plan was a three-member supervisory commission (American-British-Chinese), at another an international trustee agency involving "a Frenchman, one or two Indo-Chinese, and a Chinese and a Russian, because they are on the coast, and maybe a Filipino and an American."[38] FDR was not afraid the State Department would dilute or destroy his trusteeship program. Instead, Roosevelt simply preferred to ramble from question to question without being tied down, and in the end he considered the situation to be strictly a matter for postwar negotiations anyway. In addition, FDR knew that the harder he pushed toward an official trusteeship policy, the more he would have to confront his largest obstacle--that of intransigent British opposition.

British opposition represented Roosevelt's primary roadblock for a number of reasons. First, they were really the only nation with the power to veto the plan. The Chinese and Russians had already signed on, and while the French were certainly not happy about the possible loss of their colonies, they were not in a position to do much about it. FDR, for example, "always spoke as if the real obstacle to his program for Indochina were the British. French views simply didn't count."[39] In fact, French officials instead focused most of their diplomatic entreaties on Britain--Churchill did not

---

36 Hess, "Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina," pp. 358.
37 Ibid., p. 359.
38 Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations, p. 98.
39 Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 30.

particularly like de Gaulle any more than Roosevelt, but at least France's arguments might not fall on *entirely* deaf ears.

Britain also represented the primary roadblock because its foreign policy leaders had decided very early in the game that they would not support trusteeships for any French colonies. This commitment rested primarily on British self-interest, both colonial and domestic. The Foreign Office was first concerned about its imperial interests--nationalism was already on rise throughout Asia, and U.N. control of French colonies might lead to trusteeships or independence for Britain's colonies as well. Halifax said as much to Roosevelt in 1944: "I told the President that quite apart from his pledges which were primarily his own affair, I did not like his plan very much. . . . He might one of these days have the bright idea that the Netherlands East Indies or Malaya would go better under international trusteeship."[40] The British fear of a kind of imperial domino theory in Southeast Asia became one of Roosevelt's favorite conversation topics--he debated the issue with Hull in 1944, at the press conference returning home from Yalta in 1945, and even with Churchill himself.[41] The Prime Minister, who almost never spoke publicly about the issue, was forced on the defensive in 1942. At the Lord Mayor's dinner in London, Churchill exclaimed, "I have not become the King's First Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire."[42] Churchill's statement became unofficial British policy, and was ratified by a Foreign Office report near the end of the war:

> Our main reason for favoring the restoration of Indo-China to France is that we see danger to our own Far Eastern colonies in President Roosevelt's idea that restoration depends upon the United Nations (or

---

[40] Halifax to Eden, Jan. 18, 1944, PRO, Cab. 122/812.

[41] Roosevelt told Hull that "the only reason [the British] seem to oppose it is the fact that they fear the effect it would have on their own possessions and those of the Dutch." Hull, Memoirs, p. 2:1,597. FDR also once chided Churchill, saying: "The trouble with you is that you are thinking that Burma might want to be independent, that the Straits Settlements might want to be independent, or the Dutch East Indies might want to be independent after they have gone through an apprenticeship under a trusteeship." Quoted in Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 23.

[42] *New York Times*, November 12, 1942.

rather the United States) satisfying themselves that the French record in Indo-China justifies the restoration of French authority.[43]

Although they typically cloaked their rhetoric in less blatant colonial language, British foreign policy leaders always had one eye on their imperial possessions when they talked about Indochina.

French control of Indochina also indirectly benefited Britain's eastern colonies by providing a strong, friendly presence in the Far East which could serve as a buffer for Britain's dominions. As the Foreign Office's Post Hostilities Planning Sub-committee pointed out in their January 22, 1944 report, Britain had been unable to properly defend its eastern colonies from Japanese aggression in 1941 and had lost respect in the process:

> The potential threat to India, and to Australia and New Zealand and British possessions in the South Pacific, resulting from Indo-China being in the hands of a weak or unfriendly power has been sufficiently demonstrated by the action of Japan in this war. . . .
> The inability of Great Britain to defend Singapore and consequently Australia and New Zealand, and the fact the defense of the two latter has been undertaken readily and with success . . . by the United States has profoundly affected the outlook of those two Dominions and possibly of Canada also. . . .
> The memory of that failure is bound to remain and it will be essential, if the unity of the Commonwealth is to be maintained, to take all the measures which lie within our power to prevent the recurrence of a situation in the Pacific such as that which faced us in December 1941.[44]

French recolonization of Indochina would thus protect Britain's eastern colonies from the United Nations, Japan, or any force that threatened to take them away from the mother country.

The British Foreign Office enunciated a second set of benefits resulting from the reestablishment of French colonies--the protection of mainland England and Britain's European interests. The return of Indochina would signal the return of a strong and stable

---

43 Quoted in Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 23.
44 Post Hostilities Planning Sub-committee report, "Indo-China and French Possessions in the Pacific," January 22, 1944, p. 1 and Annex I p. 2, PRO, FO 371/41723.

France as a European buffer zone and a counterweight to future German or Soviet aggression As the Post Hostilities Planning Sub-committee report argued, it would be

> unwise to undermine the possibilities of close co-operation with a friendly France in Europe Such co-operation will presumably be a vital factor in our post-war policy and it would be seriously jeopardized if it could be represented to the French that we had willingly connived at a plan to despoil their Empire during their period of temporary weakness.[45]

The 1944 report described Germany's military incapacity as relatively temporary, characterized a rearmed Germany as an "immediate menace," and pointed to the ultimate British threat--a possible revival of the Franco-Czechoslovak-Soviet bloc.[46] The sub-committee concluded that France's geographical position made it "strategically essential, so along as there is any threat of aggression by a European power, that our policy should aim at maintaining a strong and friendly France."[47] Returning Indochina to France meant a stable presence in Southeast Asia, continued protection for British colonies, and a bulwark against future European aggression--it was strategically essential for British self-interest.

For the British, raising internal opposition to an Indochinese trusteeship was the easy part--there is no evidence that anyone in the Foreign Office supported or even sympathized with the proposal. Developing a plan to defeat Roosevelt's plan proved to be more problematic, however. The most obvious approach was to confront FDR directly, but in a pattern strangely similar to Roosevelt's, Churchill typically ignored the president's spontaneous comments regarding the evils of French colonialism and avoided any confrontation that might damage the Anglo-American alliance. In a sort of unconventional chain of command, French officials tended to pressure Anthony Eden and other pro-France foreign policy agents, and Eden typically lobbied Churchill for action.

---

45 Ibid., Annex I, p. 3.
46 Ibid., report p. 2 and Annex I, p. 3.
47 Ibid.

Throughout 1943 and 1944, however, Churchill continued to delay a formal response. In late 1943, the Foreign Office suggested that Churchill pressure FDR to allow French participation in political and military planning for Asia. The Prime Minister replied that it was better to "leave this quiet for a bit. No need to reply for some days."[48] The Foreign Office brought it up again after a few days, but Churchill again procrastinated, arguing that there was "no need for action yet. Await settlement of Medi(terranean) command question."[49] Churchill continued this pattern of terse postponements for more than a year, elaborating only on rare occasions such as one memo from November 1944:

> I think it is a great mistake to raise this matter before the Presidential election. I cannot conceive it is urgent. On this point the President's views are particular to himself. The war in the Far East may go on for a long time. I do not consider that chance remarks which the President made in conversation should be made the basis for setting all this ponderous machinery in motion. Nothing is going to happen about this for quite a long time.[50]

Much like Roosevelt, Churchill believed the Indochina question would be answered after the war. Although he certainly did not support the liquidation of the French Empire, the Prime Minister was not willing to risk a rupture in the U.S.-Great Britain wartime alliance by debating the finer points of international trusteeships months or years before the political situation became settled.

Churchill's hesitation was not an indication of overall British apathy or inactivity. On the contrary, Great Britain did everything just short of confronting FDR to ensure the best possible postwar position for the French Empire. Some of these efforts have already been identified--the British retrieved all the documents they could find containing formal American promises to preserve the French Empire, they ordered Lord Halifax to test the

---

48 Washington to FO, No. 4658, PRO, PREM 3/180/7, quoted in Stein Tonnesson, The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh and de Gaulle in a World at War (London: Sage Publications, 1991), p. 60.

49 Cadogan to Prime Minister 43/343, PRO, PREM 3/180/7, quoted in Tonnesson, The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945, p. 60.

50 Correspondence to Foreign Secretary and Dominions Secretary, Nov. 3, 1944, PRO, PREM 3/178/2.

waters in the State Department, and both Eden and Halifax vigorously opposed the plan when it came up in conversation [51] In addition, foreign policy officials formed a colonial alliance with the French and Dutch, they prepared an objective argument for French recolonization and a shining history of France's administrative record, and they appeased as many French military requests as they could without confronting Churchill or Roosevelt. They were almost literally in a race to put France in an unassailable political and military position before the end of the war. Roosevelt had clearly marked the finish line by classifying Indochina as a postwar matter, and both the British and French realized that second place was no place at all.

Churchill's refusal to confront Roosevelt forced the Foreign Office into a delicate balancing act between two Allied yet opposed nations. Britain's foreign policy officials needed to answer the dozens of French requests for a greater political and military role in the Far East, yet they could not do anything that would attract American attention or anger FDR. The resulting British strategy was clever yet deceptively simple--the Foreign Office *invited* American military participation in the Far East. American naval bases in the Pacific (or even more ideally, U.S. control of Indochina) would not only provide the strong buffer Britain wanted for its eastern colonies, but it would also prevent Roosevelt from routinely proclaiming the evils of imperialism. This strategy first emerged in a September 1943 Foreign Office memorandum by Linton Harry Foulds of the Far Eastern Department, and was later embodied in the January 1944 report of the Post Hostilities Planning Sub-committee. The report argued that:

> In order to provide a greater measure of security in the Far East it is essential to have U.S. participation; but we should try to secure this without antagonizing France . . . on the other hand the acquisition of

---

51 Eden to Halifax, Dec. 29, 1943, Halifax to Eden, Jan. 3, 1944, and Halifax to Eden, Jan. 18, 1944. All in PRO, Cab. 122/812.

> further colonial territory by the Americans would make it less easy for them to point their finger at our colonies.[52]

The sub-committee eventually dismissed the notion of direct American control as "far-fetched," pointing out sarcastically that "the Americans are more ready to criticize the colonial rule of others than to under take it themselves."[53] The concept of American naval bases remained very attractive to the Foreign Office, however--it would help Franco-British relations, provide an American commitment to collective security, and undermine U.S. anti-imperialists. The British government continued to promote this strategy and were later joined, after America's island-hopping push toward Japan, by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Truman administration.

Operating under this strategic framework, the Foreign Office also began to gather evidence to justify French recolonization, in anticipation of a future confrontation with Roosevelt. British leaders created the Post Hostilities Planning Sub-committee to begin investigating the potential postwar political arrangements in the region and the problems of an Indochinese trusteeship--exactly what FDR never allowed the State Department to do. The sub-committee's report somewhat predictably recommended a strong French presence in Europe and Southeast Asia and rejected such alternatives as control by an international group, by another power, or by a United Nations trusteeship. International control was deemed unsatisfactory because it would "open the door wide to Chinese intrigues," control by another power was acceptable but neither the British, Dutch, Russians or Americans seemed willing to take on the responsibility, and U.N. supervision was rejected because it would likely require Britain to turn over its colonies as well. A

---

52 Post Hostilities Planning Sub-committee report, "Indo-China and French Possessions in the Pacific," January 22, 1944, p. 2 and Annex I, p. 4, PRO, FO 371/41723.

53 Ibid., p. 5. With language that becomes significant in light of the Vietnam War, the sub-committee further argued that the Americans "soon become impatient of a task which proves troublesome. Their dealings with the Philippines are proof of this. They are fond of pointing to the Philippine Independence Act as an expression of altruism, but in fact it was prompted partly by economic considerations, but mainly by the desire to jettison an unwanted responsibility."

fourth alternative, Indochinese self-determination, was left completely out of the report.[54] The Foreign Office also commissioned their South-Eastern Asia office to draft a historical record of French administration in Indochina. The resulting document is a rather predictable eight-page parade of French achievements, ranging from dike-building to better communications and increased education. The report portrayed the French as tolerant and beneficial, while the Annamite character was described as one of "apathy," "placidity," and "hypocrisy," a condition attributed to the tropical climate, undernourishment, and local egoism.[55] Taken together, the two reports provide remarkable insight into the British foreign policy mindset at the time. The goals and desires of the native populations were dismissed out of hand, deemed an unimportant part of the equation. The goal of French restoration was never seriously questioned in either document, but merely accepted as the best option to save Britain's colonies, and implicitly, the best alternative for the backward Indochinese.

