Geneva 1954 and the "De-internationalization" of the Vietnamese Idea of Indochina?[1]

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Introduction

In this paper, I would like to focus on how and why Vietnamese communists had to compromise on their internationalist reading of Indochina during the Geneva Conference of 1954 – or at least why they agreed to put it on hold. Paradoxically, at the very moment the French colonial state of *Indochine* was melting down at Dien Bien Phu, Vietnamese communists arrived in Geneva determined to validate their own revolutionary vision of Indochina, one allying the communist-led Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) with the "resistance governments" (*chinh phu khang chien*) led by the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Issarak. While Vietnamese communists did not say it openly, they were operating under the ideological assumption that they were still in charge of a wider, revolutionary Indochinese identity first assigned to them by the internationalist

[1] I would like to thank Judy Stowe for her comments on a draft of this paper and Merle Pribbenow for help on many of the translations used in this paper and for his helpful comments.

communist movement in 1930 as the leaders of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP). The Geneva conference is important because the validity of this internationalist vision of Indochina was called into question on at least three counts. First, the decolonization of the French colonial-state of Indochina opposed Vietnamese "Indochinese internationalism" with two Nation-States – the royal governments of Laos and of Cambodia, each of which had enjoyed international recognition since 1950. Second, non-communist Asian states, such as India, Burma and Indonesia, rejected communist Vietnam's internationalist task (*nhiem vu quoc te*) to build a revolutionary Indochina in eastern Southeast Asia via the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Issarak. They were ready to accept a revolutionary and anticolonialist Vietnam, but the emergence of a communist Indochina was not an acceptable *postcolonial* option for non-communist Asia. Third, Zhou Enlai seems to have understood better than his Vietnamese counterparts the historical reality of both of these phenomena. He certainly grasped that China's ability to neutralize non-communist Asia against the Americans was dependent to a large extent on rolling back the internationalist model of Indochina which both the Vietnamese and the Chinese had supported.[2] Winning over non-communist Asian support for creating a neutral area on China's southern flank was directly linked to getting the Vietnamese to recognize neutral, royal Nation-states in Laos and Cambodia. The questions of Laos and Cambodia were thus at the top of Zhou Enlai's list when he travelled to India and Burma *during* the Geneva conference. And getting the Vietnamese to back off from the idea of a postcolonial, revolutionary Indochinese form was one (not the only one) of his key points of discussion with Ho Chi Minh in Liuzhou in early July 1954. What is interesting on closer examination, however, is the role that India in particular played in getting Zhou Enlai to convince the Vietnamese of this.

To get at these questions, I rely heavily upon an internal Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs study of the DRV's "diplomatic struggle" (*dau tranh ngoai giao*) between 1945 and 1954, in which special attention is given to the Geneva Conference.[3] This study reproduces a wide range of internal Chinese and Vietnamese cables and reports on the conference. What also makes this document unique is that it was issued internally in 1976 – *before* Sino-Vietnamese relations melted down into a war for all of Indochina. The study is thus surprisingly objective in its portrayal of negotiations with the Chinese. While the Vietnamese conclude that they had indeed been pressured by the Chinese at Geneva, they do not accuse the Chinese of "selling them out". Indeed, this study reveals that the DRV's diplomacy was badly informed about the international situation in the early 1950s. As this study reveals, at the time of the Geneva conference the DRV did not yet have a research bureau for the study of the international situation (*co*

[2] In August 1934, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party supported the idea of a future revolutionary structure to be known as "Soviet Indo-China". 'Open Letter to the Communist Party of Indo-China from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China', August 1934, translated in *Straits Settlements Police, Political Intelligence Journal*, (29 September 1934), pp. 77-80, in the archival grouping Gouverneur général de l'Indochine, Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France. In 1950, while the Chinese did not recognize diplomatically the Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak resistance governments, I have no reason to believe that the CCP was in disagreement with the Vietnamese communist over the Indochinese model. The question came up at Geneva, when the question of determining which nation-states would take over the Indochinese space. See below.