The Post Hostilities Planning Sub-committee, in addition to outlining the argument for French recolonization, also introduced a significant caveat which became yet a third British strategy--establishing close ties with both the French and the Dutch in southeast Asia. A good relationship with France was needed for obvious reasons, but also because the British knew their plan to position American naval bases on French colonial soil might encounter French resistance. The British were prepared to accept bases in their own territories, but there was no guarantee that Charles de Gaulle and the French would go along with the proposal. The British therefore informally warmed up their alliance with the French, and also took more formal measures to pave the way for future military installations. Twice in 1944, for example, the British War Cabinet approved proposals by Eden supporting the full return of Indochina to France, restricted only by a French

---

54 Post Hostilities Planning Sub-committee report, "Indo-China and French Possessions in the Pacific," January 22, 1944, Annex I, p. 4, PRO, FO 371/41723.

55 "The Record of French Administration in Indo-China," Jan. 8, 1944, p. 2, PRO, FO 371/41723.

acceptance of all security provisions required by the future United Nations (such as military garrisons) [56] In addition, just as FDR had consulted with China and Russia, the British also courted the other major colonial power in the Far East, the Dutch. Even though the Netherlands were a lesser power than China or Russia, the British realized that any crack in the colonial armor could lead to trusteeships for them all. Foreign Office official Victor Cavendisch-Bentinck explained that "if the Dutch, French and ourselves do not stick together as regards the Far East, we shall experience great difficulty in getting back our own possessions."[57]

Roosevelt was informed of this alliance in November 1944, yet he did not confront Churchill and essentially allowed the British strategy to continue unimpeded. In addition, at least two of FDR's advisors had told the President that the French-British-Dutch grouping had moved beyond the realm of informal diplomacy. William Donovan, director of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), argued in November 1944 that:

> There can be little doubt that the British and Dutch have arrived at an agreement with regard to the future of Southeast Asia, and now it would appear that the French are being brought into the picture. . . . It would appear that the strategy of the British, Dutch and French is to win back and control Southeast Asia, making the fullest use possible of American resources, but foreclosing the Americans from any voice in policy matters.[58]

Roosevelt's Ambassador to China, Patrick J. Hurley, further argued that Britain, France, and the Netherlands had in fact formed a secret "Council of the Three Empires" designed to ensure European recolonization in Asia through any available means, but particularly by keeping China divided and using American Lend-Lease supplies to oppose U.S. anti-imperialist policies.[59] Whether the French-British-Dutch alliance was informal or a secret

---

56 Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations, p. 106.
57 Cavendisch memorandum, Sept. 15, 1943, FO 371/35921. Quoted in Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations. p. 107.
58 Donovan to Secretary of State, extracted in a memorandum to on Indochina by A.L. Moffat, enclosed in Stettinius to Roosevelt, Nov. 2, 1944. Quoted in Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations, p. 90.
59 Hurley's message to Roosevelt, November 26, 1944, in the Patrick J. Hurley Collection, located in the

"council" is not really the issue. The significance lies in FDR's reaction--he certainly opposed the allegiance, but by November 1944 there was very little he could do about it.

Roosevelt's options faded away in 1944 because Churchill and the British Foreign Office had successfully negotiated through the French and American extremes and closed the President out of the equation. In the end, the expected confrontation with Roosevelt never came. Roosevelt's attitude shifted in 1943-44, moving from moral condemnation of European imperialism to a reluctant acceptance of French recolonization of Indochina. This complex shift is expressly demonstrated in FDR's reactions to British requests for a greater French political and military presence in the Far East.

French requests for greater participation had been arriving in the Foreign Office long before 1944--de Gaulle and his exiled government fully recognized that to repossess their former colony, France needed a diplomatic standing and troops on Indochinese soil when the war ended. Although most of these requests were forwarded to Churchill or Roosevelt and vetoed, British foreign policy officials settled for gradual increases small enough to avoid adamant opposition from the either Allied leader. In 1942, the Foreign Office proposed transferring all of East Asia to British authority. When FDR predictably refused, Britain settled for a new SEAC (which stood for Southeast Asia Command or "Save England's Asian Colonies," depending on whose side you were on), which controlled Allied Asian operations except in Thailand and Indochina.[60]

The first truly serious round of French requests came in March, 1943. Arguing that Indochina would be the perfect launching pad for Allied attacks on mainland Japan, de Gaulle demanded a Military Mission at SEAC Headquarters and the inclusion of a new French expeditionary force headed by General Roger Blaizot. The Foreign Office

---

University of Oklahoma Bizzell Memorial Library, Norman, Oklahoma. Quoted in Drachman, United States Policy Toward Vietnam, p. 65.

[60] LaFeber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina," pp. 1282. SEAC was headed by the youthful Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten.

endorsed the proposal despite the comment by Mountbatten's chief political advisor that "it now looks like as if [the French] are creating a force in order to justify the Mission."[61] On February 17, 1944, however, Roosevelt flatly refused the request. Clearly recognizing the dangers to his trusteeship plan that would accompany de Gaulle's troops to Asia, Roosevelt insisted that no French forces be used in the liberation of Indochina.[62] The Foreign Office repeated their SEAC example. They refused to confront Roosevelt and accepted less, admitting France to the London Pacific War Council despite U.S. opposition and ordering the British Secret Operations Executive (SOE) to begin conducting undercover operations in Indochina concentrating exclusively on helping the French and having "nothing to do with any Annamite or other native organizations in Indochina."[63]

One month later (but a full year after de Gaulle had made the original set of requests), the French premier again requested a Military Mission to SEAC Headquarters and dispatch of the Blaizot's expeditionary force, along with greater French participation in planning for political warfare. The Foreign Office endorsed the French request, but again decided to obtain American approval. Neither side wanted a confrontation--FDR and the State Department stalled and Churchill refused to pressure Roosevelt, telling his advisors, "I am a little shy of overburdening the President. . . . I hear he is very hard pressed and I like to keep him as much as possible for the biggest things."[64] When the State Department finally formally asked for the President's views in July 1944, Roosevelt dismissed the subject and said he would discuss it with Churchill at Second Quebec Conference in August.[65] Neither party broached the subject at Quebec, however, and further British moves over the next two months made the point moot anyway.

---

61 M. Esler Dening, quoted in Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations, p. 104.
62 Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations, p. 109.
63 Drachman, United States Policy Toward Vietnam, p. 59-60.
64 Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations, p. 104-5.
65 Ibid., p. 109.

The British moved quickly after Quebec, declaring on August 31 that Blaizot and a small staff would be invited to pay a "temporary" visit to SEAC Headquarters. The White House had no reaction and FDR never responded to a lengthy State Department memorandum in September detailing the long history of French requests.[66] In October, Churchill ruled that the Blaizot mission should remain at SEAC Headquarters permanently and this time Roosevelt ignored five requests--one from the State Department and four from the American Consul in Ceylon, Robert Lewis Buell--asking for the official American position toward the French mission.[67] Roosevelt's dream was eroding quickly. He finally broached the subject on November 3, urging his soon-to-be Secretary of State Edward Stettinius to explain clearly that "we must not give American approval to any French military mission," and arguing that:

> It should be called to the attention of our British friends that Mr. Churchill and I do not officially recognize the French Military Mission at SEAC and furthermore, I have made no agreement, definite or otherwise, with the British, French, or Dutch to retain their Far Eastern colonial possessions.[68]

This declaration of non-agreement was a far cry from Roosevelt's early exclamations of French colonial exploitation. By November 1944, however, there was little Roosevelt could do but hope to divorce the military from the political, to allow the deployment of French troops yet still insist that the U.S. be consulted on any decision affecting the postwar status of Indochina. In January 1945, FDR gave "off the record" approval of special French sabotage operations in Indochina, but told Halifax that "he did not want in any way to appear to be committed to anything that would seem to prejudge political decision about Indo-China in a sense favourable to restoration of French *status quo ante* which he did not wish to see restored."[69] Halifax pragmatically suggested that the Foreign Office "let sleeping dogs lie," and warned against any steps which would call

---

66 Ibid., p. 110.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., p. 111.
69 Ibid., p. 114.

attention to the French presence, such as parades or celebrations.[70] French troops entered Indochina with the British and French governments making as little noise as possible.

FDR's trusteeship plan formally crumbled in late 1944 and 1945. At the Dumbarton Oaks Conference in August-September 1944, the United States presented a plan for dependent peoples but made no mention of ultimate independence for European territories. Instead, U.N. trusteeships would apply to territories under the mandate of the League of Nations, territories taken from enemy nations, and territories placed into the system *voluntarily* by colonial powers.[71] Although Indochina was not specifically mentioned, all the participants knew France would never voluntarily place Indochina under international control. This trusteeship plan was presented for consideration only, and was not discussed or voted on at Dumbarton Oaks. The ultimate decision was instead made at the February 1945 Yalta Conference. The plan, unchanged from Dumbarton Oaks except for a few style modifications, was quickly endorsed by the Big Three and placed on the agenda of the spring 1945 San Francisco Conference for final ratification. Aside for one brief explosion by Churchill, FDR's potentially explosive vision of Indochinese independence had vanished silently into the night.[72]

Four important factors forced Roosevelt to shift his outlook and policy on Indochinese independence in 1944 and 1945. The most obvious factor was the beginning rumblings of the Cold War, and Roosevelt's recognition that Russia might have imperialist designs on Eastern and Western Europe, as well as Asia. FDR received warnings of a

---

70 Ibid.

71 Drachman, United States Policy Toward Vietnam, p. 51, and LaFeber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina," pp. 1289.

72 Churchill's flare-up occurred on February 9. During the presentation of a rather innocuous draft proposal that the Big Five (now including France) consult on territorial trusteeships in preparation for the San Francisco Conference, Churchill jumped out of his seat and began shouting that he would never allow other nations to thrust "interfering fingers into the life's existence of the British Empire." After sitting down, the Prime Minister continued to mutter "never, never, never," forcing a recess several minutes later. John J. Sbrega, "The Anticolonial Policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Reappraisal," Political Science Quarterly (Spring, 1986): 76.

possible Communist threat from Norman Davis, an old diplomat with long-standing access to the White House, in early 1943. Following the Casablanca Conference, Davis gave the president a grim projection detailing what would happen if Russia was not "fully cooperative" and France and Germany were both disarmed. Davis argued that "Europe in this case would be impotent against aggression," making it "necessary to have France a strong power as part of our own security."[73] The identification of French strength as an American postwar goal became increasingly popular among U.S. foreign policy officials from 1943-1945, and was wholeheartedly accepted by Roosevelt's successor, Harry S. Truman. Even the Office of Strategic Service, the predecessor of the CIA that generally supported Ho Chi Minh's efforts in northern Indochina, argued in early 1945 that:

> we have at present no interest in weakening or liquidating [colonial] empires or in championing schemes of international trusteeship which may provoke unrest and result in colonial disintegration, and may at the same time alienate us from the European states whose help we need to balance the Soviet power. . . . We should avoid any policy that might weaken the position of Britain, France, or the Netherlands in Southern Asia or the Southwest Pacific.[74]

The specter of a renewed Franco-Czechoslovak-Soviet bloc had been raised by the British Post Hostilities Planning Sub-committee in January 1944, and de Gaulle learned to use the technique to his advantage. When FDR delayed the sending of military aid to French resistance forces in March, 1945, de Gaulle applied direct pressure to the U.S. Ambassador, asking "do you want us to become, for example, one of the federated states under the Russian aegis? . . . We do not want to become Communists; we do not want to fall into the Russian orbit but we hope you do not push us into it."[75] From 1943 until his

---

73 Minutes of Subcommittee on Security Problems, February 26, 1943, Notter Records. Quoted in Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 47.

74 OSS Memorandum, "Problems and Objectives of United States Foreign Policy," April 2, 1945, Harry S. Truman Papers, OSS Files. Quoted in Gary R. Hess, The United States' Emergence as a Southeast Asian Power, 1940-1950 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987): 125-26.

75 "Record," vols. 3-4, March 11-17, Stettinius Papers. Quoted in LaFeber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina," pp. 1293.

death in 1945, Roosevelt was under increasing pressure to foster French strength in Europe through the reestablishment of their Asian colonies, demands that pushed the Indochinese trusteeship plan further and further into the background.

The deterioration of Chiang Kai-Shek's power was the second crucial factor in Roosevelt's policy shift. In FDR's "Four Policemen" scheme, China was slated to replace France as the dominant, stabilizing presence in Southeast Asia. By the end of 1944, however, that possibility had completely faded. China's military weakness, the inefficiency and corruption of Chiang Kai-Shek's government, and the vitality of the emerging Communist movement had produced widespread dissension within the country.[76] American foreign policy experts believed it would be a miracle if China survived without a civil war, and that no matter what shape the country took after the war, it would not fit Roosevelt's plans. French recolonization thus became identified as the next potential source of badly-needed stability in of Southeast Asia.[77]

With China fading and Russia out of the question, the only remaining sources of regional stability were Britain, France, and the United States. Despite his vocal support of Indochinese self-determination, FDR did not relish the thought of an overseas occupation anywhere other than Germany or Japan, especially not when American sentiment was firmly on the side of bringing the soldiers home.[78] The problem was compounded by the American public's ignorance of Southeast Asia. In an April, 1943 poll conducted by the Public Opinion Research Office at Princeton, 45 percent of those surveyed did not know if Japan occupied Indochina, and 62 percent had no opinion on whether the French had treated their colonial subjects fairly before the war.[79] Roosevelt still hoped to have a say in the ultimate political decisions regarding Indochina, but he had no illusions about the

---

76 Hess, The United States Emergence as a Southeast Asian Power, p. 124.
77 Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 45-47.
78 Drachman, United States Policy Toward Vietnam, p. 52., and Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 48.
79 Report, Office of Public Information, Department of State, February 9, 1944, File No. 890.00/416, (National Archives). Quoted in Hess, "Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina," p. 353.

availability of U.S. troops to ensure a trusteeship. "I still do not want to get mixed up in any Indo-China decision," Roosevelt told Stettinius on New Year's Day, 1945. "It is a matter for postwar. By the same token I do not want to get mixed up in any military effort toward the liberation of Indo-China from the Japanese."[80]

The fourth, and by far the most important factor in Roosevelt's shift, was the successful combined efforts of the British and French to undercut the trusteeship plan before it could ever reach the phase of formal consideration. The British attempt to increase the postwar American military presence in Southeast Asia came to fruition--the series of bloody island battles in the last stages of WWII convinced the Joint Chiefs of Staff that future U.S. control of several Pacific islands was a military necessity.[81] Satisfying the Joint Chiefs' request presented a glaring inconsistency in the U.S. policy of demanding European countries place their colonies under international trusteeship, which was exactly what Britain had hoped for in the first place.

The British strategy of avoiding a confrontation with Roosevelt by accepting gradual and limited victories also worked precisely as planned. Throughout 1943 and 1944, FDR was besieged by British requests to formally recognize de Gaulle, to allow greater French participation in Southeast Asia, and to increase Mountbatten's sphere of command. Roosevelt could not simply pigeonhole each individual request, and he did not want to risk a confrontation with Churchill by rejecting every single one. Every small British victory that slipped through, however, every French intelligence unit or expeditionary force that was allowed to pay a "temporary visit" to Southeast Asia, made it more and more difficult for Roosevelt to reverse course.

For its part, France also did everything it could to increase the forward momentum of recolonization. Although he never wavered in his opposition to FDR's trusteeship plan,

---

80 Roosevelt to Stetttinius, Jan. 1, 1945. Quoted in Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations, p. 112.
81 Drachman, United States Policy Toward Vietnam, p. 52.

de Gaulle publicly announced his intention to grant Indochina a greater degree of self-government after the war in an attempt to force a moderation of Roosevelt's position on Indochina. In a December, 1943 speech, de Gaulle announced that:

> France intends to give a new political status within the French community to these people who have thus shown their national feeling and sense of political responsibility. The liberties of the various countries belonging to the Union will be extended and reaffirmed within the framework of a federal organization, and the liberal character of their institutions will be emphasized without losing the original imprint of Indo-China's culture and traditions, and finally, the Indo-Chinese will be given access to all public offices and positions in the state.[82]

It was an extremely modest proposal which was entirely contingent on France's assessment of the level of "national feeling and political responsibility" in Indochina, but it increased public support for de Gaulle's regime. The French leader again announced his plans for a more liberal colonial policy during a July, 1944 visit to the United States. The visit was additionally significant because de Gaulle made a favorable impression on American government leaders just as the U.S. was preparing for Dumbarton Oaks.[83] The Allied victory in France and the establishment of a provisional government headed by de Gaulle on October 23, 1944 restricted Roosevelt even further. FDR could no longer dismiss France as an undeserving and collaborationist nation--it was now a member of the Big Five and a potential source of democratic stability in Europe and Asia.

The debate between historians over Roosevelt's shift in outlook and policy is almost as interesting as the shift itself. The authors of the most significant secondary accounts treat the early rumblings of the Cold War and the "decline" of China as important factors, but also include claims that are largely unsubstantiated by the historical evidence. Walter LaFeber has argued that Roosevelt "knew that entrusting his policy to the State Department ensured the dilution if not destruction of the program," and that FDR "utterly

---

82 "French Committee of National Liberation: Statement on Indo-China, Algiers, December 8, 1943." Quoted in Drachman, United States Policy Toward Vietnam, p. 53.
83 Drachman, United States Policy Toward Vietnam, p. 54.

failed as head of government, for he proved unable to impose his policy" upon a united bureaucracy.[84] John J. Sbrega has argued that FDR was a naive "Happy Warrior" whose health problems and preoccupation with the 1944 Presidential race forced him to abandon the trusteeship plan.[85] In Approaching Vietnam, Lloyd C. Gardner has even included access to Southeast Asian resources and economic markets as important considerations in FDR's shift.[86]

These arguments do not hold up under analytical scrutiny. The State Department was *never* united on Indochina, not even when the Cold War began in earnest in 1945. Roosevelt certainly had his faults, but his management of World War II demonstrates a high level of diplomatic competence that Sbrega consistently underestimates. Finally, the need for continued access to Indochinese markets and natural resources could not have discouraged Roosevelt because they almost certainly would have continued under an American-sponsored trusteeship. These unsubstantiated arguments are not presented here to undermine the credibility of their scholarly authors. The arguments instead reveal that LaFeber, Sbrega, and Gardner all wanted additional evidence, additional explanations to account for Roosevelt's shift. Unlike Edward R. Drachman, George C. Herring, and a few other historians, LaFeber, Sbrega, and Gardner all discounted or disregarded the role of the British, and therefore missed the key factor in FDR's abandonment of the trusteeship plan.

British opposition represented the only legitimate obstacle to FDR's trusteeship proposal until1944. Russia and China supported the plan, the State Department was anxiously waiting to pursue an official White House policy, and the French were in no position to block Roosevelt's proposal by themselves. If Great Britain had supported the

---

84 LaFeber, "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina," pp. 1287 and 1295.
85 Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations, p. 111, and "The Anticolonial Policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt," p. 83.
86 Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 69-70.

plan, or even opposed it less vigorously, the next half-century of Vietnamese history might have looked decidedly different. Arguing what might have happened is a complex and sometimes dangerous activity (the hypothetical U.S.-Great Britain trusteeship plan would have still encountered the decline of China and the threat of Russian aggression, for example). The real point is that the greatest single factor influencing FDR's 1944 policy shift was the role of the British. With Churchill's support, all the pieces would have been in place for a trusteeship in Indochina; without that support, Roosevelt's plan collapsed under pressure from Asian communism and European imperialism.

In addition, despite the mounting British opposition and the formal abandonment of the trusteeship plan at Yalta, FDR never gave up all hope that some sort of independence might be achieved for Indochina. In fact, the day before the Big Three endorsed the plan limiting trusteeships to territories voluntarily placed under U.N. control, FDR held a private meeting with Stalin in which both leaders reaffirmed their support for Indochinese independence. Roosevelt seemed to envision Stalin as a potential ally in a last-ditch scheme to prevent French recolonization.[87] FDR also made reference to his Russian and Chinese allies during his press conference on the boat home from Yalta, and even stated that it was "better to keep quiet" with Churchill as if that the matter had not yet been settled.[88] Roosevelt retained a faint vestige of hope even after his options for obtaining Indochinese independence had faded away.

Roosevelt's doggedly held on to this hope until the very end. Less than a month before FDR died, Caribbean Affairs adviser Charles Taussig reported that he

> asked the President if he had changed his ideas on French Indochina. . . . He said no. . . . The President hesitated a moment and then said--if we can get the proper pledge from France to assume for herself the obligations of a trustee, then I would agree to France retaining these colonies with the

---

87 Ibid., p. 50.

88 "The Nine Hundred and Ninety-second Press Conference," quoted in Rosenman, Public Papers and Addresses, pp. 13: 563-4.

> proviso that independence was the ultimate goal. I asked the President if he would settle for self-government. He said no. I asked him if he would settle for dominion status. He said no--it must be independence.[89]

FDR also continued to obstruct French efforts at recolonization. On March 9, 1945, the Japanese overthrew the collaborative French regime and disarmed the French troops. De Gaulle earnestly petitioned Roosevelt to support the scattered French resistance, and the President stalled. By the time FDR reluctantly approved air support for the French on March 29, the resistance had almost completely collapsed.[90] Roosevelt similarly ordered the State Department to delay the ratification of an agreement affirming French civil authority in Indochina after the liberation of Southeast Asia.[91]

Although the trusteeship plan had been formally abandoned at Dumbarton Oaks and Yalta, in another sense it really only died with Roosevelt on April 12, 1945. Without Roosevelt, the architect and main articulator of the Indochina trusteeship, there was no one left to keep the plan alive. As Lloyd C. Gardner argued in Approaching Vietnam:

> Roosevelt had dreamed up a magical trusteeship system that would at one and the same time protect and advance American interests, remove the onus of colonialism from the Allied cause, maintain big-power unity in keeping the peace, adjust legitimate demands for independence, yet avoid the chaos of violent revolution. In a sudden gust at Roosevelt's death, the pieces all flew apart.[92]

The State Department had never formally considered the proposal and had no mechanism to formally pursue it after Roosevelt's death, and President Truman did not share his predecessor's special interest in Indochina or his general distaste for colonialism. In mid-May, Blaizot's expeditionary force finally received American approval.[93] Later that spring, the voluntary trusteeship plan sailed through San Francisco with full American

---

89 "Memorandum of Conversation by the Adviser on Caribbean Affairs," March 15, 1945, in United States Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers 1945. Quoted in Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 46, and Drachman, United States Policy Toward Vietnam, p. 55.
90 Hess, "Franklin Roosevelt and Indochina," pp. 364.
91 Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations, p. 118.
92 Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 52.
93 Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations, p. 118.

support. Secretary of State Stettinius even attempted to wipe the historical record clean, announcing at the conference that "the record is entirely innocent of any official statement of this government questioning, even by implication, French sovereignty over Indo-China."[94] Although Stettinius conveniently neglected several years worth of Presidential exclamations that went far beyond "questioning" of French sovereignty, the word "official" made his statement essentially correct. Finally, in a speech on October 27, 1945, Truman symbolically laid to rest FDR's dream of immediate independence for colonial peoples, instead stating that the United States "believes in the *eventual* return of sovereign rights and self-government to all people who have been deprived of them by force."[95]

With the French deposed and imprisoned as a result of the March 9 coup, the task of disarming the Japanese in Indochina was split between the British and Chinese at the Potsdam Conference in the summer of 1945. The Chinese were assigned the area above the sixteenth parallel, while Mountbatten and SEAC would conduct the postwar mop-up operations in southern Indochina. The decision represented "the green light London had been waiting for for so long"--British and French troops would liberate southern Indochina and be on the ground when the ultimate political decisions were made regarding the future of French colonialism.[96] The Potsdam decision, so crucial to the history of Vietnam, was essentially a foregone conclusion, a choice that had for intents and purposes been decided several months earlier. Truman's government had not altered its evaluation of the need for French political and military security in Europe, the need for French economic and political stability in Southeast Asia, and the problems of U.S. postwar occupation in Indochina.[97] Moreover, the U.S. had effectively transferred control of their military personnel in Southeast Asia over to SEAC and Lord Louis Mountbatten. The

---

94 Stettinius to State Deparment, May 8, 1945. Quoted in Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations, p. 108.
95 Italics added. U.S. Department of State Bulletin, October 28, 1945, p. 653. Quoted in Drachman, United States Policy Toward Vietnam, p. 128.
96 Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 61.
97 Sbrega, Anglo-American Relations, p. 116.

task of disarming the Japanese in southern Indochina was thus assigned to Major-General Douglas Gracey and the 22,000 troops of the 20th Indian Brigade.

## Gracey's Military Response: The British in Indochina, September 13, 1945 - January 28, 1946

Gracey's military mission represented the second half of Britain's attempt to prevent Indochinese independence Roosevelt's trusteeship plan had been safely laid to rest, but France was not yet reestablished in Indochina Ho Chi Minh had taken advantage of the confusion surrounding the Japanese coup by declaring independence and setting up a new national government in Saigon, and Ho would not be satiated by de Gaulle's offer of access to administrative positions. With French troops still locked in Indochinese prisons while the Vietminh gathered strength and experience with each passing day, the British realized that the struggle for French recolonization was not yet complete. British foreign policy leaders did not want to become entrenched in a land war with the Vietminh, but they were not prepared to leave Indochina until the French had been firmly reestablished.

Gracey orders reflected these conflicting priorities. The Major-General arrived in Saigon on Sept. 13, 1945, with orders to disarm the Japanese forces, maintain law and order, and stay out of local politics.[98] Gracey was essentially asked to strike a balance--to keep the Vietminh in check through the maintenance of law and order, but also to disarm the Japanese as quickly as possible and avoid long-term political entrapments.

Before transferring to Indochina, Gracey had consistently repeated the official British policy, that "the eventual reoccupation of FIC is a matter for the French."[99] Upon his arrival, Gracey again emphasized that "neither he nor any of his officers or men were in French Indo-China to meddle or interfere in politics."[100] The statements appeared to

---

98 Report of the Saigon Control Commission: Political Report, Sept. 13 - Oct. 9, 1945, p. 2, Gracey Papers 4/8.

99 Headquarters South East Asia Command Joint Planning Staff, Force Plan 1 "The Occupation of French Indo-China," quoted in Dunn, The First Vietnam War, p. 141.