[3] Bo Ngoai Giao, *Dau Tranh Ngoai Giao trong Cach Mang Dan Toc Dan Chu Nhan Dan (1945-1954),* tap hai : *Dau Tranh Ngoai Giao trong Khang Chien Chong Thuc Dan Phan Dong Phap Xam Luoc va Hoi Nghi Quoc Te Gio-Ne-Vo nam 1954 ve Dong-Duong (1947-1954*), prefaced signed by the Bo Phan Tong Ket and dated 1976. [hereafter cited *Dau Tranh*].

quan nghien cuu ve tinh hinh quoc te). This lack of understanding led the Vietnamese to rely on "the Friends" (*ban*) – the Chinese and the Soviets – for information, intelligence and analysis. This, according to this internal report, blinded the Vietnamese to the real intentions of the "Friends", something which "caused damage to us during and after the Geneva accords".[4] That the Vietnamese communists were out of touch with the international situation is not entirely surprising given the type of war they were fighting. Nonetheless, it raises important questions about Vietnamese decision-making at this crucial juncture in their history and how it interacted with Soviet and especially Chinese diplomacy.[5]

While I cannot cite all the published works related to the topic at hand, I have benefited greatly from the rich historiography available on the Geneva accords.[6] I do need to mention my debt to François Joyaux's excellent analysis of China's role in the Geneva accords and in particular to Zhou Enlai's linkage of the neutralization of Laos and Cambodia to his wider policy of "co-existing" with non-communist Asia as a way of keeping the US out of the region and off of China's soft underbelly.[7]

My research tends to confirm Joyaux's linkage of Zhou Enlai's policy of co-existence with non-communist Asia to the neutralization of Laos and Cambodia. Building on this, I suggest that Zhou also realized – thanks undoubtedly to his conversations with the Indians and Burmese – that Indochina was a colonial invention and not a potential national reality. There was no Indochina Nation to negotiate at Geneva, except in Vietnamese internationalist minds. The continued Vietnamese belief in the viability of the Indochinese model threatened peace talks and marked an important difference between Chinese and Vietnamese perceptions of a postcolonial political space in

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[4] This analysis is provided in *Dau Tranh*, p. 229. The "Friends" could refer to both the Soviet Union and China or just one of them. This study reveals elsewhere that the Party "did not understand clearly the situations in France and in the world" as negotiations opened on Indochina at Geneva (*Chung toi khong hieu ro tinh hinh ben Phap va the gioi*). *Dau Tranh*, p. 104, citing extracts from the Party's cable sent to the DRV delegation in Geneva, in Luu Tru Van Phong Trung Uong Dang. Strangely, the authors of the Ministry of Foreign Affair's internal study of this period say that the DRV "did not have a policy to mobilize Southeast Asian countries to recognize [Vietnam] officially because the objective situation did not yet allow it" *(ta khong chu truong va dong cac nuoc Dong Nam A chinh thuc cong nhan ta vi tinh hinh khach quan chua chop phep). Dau Tranh*, p. 49. And yet, in early 1950, Ho Chi Minh himself had publicly invited non-communist Asian countries to recognize the DRV. See: Christopher Goscha, 'The 'Two Vietnams' and the Advent of the Cold War', in Goscha and Ostermann (eds), *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Asia (1945-1962),* forthcoming and my 'La survie diplomatique de la République démocratique du Vietnam : Le doute soviétique effacé par la confiance chinoise (1945-1950) ?', *Approches Asie,* no. 18, (2003), pp. 19-52.

[5] The core unit of the DRV delegation to the Geneva negotiations consisted of five persons. Pham Van Dong led the DRV delegation (he replaced Hoang Minh Giam who had fallen ill). He was accompanied by Hoang Van Hoan, the DRV's ambassador to China; Ta Quang Buu, military advisor; Phan Anh, juridical advisor; and Tran Cong Tuong, translator and juridical advisor. Also travelling with the Vietnamese delegation (and on Vietnamese passports) were Nouhak representing the Pathet Lao and Keo Mani representing the Khmer Issarak. Other Vietnamese officials attached to the delegation were: Tran Viet Phuong, Hoang Nguyen, Ha Van Lau, Dang Tinh, Thanh Son, Ngo Dien, and a number of lower ranking officials. *Hoi Nghi Genève nam 1954 ve Dong Duong*, undated, a recent study of the Geneva conference by one of the members of the DRV delegation in 1954. This document was communicated to the author on the condition of anonymity.