100 Extracts from minutes of British-Viet Minh meetings, First British-Viet Minh meeting, Oct. 1, 1945 45, p. 3, Gracey Papers 4/8.

indicate that the British mission would not interfere with the Vietminh government in Saigon. Unfortunately for the Vietminh, however, Gracey believed that the future of Indochina was ultimately a French question, and that his orders to stay out of local politics precluded him from having any dealings with Vietnamese nationalists. British indifference collided with Vietnamese optimism literally from the moment Gracey stepped on Indochinese soil. A large delegation of Vietnamese officials who had traveled to the airport to welcome the foreign troops watched as Gracey walked past without even acknowledging them. Gracey later remarked that he "was welcomed on arrival by the Viet Minh, who said 'Welcome' and all that sort of thing. It was a very unpleasant situation, and I promptly kicked them out."[101] Gracey further ignored the crowds of Vietnamese who lined the streets to welcome the British as they drove into Saigon from the airport. His mission already off on the wrong foot, Gracey set up his headquarters while the Vietminh watched in confusion and anticipation.

Soon after arriving, Gracey began portraying the Vietminh government as out of control, unable to control its extremist members, and under the control of various foreign powers. Gracey's pointed to September 2, the day of the Declaration of Independence, to justify his argument. The Vietminh had organized a mass celebration in Saigon on September 2, and although they had toured the streets calling for order, a riot broke out at the Rue Catinat cathedral and five Europeans were killed. While it is not clear whether Vietnamese, French, or even Japanese troops were responsible for the riot, the Vietminh had absolutely nothing to gain by inciting violence.[102] The next day the Vietminh newspaper deplored the excesses, the government reshuffled its members to include fewer Communists, and the head of the government, Tran Van Giau, stepped down.[103] These

---

101 Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society, (July-Oct. 1953): 213. Quoted in Dennis J. Duncanson, "General Gracey and the Viet Minh," Journal of the R.C.A.S., v. 55 (Oct. 1968): 289.
102 George Rosie, The British in Vietnam: How the 25-Year War Began (London: Panther, 1970): 49, and Dunn, The First Vietnam War, p. 22.
103 Rosie, The British in Vietnam, p. 50.

measures did not go far enough to satisfy Gracey, however. In an October letter to SEAC, Gracey explained that:

> it was clear that the Annamite puppet government, vociferous on paper as regards democratic and even communistic plans for the future, was quite incapable of keeping law and order. It was also clear that there was a very large hooligan element out to make mischief, many of whom were criminals of the worst type, who had been let out of jail in March 1945, and many of whom were in possession of arms. It later became clear that this criminal element largely composed the Annamite government army.[104]

The Saigon Control Commission, which was headed by Gracey, developed five distinct criticisms of the Vietnamese government. The Commission argued that the government was a subsidiary of Hanoi and had been installed by the Japanese, that no proper law and order was enforced, that too many anti-French attacks were occurring in the press, and that administrative services were at a standstill.[105] In two separate documents, the British decried the "daily acts of violence which took place usually against the French nationals in Saigon, or against a few pro-French Annamites," and "the extremist and mob elements who had instituted a reign of terror and violence directed against all French nationals and pro-French Annamites."[106] The Control Commission was more concerned with the safety of French civilians than with presenting an objective evaluation of the Vietnamese government. As Gracey later wrote in his unpublished autobiography, "the French civil population was cowed and shaken by the reign of terror and violence which had been going on since the Vietminh Government came to power. This Government was incapable or unwilling to control the extremist and mob elements."[107] As long as the French population remained "cowed," the Vietnamese government remained incompatible with Gracey's mission.

---

104 Letter from Gracey to the SEAC Recorder, Oct. 3, 1946, p. 2, Gracey Papers 4/8.
105 Report of the Saigon Control Commission: Political Report, Sept. 13 - Oct. 9, 1945, p. 1, Gracey Papers 4/8.
106 Report of the Saigon Control Commission: Political Report, Sept. 13 - Oct. 9, 1945, p. 1, and the "Summary of Events in French Indochina Prior to the Arrival of British Forces," p. 3, Gracey Papers 4/8.
107 Gracey's draft autobiographical account, p. 4, Gracey Papers 5/18.

Gracey's immediate and uncompromising rejection of the Vietminh makes more sense in its historical context, and in light of the cultural baggage that the British carried to Vietnam. The Foreign Office had dismissed the notion of Vietnamese independence in part because of the undernourishment and tropics-induced apathy described in "The Record of French Administration in Indo-China." The documents Gracey carried to Indochina were based on the same racial stereotypes,. One British report described "the Annamite" as "good-tempered and tractable" but "arrogant and overbearing when vested with authority."[108] The report additionally argued that "the Annamite" was:

> sparing in his diet and rarely touches spirits but is a heavy opium smoker. . . bends easily beneath the yoke, but is quick to curse under his breath those who offend him and to turn them to ridicule when a safe opportunity occurs. Frankness among the Annamites is regarded almost as a fault and it is this habitual lack of sincerity that for Europeans is his most trying characteristic; this and the widespread habit of thieving among the lower classes, to circumvent which unceasing vigilance is necessary.
> The Annamite is small and weak, much more so than the average Chinese. Tuberculosis and other diseases are rampant and, generally speaking, the race is decadent.[109]

In addition to guns, troops, and ammunition, Gracey and the British also brought a tradition of racial prejudices to Indochina, beliefs that made it very difficult to accept the Vietminh regime as a legitimate, competent government.

The British depiction of the Saigon government as out of control officially satisfied Gracey's policy of noncommunication, but it did not explain how the Vietnamese had come to power and managed to maintain their authority. Gracey employed two corollary theories for this point--he argued that the Vietnamese government had been empowered by the Japanese, Chinese, and Russians, and that the majority of civilians actually supported the French. The Japanese (who were better targets than the Chinese because of their role in World War II) were blamed for inciting a wave of Asian nationalism and for

---

108 British report on Annam and Laos, p. 1, Gracey Papers 4/2.
109 Ibid., p. 2.

directly supporting the Vietnamese independence movement. According to a British political report, the Japanese "were naturally sympathetic to Annamite nationalism, and under their patronage, the movement, dormant and suppressed for many years of French rule, received the added fillip which made it a powerful force throughout the country."[110] As a result, according to Gracey, the Vietminh had become "imbued with the fanaticism symbolic of the nationalism which had swept the East in the immediate post war period," resulting in political demonstrations dominated by "hysterical and fanatical mobs."[111] The British also accused the Japanese troops of allowing the Vietminh government to take control in Saigon, supplying arms to Indochinese troops, and deserting in large numbers to the Vietnamese army, where the Japanese reportedly "became responsible for most of the training of the Viet Minh forces."[112]

China provided the post-World War II specter of Communism and the other half of Britain's Asian scapegoating. The British often portrayed the Vietminh government as merely a mannequin controlled by Chinese Communists:

> It was evident . . . that the Annamite and communist Chinese press was inciting the Annamite troops, police and government supporters to acts of violence against all other nationalities who did not support the puppet government, particularly against the many French people and loyal Annamites.[113]

Other British reports maintained that the entire Indochinese society was merely a Chinese clone. Gracey's official report on Indochina held that the Vietnamese had suffered "ten centuries of domination by China, to whom [the Vietnamese] owe their institutions, language and art."[114]

---

110 "Summary of Events in French Indochina Prior to the Arrival of British Forces," p. 2, Gracey Papers 4/8.
111 Gracey's draft autobiographical account, p. 2, Gracey Papers 5/18.
112 "Summary of Events in French Indochina Prior to the Arrival of British Forces," p. 2, Gracey Papers 4/8.
113 Gracey's draft autobiographical account, p. 10, Gracey Papers 5/18.
114 British report on Annam and Laos, p. 1, Gracey Papers 4/2.

The final British argument designed to diminish the authority of the Vietminh government was that most of Saigon and Indochina supported the French. The earliest British pre-intervention documents suggested that nearly all Vietnamese intellectuals supported French colonialism while "the native population, except for a small number of collaborators, would undoubtedly welcome the return of the Europeans."[115] As a result, Gracey argued, the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence was largely rejected:

> The majority of the Annamite population was horror-stricken at the turn of events, and at the barbaric and monstrous cruelties of the puppet forces. Though imbued with the thought of independence, without much idea as to what it meant, they were soon alienated from their so-called deliverers.[116]

The only result of Vietnamese independence, therefore, was that "more temperate Annamites were too frightened to carry on with any of their normal business routine" while "armed extremist elements of the Annamites" roamed the streets.[117]

The main significance of these reports does not lie in their accuracy. A grain of truth was embedded in each one--the Japanese did offer some help to the Vietnamese, the Vietminh did contain some Chinese-style Communists, and some peasants did support the French. The British took each kernel of truth and exaggerated it to meet their political needs, however. Like the French and Americans who followed them to Vietnam, the British badly underestimated the Vietminh's grassroots support and the dedication of the Vietnamese people. Each Western nation tried to develop an argument, some rational way to explain how the technologically-backward Vietminh held onto power, and why the "decadent" peasants did not fold in the face of modern weaponry and European civilization. In the British case especially, the argument was based on very little evidence or objective analysis. The British argument began to erode over the course of 1945, as it became abundantly clear that the Vietminh were capable of organized action and were not

---

115 "Security Intelligence for Planning Section" report, pp. 1-3, Gracey Papers 4/2.
116 Letter from Gracey to the SEAC Recorder, Oct. 3, 1946, p. 5, Gracey Papers 4/8.
117 Report of the Saigon Control Commission: Political Report, Sept. 13 - Oct. 9, 1945, pp. 1-2, Gracey Papers 4/8.

awed by the British military presence. When making the military threat more explicit did not scare off the Vietminh, Mountbatten and the British recognized that an early exit was their best option in Southeast Asia.

Despite Gracey's assertions that the Vietminh government was out of control, his first week in Saigon was surprisingly quiet. Most essential services were operating, the food supply was largely adequate, and the Japanese were doing a good job at keeping the peace.[118] The Vietminh administration, while not perfect, was certainly not the unruly disaster that Gracey described. Most of Gracey's first week, in fact, was spent not on military activities but on managing the intense international lobbying effort for British favor. Colonel Cedille, France's commissioner-designate for Cochin China, knew the French were not strong enough to overthrow the Vietminh, and wanted every ounce of British assistance he could get. Joined by some middle-class Vietnamese and powerful Chinese merchants, Cedille emphasized the anxiety and helplessness of the French populations, and pleaded for arms and equipment.[119] On the other side, Vietminh leaders wrote to Gracey every day begging for direct contact with the British and offering their assistance in disarming the Japanese.[120] Gracey was placed in a tough situation--ordered to remain neutral but pressured by both sides for a kind of implicit political recognition.

Gracey's decision, if it was ever in any real doubt, was sealed by the events of September 17. The Vietminh, frustrated with Gracey's adoption of a cozy attitude with the French while he continued to ignore the existing government, closed down the Saigon market, staged a series of strikes, and enforced a boycott of all French traders.[121] The move threatened the city's food supply, and it provided Gracey with the pretense he needed to officially reject the Vietminh. On September 19, Gracey closed down the

---

118 Rosie, The British in Vietnam, p. 52.
119 Ibid., p. 54.
120 Ibid., p. 55.
121 Ibid., p. 56.

Vietnamese press and ordered the immediate disarming of all Vietnamese.[122] The Vietminh immediately protested that the loss of the press was a gross interference with their political liberty and aspirations, but the argument fell on deaf ears.[123]

Instead, Gracey issued perhaps the most important document in the history of British-Vietnamese relations, Proclamation Number 1. Printed in English, French and Vietnamese, and posted throughout Saigon on September 21, the proclamation amounted to a declaration of martial law. After a brief introductory paragraph, the document contained a dire warning and a list of stringent restrictions designed to strangle the fledgling Vietnamese independence movement. The document is worth quoting at length, starting with Paragraph 2:

> Let in be known to all that it is my firm intention to ensure with strict impartiality that this period of transition from war to peace conditions is carried out peaceably with the minimum dislocation to all public utility services, legitimate businesses and trade, and with the least interference with the normal peaceful activities and avocations of the people.
> I call on all citizens in the name of the Supreme Allied Commander to co-operate to the fullest extent to achieve the above object, and hereby warn all wrongdoers, especially looters and saboteurs of public and private property, and those also carrying out similar criminal activities, that they will be summarily shot.
>
> (a) No demonstrations or processions will be permitted.
>
> (b) No public meetings will take place.
>
> (c) No arms of any description including sticks, staves, bamboo spears, etc., will be carried except by British and Allied troops, and such other forces and police which have been specially authorized by me.
>
> (d) The curfew already imposed on my orders by the Japanese authorities between 21.30 and 05.30 in Saigon and Cholon will be continued and strictly enforced.[124]

The proclamation was dated September 19, meaning that it was probably drafted on September 18--only five days after Gracey landed in Indochina and one day after the

---

122 Peter Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace: Mountbatten and South East Asia Command, 1945-46 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 39.
123 Rosie, The British in Vietnam, p. 56.
124 Quoted in Ibid., pp. 57-8.

demonstrations which were used to justify the declaration of martial law.[125] Despite his promise of "strict impartiality" in Paragraph 2 of the proclamation, Gracey had intended all along to take steps against the Vietminh.

The proclamation not only alarmed the Vietnamese, it exceeded Gracey's orders and caught the attention of Mountbatten, heretofore quiet regarding Gracey's actions. What most alarmed Mountbatten was that Gracey had addressed the proclamation to the entire country south of the 16th parallel, implicitly extending the boundaries of the British mission. As Mountbatten said later:

> I felt that the proclamation--addressed as it was to the whole of southern French Indo-China and not merely to the key points--was contrary to the policy of His Majesty's Government; and since proclamations of this nature may well appear to be initiated by government policy, I warned Major-General Gracey that he should take care to confine operations of British/Indian troops to those limited tasks which had been set.[126]

Proclamation No. 1 provided Mountbatten with two unappealing choices. He could support Gracey completely and request more troops to move into the interior, or he could limit the British to the original boundaries and let the French enforce the proclamation in the rest of the country. Mountbatten recommended the second option to the British Chiefs of Staff while the French, wholeheartedly thanked Gracey for the proclamation but refused to officially reaffirm it or take the responsibility for its consequences.[127] Until the French could ship in ample forces (specifically their 9th Division), it was in their best interests to limit Mountbatten's options and force the British to the work for them.

Mountbatten never received an answer from the British Chiefs of Staff because Gracey completely transformed the political situation on the very next day. Without consulting Mountbatten, Gracey's troops took over Saigon Jail on September 22 and

---

[125] Ibid., p. 59.
[126] Mountbatten, "Section E" of the Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, H.M.S.O., p. 287, quoted in Rosie, The British in Vietnam, p. 59.
[127] Ibid., p. 60.

rearmed the French captives. Cedille quickly organized the rearmed French and in the early hours of Sunday September 23, on Gracey's orders, they launched a coup d'etat against the Vietminh. The coup was brutally efficient--the French quickly stormed the Vietminh headquarters, arrested all government members they could find (most had received word of the coming coup and had escaped to the countryside), and ran up the French flag.[128] Although several Vietminh sentries and officials were shot and beaten, there was very little loss of life and very few French casualties.[129] By midday the major public administrative buildings were in French hands, and the tricolour once again flew over Saigon's tourist hotels.

Gracey and British reporters like Christopher Buckley hoped for a smooth transfer of power from the Vietminh to the French. Buckley, who filed a report with the *Daily Telegraph* only hours after the coup, pointed out that the French troops were "inexperienced and lacked discipline," and argued that:

> order and normal conditions will be best assured if the French authorities adopt a broadly conciliatory attitude towards the Annamese and restrain the armed irregulars among their own supports from acts of provocation or retribution.
> Fortunately there seems every likelihood that this policy will be followed. Col. Cedille . . . and Col Riviere, commander of the French military forces in Saigon told me this afternoon that they were concerned to avoid retribution.[130]

Despite the alleged concern of their commanding officers, retribution was the first thing on the mind of the French troops. A few hours after Buckley's report, troops of the 11th Regiment d'Infanterie Coloniale (RIC), imprisoned since March, went on a "reign of terror" against their formal captors and any other Asians on the streets of Saigon.[131]

---

128 Ibid., p. 61.
129 Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 46, and Rosie, The British in Vietnam, p. 61.
130 Christopher Buckley, "British Bringing Peace to Saigon: Indo-China Capital Back to Normal; Few Casualties in Street Fighting: French in Control Again, Conciliation Promise," *Daily Telegraph*, Sept. 26, 1945 (delayed from Sept. 23). As the headlines suggest, the article was otherwise very pro-British and French.
131 Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 49.

They fired into empty buildings to impress the crowds of women and children, began making mass arrests and roughing up the male captives, and sprayed automatic weapon fire at indiscriminate targets including the British barracks.[132] Inspired by the sudden emergence of their flag atop most public buildings, French soldiers and civilians took their revenge for months of humiliation all day Sunday and into Monday. One British reporter described "disgraceful scenes of vengeance against helpless Annamites,"[133] while two separate British commissions deplored the violence. Mountbatten's SACSEA Commission wrote that "the more emotional of the French citizens . . . unfortunately took this opportunity of taking what reprisals they could. Annamites were arrested of no other reason than that they were Annamites."[134] Even the Gracey-headed Saigon Control Commission explained that:

> The promises given to General Gracey by the leaders of the French, both civil and military, that minimum force and iron discipline would be assured during the coup d'etat proved a false assurance by their instability and indiscipline, by their emotional behaviour and unnecessary violence the French soldiers, their police and civilians, invited active counter-measures as soon as the Annamites could gather themselves together.[135]

Gracey immediately tried to put the lid back on the situation. He sent for the French leaders a few hours after the coup and "addressed them like pickpockets," shouting, "Never have I been so let down in my life!" before ordering that the 11th RIC be disarmed and confined to its barracks.[136] Cedille was also ordered to carry out an immediate inquiry into the worst of the French excesses, but by then the damage was

---

[132] Rosie, The British in Vietnam, p. 61, and Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 49.
[133] Tom Driberg in *Reynold's News*, Sept. 30, 1945, quoted in Rosie, The British in Vietnam, p. 62.
[134] SACSEA Commission No. 1, "Political History of Indo-China South of 16 Degrees," Sept. 13 - Oct. 11, quoted in Rosie, The British in Vietnam, p. 62.
[135] Report of the Saigon Control Commission: Political Report, Sept. 13 - Oct. 9, 1945, p. 3, Gracey Papers 4/8.
[136] Personal interview of British Brigadier M. S. K. Maunsell by Peter M. Dunn, quoted in Dunn, The First Vietnam War, p. 198. The meeting is also detailed in Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 49.

done.[137] In the north, Ho Chi Minh's foreign minister sent an irate telegram to the British Prime Minister, calling the rearming of the French:

> a non-fulfillment of the mission placed on the commander British forces in South Indo-China by the United Nations . . . and non-observation of neutrality by the British disarmament forces. We therefore lodge a most emphatic protest against such smoke-screening of French aggression.[138]

In the south, the "smoke-screening of French aggression" eliminated the Vietminh policy of moderation. The Vietminh had protested Gracey's repeated dismissals, but had eventually accepted them nonviolently. They had even reacted peacefully to the sudden posting of Proclamation No. 1. The coup and the French rampage through Saigon made it crystal clear, in the words of C.B.S. broadcaster Bill Downs, that Gracey had been "committed to return the country's rule to the French . . . when the British entered the country on September 12."[139] The Vietminh, initially conciliatory to the British, had no choice but to fight a "legitimate war of independence."[140]

By September 24, one day after the coup, the situation in Saigon had become a "virtual state of war."[141] Indochinese nationalists seized the market place and succeeded in shutting off all the city's power supplies during the day, while on the night of the 24th, a organized gang of Vietnamese bandits attacked European and Eurasian civilians in the northeast section of Saigon, killing between 150 and 300.[142] On the 25th, Vietnamese raiding parties attacked the center of the city and injured four Indian soldiers before being driven off. The nationalists set the markets afire the next day and then attacked British troops on the downtown streets.[143] The British forces raided the Vietminh on the 27th

---

137 Rosie, The British in Vietnam, p. 63.
138 *Documents Relating to British Involvement in the Indo-China Conflict 1945-1965*, No. 3, Command 2834, H.M.S.O., quoted in Rosie, The British in Vietnam, p. 63.
139 Quoted in *Manchester Guardian* quoting Associated Press reports, "Indo-China Revolt: British Troops Act," Sept. 26, 1945.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
142 Rosie, The British in Vietnam, p. 63, and Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 49.
143 Rosie, The British in Vietnam, p. 69.

and killed 13, while on the next night 2,000 armed Indochinese attacked a British patrol.[144] Gracey's limited mission to disarm the Japanese and maintain law and order had escalated into a full-scale civil war.

Gracey reacted to the outbreak of violence in three distinct ways--he issued positive propaganda to defend himself, he rearmed Japanese forces to maintain law and order, and on Mountbatten's orders he negotiated a truce with the Vietminh. The second and third strategies, which will be discussed in detail later, began a few days after the coup, whereas Gracey's public relations treatment of his actions began almost immediately. Some attempts were quite flimsy (in the heart of the coup-inspired civil war, French High Commissioner Thierry d'Argenlieu tried to appease the Vietminh with the old offer of "access to administrative posts . . . without distinction of race"[145]), but others were more complex. Gracey's Saigon Control Commission repeated its usual list of charges in its report to Mountbatten--the Vietminh were controlled by extremist elements and incapable of governance, while the breakdown in administrative services and "proper security" had made it "inevitable that the French should re-establish control with, as a first step, the assumption of police responsibilities and the necessary disarmament of Annamite armed elements."[146] In the first of many twists of logic the British employed to explain the coup, Gracey's commission described the violent Vietnamese reaction as "inevitable," but then used the attacks as evidence that the British needed a tighter military grip around Saigon. The passage also continued the British use of condescending language to describe the Indochinese:

> The actions of the [Indochinese] mob were typical of those of all savages; murder, outrages, interference and molestation and murder with outrage of French women, atrocities on women and children, were all present. It was

---

144 Ibid., p. 70.

145 Quoted in *Manchester Guardian* quoting Associated Press reports, "Indo-China Revolt: British Troops Act," Sept. 26, 1945.

146 Report of the Saigon Control Commission: Political Report, Sept. 13 - Oct. 9, 1945, p. 1, Gracey Papers 4/8.

> obvious that without intervention by the British there could be no hope of any ending this phase without the use of maximum force and its inevitable bloodshed [147]

Gracey further defended the coup in a 1946 letter to the SEAC Recorder. Slipping into the third person, Gracey argued that Proclamation No. 1 "was essential in the form and at the time of its publication," and that "there was never any intention in the mind of the Allied commander to interfere in the internal affairs of a foreign country. The proclamation followed by the eviction of the puppet government saved a massacre!"[148] In addition to exaggerating the potential for a "massacre," Gracey downplayed the French violence and, following a popular military tactic, blamed the whole disaster on the media:

> This revolution was noisy but there were no fatal casualties to the Annamite puppet government, or to their evicted police, though some rough handling and a few unnecessary reprisals by the French forces took place; this was natural under the circumstances, but was over-emphasized by various Press correspondents, who had the first chance, after being unmuzzled by censorship since 1939, of free and unfettered expression.[149]

Finally, Gracey continued to twist the inevitable Vietminh reaction to his own advantage, again characterizing the Indochinese as backward savages and arguing that:

> hooligan reaction was barbaric. Several French nationals, men, women and children, mostly half-castes or loyal Annamites, were murdered most foully, including some who had spent their lives in excellent service to the Annamites.[150]

There are three main problems with Gracey's argument. First, Gracey failed to mention that he had actually tried to rearm the French a week before the coup, and that the experiment had been a dismal failure. According to Brigadier Douglas Taunton, the British rearmed 2,000 French on September 16 and 17, but they "did not fulfill the results expected. When their turn came, they proved not good enough."[151] Despite his high

---

147 Ibid., p. 3

148 Letter from Gracey to the SEAC Recorder, Oct. 3, 1946, p. 8, Gracey Papers 4/8.

149 Ibid., p. 2.

150 Ibid., p. 3.

151 Report from Taunton, "Build-up of 80 Indian Infantry Brigade at Saigon," Nov. 14, 1945, p. 3, Gracey Papers 4/12.

Later, Gracey conceded in his private autobiography that "the morale of these [soldiers] had been shaken by their long period in captivity . . . and they proved undisciplined and unreliable and added to the difficulties of an already delicate situation."[152] The Japanese, meanwhile, had informed the British early and often that the use of French troops would lead to problems. Taunton notes that "from the very first day I arrived, 13 Sp, the [Japanese] had always asserted that the only serious trouble would happen when and where French troops were to be involved."[153] Despite Gracey's repeated claims that the Vietminh were barbaric and unrestrained, the French in fact provoked most of the violence in Saigon and proved the most unreliable and undisciplined. Gracey knew of the potential for disaster as early as Sept. 16, yet he never hesitated from restoring the French to power.

This lack of hesitation is embodied in the second fallacy of Gracey's defense. All of Gracey's objections to the Vietminh--the lack of "proper" law and order, the alleged influence of the Chinese and Japanese, the reported "standstill" of administrative services were a screen designed to cloak the fact that Gracey had decided against the Vietminh on September 13, the day he stepped on Indochinese soil. For Bill Downs and other reporters, the coup was the final shining proof that "when the British entered the country . . . it became clear that the British were committed to return the country's rule to the French."[154] Roughly a week after the coup, the Saigon Control Commission itself implicitly admitted that the coup was only a formality, a foregone conclusion from the day they landed. The commission's October 3 reported explained that:

> on the arrival of the Allied Control Commission on September 13th, the situation was appreciated afresh and it was quite evident that unless the puppet government was evicted and the French government reinstated almost immediately, in fact strong measures taken, not only would the

---

152 Gracey's draft autobiographical account, p. 6, Gracey Papers 5/18.
153 Report from Taunton, "Build-up of 80 Indian Infantry Brigade at Saigon," Nov. 14, 1945, p. 5, Gracey Papers 4/12.
154 Quoted in *Manchester Guardian* "Indo-China Revolt," Sept. 26, 1945.