[6] I have benefited enormously from the recents works of Qiang Zhai, *China & the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975,* Chapell Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2000; Qiang Zhai, 'China and the Geneva Conference of 1954', *The China Quarterly,* no. 129, (March 1992), pp. 103-122; Ilya V. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy towards the Indochina Conflict, 1954-1963*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003; Gilles Boquérat, 'India's Commitment to Peaceful Coexistence and the Settlement of the Indochina War', *Cold War History,* vol. 5, no. 2, (May 2005), pp. 211-234; Kevin Ruane, 'British Diplomacy and the Origins of the Geneva Conference of 1954', The Historical Journal, vol. 37, no. 1, (March 1994), pp. 153-172, to name only a few.

[7] François Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine, Genève 1954*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1979.

Southeast Asia. Unlike the French and non-communist Vietnamese, many Vietnamese communists believed in the reality of Indochina. Some still do. Zhou gave up this idea at Geneva and convinced the Vietnamese at least to put it on hold.

Lastly, while Vietnamese communists would later accuse their Chinese counterparts of "selling them out" at Geneva in 1954, the internal Vietnamese documents consulted for this paper do not support this claim. That Zhou Enlai put pressure on the Vietnamese to head off American intervention in Indochina, there can be no doubt. However, the Vietnamese were actors and players in the making of their own history. The internal study used in this paper strongly suggests that the Vietnamese signed off with the Chinese (and the Soviets) in 1954, even if they would interpret it in different terms later.[8] The general secretary of the party himself, Truong Chinh, explained that the Party would make the needed concessions to attain an accord because the Vietnamese, like the Chinese, felt the Americans were ready to intervene directly in Indochina (see conclusion).

The Vietnamese Internationalist Idea of Indochina (1930-50)

From its genesis in the early 20th century, Vietnamese communists have always oscillated between a Vietnamese national identity and an Indochinese internationalist duty (*nhiem vu quoc te*). As is well known, in 1930, budding Vietnamese internationalists replaced the term *Vietnam* in Ho Chi Minh's Communist Party in order to create the *Indochinese* Communist Party. According to the internationalist rules laid down by the Comintern, the borders of colonial states had to delimit the geographical realms of the communist parties taking them on. There could thus be no "Javanese" communist party; it had to be the "Indonesian" Communist Party. For the Vietnamese, it was thus "French Indochina" that defined their revolutionary domain, not the national idea of "Vietnam". Vietnam did not exist; the colonial-state of Indochina was the political reality.[9] Of course the Vietnamese national idea developed on its own and in powerful ways. In 1945, following the Japanese overthrow of the French colonial state and defeat of the Japanese themselves, Vietnamese nationalists established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). On 2 September, Ho Chi Minh announced it to thousands of Vietnamese in Hanoi. Vietnamese communists were, however, at the helm, unlike the postcolonial states coming into being in Indonesia, Burma, and India.

However, the fact that Vietnamese communists had opted for the creation of a Vietnamese nation-state did not mean that they had necessarily given up their internationalist vision of a wider revolutionary entity defined along the Indochinese lines. They did not. Security concerns certainly reinforced the Indochinese model. With the French moving already in late 1945 to reimpose their Indochinese colonial state by force, Vietnamese strategists understood perfectly well that Laos and Cambodia would be vital to the protection of Vietnam's vulnerable western flank.

Yet there was more to it than security. National liberation along Vietnamese lines was not enough for the ICP. Even before the Cold War arrived in northern Vietnam with the Chinese communist victory in 1949, Vietnamese communists had already made efforts to

[8] The last part of the *Dau Tranh* study provides interesting clues into the DRV's negotiating strategy leading up to the Paris accords in 1973, by trying to learn from the "lessons" of the Geneva conference. The study includes reflections from Pham Van Dong himself. This section of the *Dau Tranh* study merits a separate analysis in and of itself.

[9] For more on the concepts of "Indochina" and "Vietnam" in Vietnamese nationalist thinking see my *Vietnam or Indochina? Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism (1887-1954),* Copenhagen, NIAS, 1995, Part I.

be good Indochinese internationalists.[10] In 1948, a few months after the creation of the Cominform and Zhadnov's enunciation of world divided into two camps, Truong Chinh announced that Vietnamese communists had to advance towards creating an "Indochinese Federation" (*Lien Bang Cong hoa Dan chu Dong Duong*). It was an "internationalist duty" to bring liberation, communism and eventually social revolution to Laos and Cambodia as part of this wider Indochinese internationalist task assigned to them in 1930 and which the ICP had never abandoned even if the name changed to the Vietnamese Worker's Party in 1951 (and not without resistance).[11] According to the man who had adopted the "Long March" for his name, the Vietnamese

> […] goal is to realize a new democratic regime in all of Indochina, to act such that Indochina becomes the People's Democratic Republic of Indochina, the first step in moving forward to realizing socialism in Indochina. The Indochina Federation will consist of the three states of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Within each state there can later be a number of autonomous regions for minority groups which are relatively numerous and advanced.[12]

This double identity in Vietnamese communism (nationalist and internationalist) is important for understanding contradictions that would surface during the Geneva Conference over which states would occupy the colonial space being vacated by the French. For example, when the French first began to decolonize Indochina (albeit ever so slowly) in 1948, transforming their own Indochinese Federation into what eventually became known as the "Associated states" of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, the Vietnamese communists responded in kind by issuing orders to create their own "resistance governments" (*chinh phu khang chien*) in Laos and Cambodia as part of a Vietnamese-run revolutionary association of Indochinese states. These orders were issued in 1949 and perhaps earlier.[13] This gave rise to a revealing paradox: whereas the French grudgingly accepted the decolonization of colonial Indochina along triangular national lines, the Vietnamese actually countered that very decolonization by moving to *create* –

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[10] Indeed, the party criticized its political and military cadres for only thinking of Vietnamese military and security interests in their work in Cambodia and Indochina in the late 1940s.

[11] On the importance of ideology, see: Tuong Vu, 'From Cheering to Volunteering: Vietnamese Communists and the Coming of the Cold War, 1940-1951' and Christopher Goscha, 'The 'Two Vietnams' and the Advent of the Cold War: 1950 and Asian Shifts in the International System', both forthcoming in Christopher Goscha and Christian Ostermann (eds), *Connecting Histories.*

[12] 'Cach-Mang Dan-Chu Moi o Dong Duong: trich ban bao cao "chung ta chien dau cho doc lap va dan chu cua TRUONG CHINH tai Hoi Nghi can bo lan thu 5 (8-16 thang 8 1948), [this is the original], p. 26. Significantly, in the "complete" (*toan tap*) *Party Documents (Van Kien Dang),* published in 2001 by the Party's publishing house, the editors censored the entire "part VI" of Truong Chinh's speech on the "Indochinese Federation". The editors simply noted their expurgation with an ellipse "…" See the tampered version in 'Chung ta chien dau cho doc lap va dan chu: bao cao doc o Hoi nghi can bo lan thu V (Tu 8.8 den 16.8.1948), in *Van kien Dang toan tap,* volume 9, 1948, Hanoi, Nha Xuat Ban Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2001, p. 209. These official Party histories must be used with great caution. As elsewhere in the world, their selection and reproduction are subject to political considerations.

[13] This is based on the French interception and decrypting of Vietnamese radio communications, such as : 'De Ban Ngoai Vu du Nam Bo, Ha Tien, à Comité de conseiller [Ban Can Su] du Sud-Ouest Cambodge, Etat-Major, Front du Cambodge', dans HCFIC, SDECE, no. 19960/4/HV/SD, 'Congrès du Cambodge', interception datée du 24 novembre 1949, valeur : A, d. D.Y., c. 10H4120, Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre. See my *Le contexte asiatique de la guerre franco-vietnamienne* for full documentation on the Vietnamese creation of the Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak. It should be noted that the head of the Ban Ngoai Vu (External Affairs Commission) was (Nguyen) Thanh Son, who was also part of the Vietnamese delegation to Geneva. The presence of Thanh Son, Hoang Van Hoan, Ngo Dien and Pham Van Dong himself in Geneva leave no doubt that the VWP had sent its top experts on revolutionary Laos and Cambodia.