> puppet government's hold on the country be consolidated and their plans for subversive action and hooliganism be made firm, but also the landing by air and sea of troops and supplies would become daily more hazardous All this would be playing into the hands of the Japanese, and would seriously delay their disarmament and concentration[155]

The Vietminh, so persistent in their attempts to win the sympathy of the British, never had a chance from the outset.

Finally, Gracey's self-defense argument failed because it revealed the logical contradictions inherent in the British position. Gracey always maintained that his orders were to stay out of local politics--his definition of "staying out," however, had nothing to do with neutrality or objectivity. As Gracey himself put it, he had received "instructions not to get involved politically . . . [it] was therefore impossible to have any dealings with [the] Vietminh Government."[156] Gracey essentially argued that administrative services were at a standstill, that he could not ask the Vietminh to correct the problem because he was ordered to stay out of local politics, and that he was therefore forced to restore French rule. The argument blithely ignored the fact that restoring the French was a greater political intrusion than simply talking to the Vietminh. Gracey himself later stressed that "although it may appear that I have interfered in the politics of the country I have done so only in the interests of the maintenance of law and order and after close collaboration with the senior French representatives"[157]--blissfully unaware that the two sides were directly contradictory, that "close collaboration with the senior French representatives" intrinsically constituted interference into "the politics of the country."

Gracey always maintained that his role in Indochina was to disarm the Japanese, maintain law and order, and stay out of local politics. In one fell swoop, the coup forced the rearming of the Japanese, destroyed law and order, and irrevocably placed Gracey in

---

155 Letter from Gracey to the SEAC Recorder, Oct. 3, 1946, p. 2, Gracey Papers 4/8.
156 Gracey to Mountbatten, September 25, 1945, WO 203/4273, quoted in Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, pp. 50-51.
157 Gracey to Mountbatten, September 21, 1945, WO 203/4020, quoted in Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 39.

the middle of the political confrontation between the French and Vietminh. Instead of minimizing British involvement as Mountbatten had wished, Gracey "had tied it inextricably to French attempts to reassert their sovereignty, and had precipitated the very situation that Mountbatten had sought to avoid."[158] Gracey authorized the coup and the French troops remained under British command--when the soldiers then flagrantly violated the law and struck against the Indochinese, Gracey and the British were immediately implicated alongside them. Gracey's decision resulted in a violent Vietnamese reaction against the British and French, irrevocably tied the British forces to French actions, and ultimately undermined the British mission.[159]

In addition to creating a public relations nightmare, the French revolt and subsequent civil war also destroyed law and order and threatened the lives of the European forces. In response, Gracey rearmed many of the 70,000 Japanese forces remaining in Indochina. Gracey's troops reacted with surprise and anger--the British had considered the Japanese brutal and evil enemies for four years, and the Japanese had been the 20th Division's sole enemy for the last two years in Burma and Southeast Asia.[160] While the soldiers had difficulty reconciling themselves to the idea, even pro-British reporters considered the decision only the latest bizarre episode "in a situation which, while brushing the fringe of the tragic, has strong elements of comic opera."[161] President Truman had authorized the use of Japanese troops on August 15, 1945, so Gracey was somewhat within his rights to rearm them.[162] In a military sense, he really didn't have a choice--Saigon had erupted into chaos (a chaos Gracey had largely caused), and with no French or British reinforcements forthcoming, the Japanese represented his best military option.

---

158 Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 46.
159 Ibid., pp. 47-49.
160 Rosie, The British in Vietnam, p. 87.
161 Driberg, *Reynold's News*, Sept. 30, 1945.
162 Rosie, The British in Vietnam, p. 87.

The "comic opera" or ironic quality of the situation came from two factors. First, the decision ran against the wartime alliance system and Gracey's own orders on how to interact with the Japanese. In Appendix B to the 20th Division's orders, Mountbatten had laid out several principles of conduct for dealing with Japanese soldiers and civilians. The appendix included the following directives designed to socially and militarily segregate the two forces:

- There will be no fraternization whatever between Japanese and Allied forces. In dealing with Japanese your behaviour will be strictly correct and coldly polite. . . . You will not shake hands with them.
- All Japanese military and naval personnel of whatever rank will salute all Allied officers. Failure to do this will be an offense and will be dealt with.
- In no case will British and Japanese officers food in the same room, nor will drinks be offered at any meeting. Any Japanese come to receive orders or report should be kept at arms length, e.g. with a table between you and them and they should not be asked or allowed, to sit at the same table.[163]

Appendix B also contained a number of other directives designed to ensure that disarmament would be conducted as "rapidly and smoothly as possible."[164] The regulations were stringent--all Japanese arms were to be collected and placed under Allied guard, and all enemy soldiers were to be searched for weapons before they departed for Japan.[165] Perhaps most significantly, Appendix B contained specific orders limiting the freedom granted by Truman. Gracey, at his discretion, was allowed to permit "a minimum number of Japanese to retain arms for protection against looters, but the numbers so allowed will be kept very small and constantly watched. The type of arms will be limited to rifles."[166] The coup suddenly turned these orders on their head: the Japanese went from hated enemies to armed allies. The change wasn't complete--Gracey's draft autobiography contains a reference to an entire appendix of "howlers," humorous

---

163 Appendix 'B' to 20th Indian Division orders, "Relations with Surrendered Japanese Forces and With Enemy Civilians," p. 1, Gracey Papers 4/2.
164 Ibid., p. 3.
165 Ibid.
166 Appendix 'B' to 20th Indian Division orders, "Relations with Surrendered Japanese Forces and With Enemy Civilians," p. 3, Gracey Papers 4/2.

anecdotes of Japanese soldiers trying to master English.[167] Still, as one British soldier who catalogued and stored the confiscated Japanese weapons later pointed out, ten days after the Japanese officially surrendered their family swords, "all the swords had to be re-issued to the same Japanese to cut the grass along the verges of the route used by the convoys to prevent Vietminh ambushes."[168]

The second irony of using Japanese troops was that the French, the people who had caused the civil war in the first place and whose civilians most needed protecting, carried an intense hated of the Japanese. Part of the animosity was racial. The British Indian troops were treated as "black" inferiors by French officers and men, and the Japanese fared no better.[169] The French also blamed the Japanese for promoting a sense of Asian nationalism and allowing the Vietminh to take control in 1945. In short, the French wanted the Japanese embarked "as a matter of first priority."[170] Although they maintained a friendly relationship with the British, the Japanese returned the French animosity. In a November letter to one of his commanding officers, Gracey pointed out that "the Japanese will take anything from us, but will do nothing for the French," and passed along a request from Japanese leaders requesting that "all orders to our forces should be passed by a British and not a French Officer, as we find it increasingly difficult to carry out the orders resulting from their schemeless plans."[171]

Considering this atmosphere of animosity, it must have further irked the French that the Japanese performed so well as soldiers and displayed so much more discipline than their own 11th RIC. The Japanese were first used as nighttime policemen, but by mid-October they were handling "all the dirty work" and dangerous missions to minimize

---

167 Gracey's draft autobiographical account, p. 21, Gracey Papers 5/18.
168 Cross, First In, Last Out, p. 21.
169 Letter from Gracey to Leclerc, Dec. 12, 1945, Gracey Papers 4/12.
170 Letter from Leclerc to Gracey, Nov. 12, 1945, Gracey Papers 4/16.
171 Letter from Gracey to General Sir W.J. Slim, Commander-in-Chief, Allied Land Forces South East Asia, Nov. 5, 1945, Gracey Papers 4/12.

British casualties.[172] Although General Douglas MacArthur noted condescendingly that it made his "blood boil to see our allies in Indo-China . . . deploying Japanese troops to reconquer the little people we promised to liberate," by October the Japanese were clearing out Vietminh garrisons and suffering losses on the order of 50 killed and 80 injured a week.[173] Gracey argued that the Japanese were necessary "to stop attacks on Allied Nationals and to keep the life of Saigon-Cholon Area going,"[174] and issued a warning to the French troops, writing to Leclerc that:

> It might be of value for them to realise the fact that, had not the Japanese in most cases carried out my orders faithfully, there would have been a disaster of the first magnitude in Southern French Indo China with a massacre of thousands of French people, and the destruction of a vast amount of French property.
> They should know I think, that I, and you, depend on the Japanese maintaining their discipline in order to ensure that they continue to carry out their orders faithfully, and that anything done to undermine their discipline will, in fact, react against your plans for the resettlement of French Indo China.[175]

Although Gracey later argued that "in dealing with the Japanese in F.I.C. no kid glove methods were used,"[176] his warning to Leclerc reveals just how much the British needed the discipline and determination of the Japanese. At some point Gracey must have consciously or unconsciously realized just how tenuous his hold over Saigon would have become if the Japanese had acted even half as unruly as the French troops had after their rearmament.

---

172 Bishcshwar Prasod (Gen. Ed.), Official History of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War, 1939-1945: Post-War Occupation Forces, Japan and South-East Asia, Combined Inter-Services Historical Section, India and Pakistan (New Delhi: Orient Longmans, 1958), quoted in Rosie, The British in Vietnam, p. 92.

173 W. E. H. Condon, The History of the Frontier Force Regiment, (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1962), quoted in Rosie, The British in Vietnam, p. 94.

174 Extracts from minutes of British-Viet Minh meetings, First British-Viet Minh meeting, Oct. 1, 1945, p. 1, Gracey Papers 4/8.

175 Letter from Gracey to Leclerc, Dec. 12, 1945, Gracey Papers 4/12.

176 Gracey's draft autobiographical account, p. 3, Gracey Papers 5/18.

A French riot, the rearming of the Japanese, and then a full-scale civil war on the streets of Saigon--Mountbatten watched the situation in Saigon change early and often in late September. Although he was often as unsympathetic to the Indochinese as Gracey, Mountbatten must be given credit for quickly realizing what took the French and Americans a generation to understand--that a land war in Southeast Asia would be bloody, frustrating, and largely unproductive. Mountbatten's strategy after September 25 became focused on disarming the Japanese and getting the British out of Indochina as fast as possible. Both the British and French government were therefore devastated when London announced in early October that the primary French reinforcements, the 9th Division Infantry Command (DIC), would arrive in late December instead of early November as earlier planned.[177]

The two-month delay posed several potential problems for Mountbatten and the British. Protests had already begun in India about the use of Indian troops to quell disturbances in Indochina, and the British Viceroy had suggested to Mountbatten that the troops be quickly withdrawn to prevent "considerable agitation."[178] Mountbatten recognized that the longer British forces had overall responsibility in southern Indochina, "the more difficult it will be for us to avoid being drawn into fighting . . . outside the Saigon area," and that the only way for the British to avoid this ever-widening role was to rely on the armed Japanese for another three months.[179] Perhaps most significantly, in three months all of Britain's post-surrender tasks would have been completed, leaving the British with no real reason for maintaining troops unless to interfere in the internal affairs

---

177 Chiefs of Staff to Mountbatten, COSSEA 366, Oct. 1, 1945, Cab 105/165, quoted in Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 57. The French wanted reinforcements for obvious reasons, and because they felt the British were overly hesitant about suppressing Vietnamese nationalists. The new date arose out of a study by the Joint Planning Staff which concluded that an earlier arrival would delay other necessary troop movements, such as the 5,000 Dutch troops scheduled to relieve British occupation of Java and Sumatra.

178 Mountbatten to COS, SEACOS 500, Oct. 2, 1945, Cab 105/162, quoted in Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 58.

179 Ibid.

of Indochina.[180] Mountbatten warned the Chiefs of Staff that "we shall find it hard to counter the accusations that our forces are remaining in the country solely in order to hold the Viet Nahm [sic] Independence Movement in check," and told his staff that "British forces would patently be holding resistance movements in check until the arrival of the French."[181]

Mountbatten had few alternatives. He briefly considered bringing in France's Madagascar Brigade, but both he and the French representatives rejected that option because most of the brigade's troops were black.[182] Faced with dimming prospects, Mountbatten ordered Gracey to hold cease-fire talks with the Vietminh in an effort to calm the civil war, stall for more time for the 9th DIC to arrive, and limit British military involvement as much as possible.