from scratch and in a time of war! – their own two "resistance" nation-states for Laos and Cambodia, each of which would stand with the DRV in opposition to the *Etats Associés de l'Indochine* of Bao Dai, Sihanouk and Sisavang Vong. The dissolution of the ICP into three national parts in 1951 is thus very much linked to the French transformation of Indochina into the States of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. However, at both the state and party levels, Vietnamese communists never abandoned the validity of the internationalist Indochinese model and their right to direct revolutionary affairs for all three countries in this revolutionary association. At the moment the French Republic was giving up its colonial "devoir" in Indochina, Vietnamese internationalists were actually asserting an internationalist right to fill in their Indochinese shoes. The Vietnamese played the overwhelming role in creating revolutionary nation-states for Laos and Cambodia.[14] The problem was that these states could not generate the popular support and nationalist symbols available to the monarchs moving to create their own nation-states out of French Indochina (neither of whom wanted anything to do with Vietnamese or French notions of Indochina).[15]

Of course, security concerns were at work here, too, as others have shown elsewhere and which I have certainly not sought to minimize in my own work. At war with the French and opposed to their creation of a counter revolutionary Vietnamese state under the direction of Bao Dai, Vietnamese communists found it understandably hard to recognize royal states in Laos and Cambodia emerging out of the same process. They were after all *les Etats associés de l'Indochine.*[16] But security as a sole explanation is not enough to explain the DRV's attachment to the Indochinese idea. It would be more accurate to say that ideology and security reinforced each other. In any case, the emergence of two pairs of "Associated states of Indochina" by 1950 explains why at Geneva there were six groups vying to replace the French in former Indochina: 1) the DRV vs. the State of Vietnam (Bao Dai), 2) the Pathet Lao vs. the State of Sisavang Vong, and 3) the Khmer Issarak vs. the State of Sihanouk.

This had important ramifications for early DRV postcolonial diplomacy. Vietnamese communist hostility to the royal Laotian and Cambodian governments and their support of an association of revolutionary states of Indochina made it difficult for the DRV to normalize relations with non-communist neutralist states in Asia, despite the anticolonialism they all shared. The ICP's policy during the war against the French was to overthrow the French *and* their royal puppets (*bu nhin*) – meaning Sihanouk and Sisavang Vong. Wary that Ho's Vietnam was "leaning to one side" in the international

[14] For the Vietnamese documentation, see *Le contexte asiatique de la guerre franco-vietnamienne*, sections Laos and Cambodge.

[15] The fact that the Vietnamese first tried to win over Prince Phetsarath to lead their "resistance government" in Laos, instead of the "red" Prince Souphanouvong, leaves no doubt as to the fact that the Vitenamese were engaged in "revolutionary" state making and keen on exploiting the symbol of the monarchy for the building of a national state for Laos. Prince Phetsarath would have conferred real popular legitimacy to the Pathet Lao state, at least this is what the Vietnamese present at the creation thought. For full documentation, see: Soren Ivarsson and Christopher Goscha, 'Prince Phetsarath (1890-1959): Nationalism and Legitimation in the Making of Modern Laos', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, forthcoming (approved for publication) in late 2006.

[16] If the Vietnamese had created "resistance governments" for the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Issarak to counter the emergence of royal nation-states in Laos and Cambodia, the French had created the Bao Dai-led state of Vietnam to counter the national and revolutionary state of the DRV. This distinction is important for understanding why countries such as India, Indonesia and Burma considered Bao Dai's Vietnam as a colonial creation and the DRV as a legitimate nation-state, regardless of its communist orientation. But the same could not be said of the Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak (see below).

system, not one single Asian state recognized the DRV before the Geneva Conference.[17] And when they did, they recognized both Vietnams …

Non-communist leaders like Nehru, Sukarno and U Nu had reason to be worried. The victory of the Chinese in 1949 only reinforced the internationalist tack in the ICP's view of Indochina and the region. Top ranking Vietnamese communists such as Truong Chinh welcomed this momentous event and were thrilled to be a part of it. The General Secretary warmly welcomed Sino-Soviet recognition and willingly allied the DRV/ICP with the communist bloc. This also meant pushing the Indochinese line harder. To Truong Chinh, the Vietnamese were now on the "Indochinese front line" of the revolutionary movement in Southeast Asia: "[W]e are all now standing in the forward ranks of the world peace front in Southeast Asia. That honour also assigns to us a heavy responsibility to the world. We must bravely assume it".[18] In July 1950, as the US mobilised Allied troops to repel Kim Il-sung's invasion of South Korea, Truong Chinh got so excited that he looked beyond Indochina to Southeast Asia when speaking of Vietnam's internationalist duties:

> Not only do we have the task of helping the Khmer and Lao revolutions, but we must also aid the revolutionary movements in Southeast Asian countries such as Malaya, Indonesia and Burma, etc. In these countries the imperialist cliques are fiercely repressing and outlawing communist parties. If we use the name Workers Party [instead of communist party], then we will be able to assist more easily the revolutionary movement in those countries.[19]

The Vietnamese clearly believed. However, the excitement of 1950-51 would dissipate by 1954, in spite of the Vietnamese military victory at Dien Bien Phu. If the Chinese themselves had condemned non-communist India and Burma's "neutralism" in 1949 and 1950, in 1954 Zhou Enlai was looking to reduce tensions in the region, normalize relations with neutralist, non-communist Asian states and above all keep the US and its bases off of China's southern flank. Stalin was dead, the shooting had stopped in Korea and the first step of radical social change inside of China had been largely achieved. The road was now prepared for a major reorientation in China's foreign policy towards the region. India was at the centre of this major reorientation of Chinese foreign policy following the armistice in July 1953. It is no accident that Zhou Enlai had first put forward the five principles of peaceful coexistence (*Pancha Sila*) when meeting Indian delegates visiting China in December 1953 – mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference into each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence". Before coming to Geneva, in April 1954, the Chinese reached an agreement with the Indians by which New Delhi recognized Tibet as a part of China. In exchange, Zhou Enlai promised not to "export" revolution outside of China.

Pham Van Dong arrived in Geneva in 1954 convinced of the righteousness of the Indochinese revolutionary cause and Zhou Enlai was probably ready to accord him that

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[17] Goscha, 'The 'Two Vietnams' and the Advent of the Cold War', in Goscha and Ostermann (eds), *Connecting Histories,* forthcoming.

[18] Truong-Chinh, *Hoan thanh nhiem vu chuan bi chuyen manh sang tong phan cong*, p. 79.

[19] 'Thong cao cua ban chap hanh trung uong dang cong san dong duong ve viec de nghi doi ten Dang thang 7 1950', in *Van kien dang toan tap*, volume 11, p. 372.

right at the outset. The Vietnamese saw no theoretical contradiction in pushing for the recognition of Indochinese sister "governments" in Laos (*Pathet Lao*) and Cambodia (*Khmer Issarak*) (see above).[20] I doubt the Chinese knew much about Vietnamese policy and actions in Laos and Cambodia since 1945. All that would change at Geneva, however. Two months later, the Vietnamese would agree sign accords holding them to pull out of western Indochina, recognize the royal governments that they had been trying to overthrow, regroup the Khmer Issarak "government" to Hanoi and move all the Pathet Lao to Phongsaly and Sam Neau. Something had clearly changed at Geneva.

II. Geneva and the Rolling Back of Vietnam's Internationalist Indochina

Geneva was of course all about who and which type of states were going to replace the colonial Indochinese space that fell apart at Dien Bien Phu on 7 May 1954. The Vietnamese had come to Geneva thinking that their newly won positions on the Indochinese battlefield would allow them to carve out a political place for them and their Cambodian and Laotian revolutionary "resistance governments". The Vietnamese military expansion into Laos and upper Cambodia in 1953-54 had allowed the Vietnamese to transfer the Pathet Lao into the border regions of Phongsaly and Sam Neua. Given the concentration of Vietnamese military strength in the north and Chinese aid, the DRV/ICP's position in Laos was much stronger than it was in Cambodia when negotiations on Indochina began in Geneva.[21] That said, the Vietnamese conceded in pre Geneva meetings with the Soviets and Chinese that their military position in Cambodia and even in Laos was still limited. As the section of the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' study of the Geneva conference conceded in 1976: "We had no real way to pressure the enemy to concede much to us if we were to set our conditions too high" for the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Issarak.[22] While the Vietnamese hoped to legitimate their nation-building projects in Laos and Cambodia, they expected resistance in Geneva. In preliminary discussions with the Soviets and the Chinese, it was agreed that the communist side should "not over emphasize the request that the Lao and Khmer resistance governments participate in the conference".[23] However, as we shall see, the Vietnamese would be caught off guard by just how "stubborn" (*ngoan co*) international resistance to recognizing the reality of the Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak was.