The three British-Vietminh meetings (October 1, 3, and 6), were basically doomed to failure from the outset. The French refused to offer any new concessions, the British did not step back at all from Proclamation No. 1, and the Vietminh were not willing to accept anything less than full independence. Right from the outset on October 1, Gracey propped up the myth of British neutrality and eliminated any possibility of a substantive discussion of the real issues, stating that:

> this is NO discussion on policy. That is entirely a matter for the French and Annamites but my task here is to get the Japanese forces of all kinds disarmed and shipped as quickly as possible out of this country. My whole Division with tanks, guns and the finest infantry in the world will very shortly be here and the sooner the Annamites return to normal peaceful conditions and behave themselves, the sooner can my task be completed of disarming the Japanese and getting them away from French Indo China.[183]

---

180 Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 58.
181 Mountbatten to COS, SEACOS 500, Oct. 2, 1945, Cab 105/162, and SACSEA, 287th meeting, Oct. 2, 1945, WO 172/1786, quoted in Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 58.
182 Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 59.
183 Extracts from minutes of British-Viet Minh meetings, First British-Viet Minh meeting, Oct. 1, 1945, p. 1, Gracey Papers 4/8.

Gracey then commanded the Vietminh to stop molesting Allied nationals, roaming the countryside in armed bands, and setting up roadblocks on streets leading into Saigon. He demanded to know whether the Vietminh leaders had sufficient authority to carry out his orders. The Vietminh answered Gracey's charges calmly but firmly. According to the minutes of the meeting:

> the Viet Minh leaders stated that they had welcomed British troops on their arrival as they thought they come to liberate their country from the Japanese and from French domination. They repeated the usual accusations against the French. . . .
> The demands of the Annamites are simple but inflexible, they appear to leave no room for discussion or compromise. They comprise the transfer of sovereignty to the Viet Nam government, the disarmament of French forces, the re-armament of Annamite forces, and the release of all Annamite prisoners.[184]

Having reached a standstill, the two sides called a cease-fire, arranged for further meetings, and Gracey once again emphasized that "neither he nor any of his officers or men were in French Indo China to meddle or interfere in politics."[185]

Most of the meeting was well-traveled ground for Gracey and the British. The shielding of Britain's implicit political role in assisting France, the implication that the Vietminh were an illegitimate organization, and the curt dismissal of the Indochinese demands for independence had occurred several times before. The implicit threat of "tanks, guns and the finest infantry in the world" was a relatively new development, however. The British had been following a policy of "minimum force and persuasion" until the day after the coup, when they had switched to "maximum brutal force . . . to avoid casualties to our own troops."[186] Even this "maximum brutal force" had been limited to defensive counterattacks in Saigon, however. Now for the first time the British

---

184 Ibid., p. 2, and Report of the Saigon Control Commission: Political Report, Sept. 13 - Oct. 9, 1945, pp. 4-5, Gracey Papers 4/8.
185 Extracts from minutes of British-Viet Minh meetings, First British-Viet Minh meeting, Oct. 1, 1945, p. 3, Gracey Papers 4/8.
186 Report from Taunton, "Build-up of 80 Indian Infantry Brigade at Saigon," Nov. 14, 1945, p. 5, Gracey Papers 4/12.

threatened serious offensive attacks. The consequences for Vietnamese civilians were potentially devastating, as Gracey made clear in a leaflet dropped on several villages on October 1. The leaflet in part advised civilians:

> Do not be mislead by the extremist and irresponsible elements who are trying to continue this useless fight against the terrible might of tanks, aircraft, guns, ships, soldiers, sailors, and airmen. . . .
> The New and Free France wishes to recognize your point of view. Do you want a life of destruction, of misery, of famine and of unhappiness for yourselves and for your families? Do you want to suffer the terrible destruction of modern arms against your houses and your villages?[187]

Gracey's threat, if carried out, would lead to greater British military involvement, which was exactly what Mountbatten was seeking to avoid. According to Gracey, Mountbatten took him "to task" for this leaflet. In defending himself to Mountbatten, Gracey blamed the situation on the Vietminh. He argued that the Indochinese believed the British "are being used as cover to allow French troops to be brought into the country," and that the Vietminh therefore refused to differentiate between British and French troops. According to Gracey, this Vietminh attitude forced him "to take offensive action" to prevent needless casualties, and to "maintain a proper standard of British prestige in the eyes of the French and Chinese."[188] Gracey further argued that the leaflet was designed to:

> persuade the vacillating elements of the population why peace could be the only sensible policy to adopt. In that pamphlet I did not say that tanks, ships, aircraft and guns were massed against virtually unarmed people; I said that the Annamite extremists and irresponsible elements who were trying to continue the useless fight against the might of tanks etc. were misleading the remainder of their people; nor is it really accurate to refer to the Annamites as virtually unarmed . . . I had this particular pamphlet dropped in order to save further bloodshed and as a warning not as a threat.[189]

---

187 British propaganda leaflet, Oct. 1, 1945, Gracey Papers 4/13.
188 Letter from Gracey to Mountbatten, Nov. 9, 1945, p. 2, Gracey Papers 4/13.
189 Ibid., pp. 1-3.

Gracey's logic was predicated on the assumption that there *was* a difference between the British and French forces, and that the Indochinese were incorrect in not differentiating between the two. Mountbatten, who had watched the limited British intervention turn into the suppression of a civil war, was not willing to make the assumption. Not trusting Gracey, he sent in Brigadier E.C.J. Myers to investigate the situation and recommend ways for SEAC to achieve its goals without becoming involved in local politics.[190] Reporting on Oct. 3, Myers told Mountbatten that the old French administration was "rotten to [the] core," and that if France did not act immediately to establish a more competent, progressive policy, they would create a "running sore" that would last for years.[191] De Gaulle had already stated that a more open French colonial policy was "out of the question," and on Oct. 1 Cedille informed the audience of Radio Saigon that "order" would have to be restored before even the limited reforms proposed in 1943 would be enacted.[192]

A French-Vietminh truce was becoming increasing unlikely. Both Mountbatten and Gracey knew as early as 1945 that the Vietminh had become "adamant in their demand for immediate and unconditional independence,"[193] while local French civilians combined "an almost hysterical fear of the Annamites with an intense hatred and desire for revenge" and would vigorously oppose any long-term reconciliation.[194] The negotiations between the French and Vietminh, which had been unproductive since the outset, finally broke down on October 6. The French representatives refused to go beyond their original offer of public administration posts, and simply deferred all questions of ultimate

---

190 Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 65.
191 Myers to Mountbatten, October 3, 1945, WO 172/1786. Quoted in Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 65.
192 De Gaulle to Leclerc, Sept. 29, 1945, quoted in Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, pp. 65, 164.
193 Report of the Saigon Control Commission: Political Report, Sept. 13 - Oct. 9, 1945, p. 5, Gracey Papers 4/8.
194 H.N. Brain to Foreign Office, September 27, 1945, FO 371/46309 F8420/11/61. Quoted in Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 62.

sovereignty--the only subject the Vietminh were really interested in discussing--to higher authorities in Paris.[195]

October 6 also marked the beginning of the end for the British-Vietminh cease fire and Mountbatten's attempt to minimize British involvement. Meeting with the Vietminh on October 6, Brigadier J.A.E. Hirst reiterated that "the British have no interest in the politics of this country as between you and the French," and again demanded strict adherence to Proclamation No. 1--the Vietnamese were not to hinder Allied troops, hold demonstrations, or carry arms of any kind.[196] Hirst explicitly threatened maximum force, stating:

> I have sufficient force at my disposal and I shall make use of all the weapons which I have - armed cars, guns, mortars, aircraft, and so on. I am determined to carry out the terms of this proclamation, and those people of whatever nationality who oppose my forces, must take the consequences.
> The British forces here are the finest trained troops in the world today - what chance have your half trained levies against them? You are fools if you think your troops can oppose them successfully. The only result will be a lot of needless and useless bloodshed - the outcome of the struggle will not be in doubt.
> I appeal to you, therefore, to be sensible about this. It is my last offer and your last chance of settling this matter.[197]

Although Hirst offered the Vietminh one important concession (that only British forces, and not the French, would disarm the Japanese), he also gave them 24 hours to comply with his orders or face the consequences. According to Hirst, the Vietminh offered the British "all assistance possible" in disarming the Japanese, but they also "said (with some justification) that, although we say we have no political interest in this country and are impartial, we are in fact being used to cover the concentration of large French forces."[198]

---

195 Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 165.
196 Text of Hirst's speech of Oct. 9, 1945, in letter from Hirst to Gracey, Oct. 10, 1945, p. 1, Gracey 4/18.
197 Ibid., p. 2.
198 Ibid., p. 3.

Instead of bringing the British and Vietminh together in a long-term truce, the October 6 meeting only illustrated how stalwart and opposed the two sides really were.

The cease fire quickly eroded after the Hirst-Vietminh meeting. Scattered Vietminh "parades and marches, . . . and usual grenade throwing,"[199] grew in intensity, as did propaganda from both sides. Both the Vietminh and British used the truce to funnel troops and supplies into Saigon, raising the military stakes on both sides. In addition, the Saigon Control Commission reported that a fresh outbreak of Vietminh violence "will be suppressed by force and this time there will be no guarantee that the heavy armament which we have refrained from using before will not be used, if necessary to the full."[200] In this highly-charged atmosphere, an inflammatory incident was almost inevitable. The breaking point came on October 10, when a British Indian Engineering Reconnaissance party was ambushed outside Saigon, resulting in four dead and seven wounded.[201] Further Vietminh attacks around the Saigon area confirmed that the truce had been irrevocably broken.

The British went on the offensive the next day, launching operations to clear Saigon's northern and north-eastern suburbs of Vietminh positions. Gracey also asked his superiors for permission to initiate a system of summary judgment. He argued that the attacks on the Engineering Party amounted to murder, but the only recourse was to hand the offenders over to the slow and overloaded French courts. Instead, Gracey recommended allowing "subordinate commanders to try these criminals and if necessary bump them off."[202] Individual cases could be heard by a lieutenant-colonel and two other officers, and if the Brigade commander confirmed the death sentence, it should be carried

---

199 Gracey's draft autobiographical account, pp. 10-11, Gracey Papers 5/18.
200 Report of the Saigon Control Commission: Political Report, Sept. 13 - Oct. 9, 1945, pp. 5-6, Gracey Papers 4/8.
201 Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 167.
202 Gracey to Slim, Oct. 13, 1945, WO 203/4020, quoted in Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 168.

out "on the spot."[203] Gracey's policy would have involved a major departure from British policy, which was to treat the situation as a civil disturbance and not a war, and not surprisingly, the Major-General was turned down.

Mountbatten instead continued to push for limited British involvement through his only real remaining option, an earlier arrival of the 9th DIC. On October 15, his wishes were answered--the United States made eight additional trooping ships available, which would allow the 9th DIC to arrive by late November (instead of late December) without disrupting any other British troops movements.[204]

This was a crucial development in the history of the British intervention. Instead of another two and a half months of expanding British responsibilities, political backlash in India, and the continued use of Japanese troops, the new deadline allowed the British to focus on disarming the Japanese and evacuating their own forces. The news could not have come sooner for Mountbatten. His attempts at limiting British involvement had not kept pace with Gracey's efforts, which were increasingly pro-French. Gracey recognized in mid-October that his forces were creating a shield and allowing the French to progressively reoccupy the country, yet he never seemed troubled by the irony of his position. He did not distinguish between operations designed to remove the Japanese and efforts that directly assisted the French in their military and political struggle, even when assisting the French meant delaying the disarmament of the Japanese.[205] Gracey's military operations brought the British into closer contact with the native populations, and as one British officer noted, "relations were getting strained. We, the British, had lost the popularity we had initially when it was thought we were going to hand the country over to

---

203 Ibid.
204 Chiefs of Staff to Mountbatten, Oct. 15, 1945, CAB 105/165, quoted in Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 172.
205 Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 169-171.

the Vietnamese. Now that they could see we intended to hand their country back to the French, we were no longer welcome."[206]

Mountbatten options for restraining Gracey had been extremely limited. Mountbatten could protest the content of Gracey's leaflets and reprimand him for burning down civilian houses in villages and towns, as he did on October 31, but Gracey had more direct control of the troops and always prepared a vigorous defense.[207] The new timeline allowed Mountbatten to concentrate on the disarmament of the Japanese and the departure of British troops. He moved with remarkable speed. On November 19, Mountbatten's command office declared that "it is the policy of His Majesty's Government to withdraw all British forces from FIC at the earliest possible moment."[208] On November 30 he accepted the sword and formal surrender of the top Japanese official, a ceremony which was delayed largely because Britain's reliance on rearmed Japanese would have made the surrender appear hollow.[209]

An additional 29,000 French troops arrived on December 10, and the British began departing in earnest. The British wiped out the last Vietminh stronghold on December 15 and 16, and the 32nd Brigade left on Christmas Day, 1945.[210] The French were officially given responsibility for all military operations on January 1, 1946, and the final Vietminh push came two days later, when an all-out attack failed to dislodge the Europeans from their positions. As the Vietminh continued to leave Saigon and regroup in the hills, 80

---

206 Cross, First In, Last Out, p. 22.

207 Mountbatten recommended that unsavory military operations, such as the destruction of civilian homes, be avoided or at least delegated to the French. Gracey argued that he was forced to take offensive action because the Vietnamese refused to differentiate between the British and French forces, and explained that "the actual effect of obtaining French assistance would result in the complete destruction of not 20 but 2,000 houses, and probably without warning to the occupants! . . . I can assure you that French measures in such cases know no such thing as minimum force." Letter from Gracey to Mountbatten, Nov. 9, 1945, p. 4, Gracey Papers 4/13.

208 S.A.C.S.E.A. Joint Planning Staff Paper 215, "Turnover of Command in Indo-China," Nov. 19, 1945, p. 1, Gracey Papers 4/16.

209 Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 172.

210 S.A.C.S.E.A. Joint Planning Staff Paper 215, "Turnover of Command in Indo-China," Nov. 19, 1945, pp. 2-3, Gracey Papers 4/16.

percent of the Japanese troops were disarmed by the middle of January. The British 80th Brigade departed on January 10-13, and Gracey left Saigon on January 28, 1946.[211] On the day of his departure, Gracey was fittingly presented with a scroll and made a Citoyen d'Honneur, the first time the city of Saigon had ever bestowed the honor.[212] Although some troops remained to disarm the remaining Japanese and Indochina was not officially removed from SEAC until March 1, January 28 really marked the end of the British occupation.

The British departed Southeast Asia with no illusions about what the future would hold for the French and Vietnamese. The British commanders recognized that their military success against the Vietminh was at best a temporary victory. One British report stated that:

> Vietminh influence and power in South FIC was on the wane and many of their leaders and followers had wearied of the struggle and surrendered to the French. The die hard elements were attempting to make their way to the East Coast of Annam, where large concentrations of Vietminh still existed and which was completely under their control. . . .
> With the exception of the East Coast the disintegration of the Vietminh armed forces in South FIC was now complete. The remnants of these forces joined together and formed guerrilla bands in many parts of the country and their presence was likely to remain an ever present threat to law and order.[213]

Gracey never publicly criticized his European allies, instead praising the "great firmness, impartiality and tact" of the French leaders and the "goodwill and friendship" that had made the British and French "a very happy team of Allies."[214] The Saigon Control Commission even held out hope that once the Japanese were disarmed, "the Annamites will be able to bring their case to a French government which will, we trust, examine it

---

211 Letter from Gracey to the SEAC Recorder, Oct. 3, 1946, p. 4, and Appendix B, "Phase III," p. 22, Gracey Papers 4/8.
212 Dennis, Troubled Days of Peace, p. 179.
213 Appendix B, "Phase III," pp. 20-21, Gracey Papers 4/8.
214 Letter from Gracey to the SEAC Recorder, Oct. 3, 1946, p. 5, Gracey Papers 4/8.

with a sympathy and fairness worthy of the cause for which they and we have fought for five years."[215] Gracey painted a strikingly differed picture of French rule in his draft autobiography and private correspondence, however. Gracey privately admitted that despite his best efforts, the country was "for the most part under the complete control of the Vietminh."[216] Gracey also wrote to one of his commanding officers that

> the French troops are leaving a pretty good trail of destruction behind them, which will result in such resentment that it will become progressively more difficult for them to implement their new policy, and, I am convinced, will result in guerrilla warfare, increased sabotage and arson as soon as we leave the country.[217]

Gracey prediction came true with amazing alacrity. After a series of negotiations failed to eliminate the roadblocks between the French and Vietnamese positions, hostilities increased on both sides.[218] The animosity boiled over on November 23, 1946, when the French bombarded the port city of Haiphong in retaliation for a series of Vietnamese provocations. The French were unable to crush the Vietminh once and for all, but the attack left 6,000 Vietnamese dead and set off a war which in its various phases would last 30 years.[219]

---

215 Report of the Saigon Control Commission: Political Report, Sept. 13 - Oct. 9, 1945, p. 6, Gracey Papers 4/8.
216 Gracey's draft autobiographical account, p. 20, Gracey Papers 5/18.
217 Letter from Gracey to General Sir W.J. Slim, Commander-in-Chief, Allied Land Forces South East Asia, Nov. 5, 1945, Gracey Papers 4/12.
218 Gardner, Approaching Vietnam, p. 74-75.
219 Ibid., p. 75, and George C. Herring, America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975 (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1979): 7.

# Conclusion

In the span of 14 months, Ho Chi Minh moved from the leader of an independent nation to the head of a resistance movement locked in a life-or-death struggle with the French. Franklin Roosevelt's dream of eventual Vietnamese independence had been quickly replaced by 22,000 British troops intent on rearming French troops and reestablishing European colonialist. Events began to happen at a lightning pace--Ho Chi Minh was branded a Russian-style Communist for the first time in 1945, Churchill delivered his "Iron Curtain" speech in 1946, and the containment policy took shape in 1947. Vietnam quickly became a testing ground for the containment policy and formed the heart of the domino theory, especially after China "fell" in 1950 and most of the State Department's experts in Southeast Asia were replaced with hard-line anti-Communists. Ho Chi Minh had been put on his heels, while America had been put directly on the path to military involvement in Vietnam.

This dramatic turn of events was caused primarily by Great Britain. The British were first responsible for undercutting FDR's trusteeship plan for Indochina and replacing it with French military control in Southeast Asia. Without ever questioning the assumption that trusteeships for French colonies would automatically lead to the unraveling of the British Empire, Churchill and the Foreign Office did everything they could to prevent FDR's plan from becoming reality. They assigned as many British and French troops as possible to Southeast Asia, rejected out of hand any notion that the Indochinese people might be capable of self-determination, and tried to co-opt American anti-imperialism through naval bases in the Pacific. The British were not the only cause of the trusteeship's death, but the other relevant factors--the onset of the Cold War, the growing instability in China, and the "bring the boys home" sentiment in America--would almost certainly not have been enough to block the trusteeship plan if it had British support. If Churchill had endorsed any sort of moderate plan (such as gradual Indochinese

independence with American bases in Southeast Asia and the return of all other British and French colonies), France would have had nowhere else to turn, de Gaulle would have had to resign himself to the loss of Indochina, and the United Nations would have adopted some form of international trusteeship. There were other ways for the British to accomplish their goals of European and Asian security without returning Indochina to France, but they simply refused to let any of them get an inch off the ground.

The British also prevented Vietnamese independence in 1945 through direct military intervention. Ordered to disarm the Japanese, maintain law and order, and stay out of local politics, Gracey instead ignored Ho Chi Minh's representatives, rearmed the French, and stood behind the colonial status quo. Gracey doggedly pursued French recolonization even after he had pushed the Vietminh into a bloody civil war on the streets of Saigon, choosing to rearm the Japanese troops and unleash all of Britain's offensive weaponry rather than compromise with the Vietminh. By contrast, the Chinese occupation of Indochina north of the sixteenth parallel provided the Vietminh with crucial material and psychological support. The 150,000-man Chinese army entered northern Indochina just as Ho Chi Minh's forces were losing ground to the British. Instead of crushing Ho Chi Minh's northern forces, however, the Chinese turned over to the Vietminh vast quantities of arms and war materials.[220] After the occupation, the Chinese chose French accommodation and a favorable economic status in Indochina over the concerns of the Vietminh, but the contrast between the two postwar occupations is striking. Unlike the Chinese position of moderation, Gracey's actions resulted in a violent Vietnamese reaction against the British and French, irrevocably tied the British forces to French actions, and ultimately undermined the British mission in Indochina.

The story of the British in Vietnam has unfortunately fallen through the cracks of orthodox history. It is a tragic loss because the British experience in Indochina

---

220 Hess, The United States' Emergence as a Southeast Asian Power, p. 176.

foreshadowed much of what happened to the French and Americans in Vietnam. The British accounts of Vietnamese snipers, grenades, and guerrilla warfare could have come directly from American reports 25 years later. The inability of the British to identify Ho's forces or pin them into a set battle was another experience shared by the French and Americans. Perhaps most significantly, Gracey's invasion represents the first realization by a Western power that a land war in Southeast Asia was not worth the political or military cost. Three months of bloody guerrilla warfare were quite enough for Gracey and the British--by late November they were lobbying for as many French reinforcements as could transfer over, and counting the days until they could return home.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## Primary Sources

### Great Britain (Public Records Office)

*Cabinet Files:*

Cab 122/812, Eden to Halifax, Dec. 29, 1943.
Cab 122/812, Halifax to Eden, Jan. 3, 1944.
Cab 122/812, Halifax to Eden, Jan. 18, 1944.

*Foreign Office Files:*

FO 371/41723, Post Hostilities Planning Sub Committee report, "Indo-China and French Possessions in the Pacific," Jan. 22, 1944.
FO 371/41723, Ashley Clark to Prime Minister, March 1944.

*Prime Minister's Office Files:*

PREM 3/178/2, Correspondence to Foreign Secretary and Dominions Secretary, Nov. 3, 1944.

### Private Papers of Gen. Sir Douglas Gracey (papers stored in the Liddell Harte Center for Military Archives, King's College, London).

Section 4/2

"British report on Annam and Laos."
Appendix 'B' to 20th Indian Division orders, "Relations with Surrendered Japanese Forces and With Enemy Civilians."
"Security Intelligence for Planning Section" report.

Section 4/6

Supreme Allied Commander Southeast Asia to Saigon Control Commission *et al.*, Nov. 10, 1945.

Section 4/8

Report of the Saigon Control Commission: Political Report, Sept. 13 - Oct. 9, 1945.
Letter from Gracey to the SEAC Recorder, Oct. 3, 1946.
Appendix B, "Summary of Events in French Indochina Prior to the Arrival of British Forces."
Appendix B, "Phase III."
Extracts from minutes of British-Viet Minh meetings, First British-Viet Minh meeting, Oct. 1, 1945, and last meeting with Viet Minh, Oct. 9, 1945.

**Section 4/12**
Letter from Gracey to General Sir W.J. Slim, Commander-In-Chief, Allied Land Forces South East Asia, Nov. 5, 1945.
Report from Brigadier Douglas Taunton, "Build-up of 80 Indian Infantry Brigade at Saigon," Nov. 14, 1945.
Letter from Gracey to Leclerc, Dec. 12, 1945.

**Section 4/13**
British propaganda leaflet, issued Oct. 1, 1945.
Letter from Gracey to Mountbatten, Nov. 9, 1945.

**Section 4/16**
Letter from Leclerc to Gracey, Nov. 12, 1945.
S.A.C.S.E.A. Joint Planning Staff Paper 215, "Turnover of Command in Indo-China," Nov. 19, 1945.

**Section 4/18**
Text of Hirst's speech of Oct. 9, 1945, in letter from Hirst to Gracey, Oct. 10, 1945.

**Section 5/18**
Gracey's draft autobiographical account.

## Periodicals

Buckley, Christopher. "British Bringing Peace to Saigon: Indo-China Capital Back to Normal: Few Casualties in Street Fighting: French in Control Again, Conciliation Promise," *Daily Telegraph* (Sept. 26, 1945, delayed from Sept. 23).

"Indo-China Revolt: British Troops Act," *Manchester Guardian* quoting Associated Press reports (Sept. 26, 1945).

"Charter Says 'All,' President Replies," *New York Times* (October 25, 1942): 4.

*New York Times* report (November 12, 1942).

## Secondary Sources


Buttinger, Joseph. Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled, v. 1. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1967.

Cross, J.P. First In, Last Out: An Unconventional British Officer in Indo-China: 1945-46 and 1972-76). London: Brassey's, 1992.

Dennis, Peter. Troubled Days of Peace: Mountbatten and South East Asia Command, 1945-46. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987.

Drachman, Edward R. United States Policy Toward Vietnam. Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Press, 1970.

Duiker, William J. The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981.

Duncanson, Dennis J. "General Gracey and the Viet Minh." Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society, v. 55 (Oct. 1968): 288-97.

Dunn, Peter M. The First Vietnam War. London: C. Hurst & Company, 1985.

Gardner, Lloyd C. Approaching Vietnam: From World War II to Dienbienphu, 1941-1954. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988.

Hammer, Ellen J. The Struggle for Indochina. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1954.

Herring, George C. America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1986.

Herring, George C. "The Truman Administration and the Restoration of French Sovereignty in Indochina." Diplomatic History No. 1 (1977): 97-117.

Hess, Gary R. "Franklin Roosevelt and Vietnam." The Journal of American History 59 (Sept. 1972): 353-68.

Hess, Gary R. The United States' Emergence as a Southeast Asian Power, 1940-1950. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Hull, Cordell. The Memoirs of Cordell Hull, 2 vols. New York: Macmillan, 1948.

La Feber, Walter. "Roosevelt, Churchill, and Indochina: 1942-45." American Historical Review, v. 801 (1975): 1277-95.

Marr, David C. Vietnam 1945: The Quest of Power. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995.

Roosevelt, Elliott. As He Saw It. New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1946.

Rosenman, Samuel I. ed. The Public Papers of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, volumes 10 and 13. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1950.

Rose, George. The British in Vietnam: How the Twenty-five Year War Began. London: Panther Books Limited, 1970.

Sbrega, John J. Anglo-American Relations and Colonialism in East Asia, 1941-1945. New York: Garland, 1983.

Tonnesson, Stein. The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh and de Gaulle in a World at War. London: Sage Publications, 1991.

Watt, D. Cameron. Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place, 1900-1975. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.