The DRV began, of course, by trying to get the Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak recognized as legitimate national players in postcolonial Indochina, on the same level as the Royal governments of Laos and Cambodia. Unsurprisingly, France and her Western Allies vehemently refused this. When Pham Van Dong tried on 8 May 1954, one day after Dien Bien Phu fell, to get the Lao and Khmer "resistance" governments accepted at the conference, the Chinese and the Soviets supported him. However, after four sessions of heated debates, the DRV had to back off from its Indochinese position.[24] The French, British and Americans were determined to extricate Laos and Cambodia from the

[20] Indeed, as the government's representative in War Zone 5 in the late 1940s, he had handled the Lao and Khmer revolutionary questions. See Goscha, *Le contexte asiatique de la Guerre d'Indochine*, section Laos and Cambodge.
[21] Christopher E.Goscha, 'La guerre *pour* l'Indochine : Le Laos et le Cambodge dans l'offensive vietnamienne (1950-1954)', *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains,* numéro spécial sur la bataille de Dien Bien Phu, no. 210, (2003), pp. 29-58 and Goscha, *Le conteste asiatique de la guerre franco-vietnamienne*, section Laos.
[22] *Dau Tranh*, p. 141.
[23] *Dau Tranh*, p. 108.
[24] "In reality", the Vietnamese admitted in 1976, "we conceded" on this point. *Dau Tranh*, p. 148.

Indochinese model. Laos and Cambodia were different from Vietnam; and the Vietnamese – like the French – would have to withdraw from these independent countries. It was made clear from the start to the Chinese and the Vietnamese that there would be no question of accepting the "resistance governments" of the Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak.

The US in particular had carefully been following the large-scale Vietnamese military intervention into Laos and north-eastern Cambodia in late 1953 and 1954. Given that Laos and Cambodia were already sovereign states (recognized by dozens of governments), Vietnamese military intervention was considered as an "invasion" and as evidence of communist expansion into Southeast Asia. To many American strategists looking at Vietnam with Korea in mind, the Vietnamese were out to take all of Indochina. Significantly, non-communist Asian countries, such as Indonesia, Burma and India, were also worried about communist Vietnam's expansion into Laos and Cambodia in 1953-54. Vietnam yes, Indochina no.[25] This helps explain why the Vietnamese encountered such a wide range of opposition to their Indochinese pretensions. From the start of the conference, a wide range of voices insisted that all Viet Minh forces had to be pulled out of those two countries, all popular guerrilla forces had to be disarmed, all civil and military administrations had to be returned to the royal governments and international inspection allowed.[26] At the outset, the Vietnamese had a hard time conceding that their "volunteers" (*tinh nguyen*) in Laos and Cambodia were "foreign troops", to be withdrawn with the equally "foreign" French ones. Not only had war against the French been an Indochinese wide military affair, but the Vietnamese were convinced of their right to administer state and revolutionary affairs in Laos and Cambodia for the Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak. These questions were intensely discussed during the May sessions, with little progress being made.

It is well known that the Chinese came to Geneva in search of a solution. Zhou Enlai wanted to keep the US off China's southern flank in Indochina and in all of Southeast Asia if possible. It quickly became clear that any Vietnamese pretensions to all of Indochina would stymie talks and confirm Western and non communist Asian fears that the communists were indeed trying to advance further into Southeast Asia by way of Laos and Cambodia. And this is where Zhou Enlai began to rethink the reality of the Indochinese idea and its internationalist foundations. In a cable dated 30 May, Zhou Enlai reported that the Western powers were refusing categorically to recognize the "resistance governments" in Laos and Cambodia. The opponent's goal, he explained, was to break Cambodia and Laos off from Vietnam. Zhou added that the Western powers were not the only ones worried about communist support of the Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak. British

[25] On Indian, Indonesian and Burmese concerns about the Vietnamese intervention into Laos in 1953-54, see my 'The 'Two Vietnams' and the Advent of the Cold War', in Goscha and Ostermann (eds), *Connecting Histories,* forthcoming. The Vietnamese were indeed out to take all of Indochina as part of the Indochinese internationalist model described above. As Giap outlined the Central Committee's Indochinese-wide strategy for the upcoming General Counter-Offensive in early 1950: 'From a territorial point of view, our strategic goal is to retake all of Indochina. That means Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, from China to the Point of Camau and from the coast of Dong Nai to the Mekong [Laos] and the Dangrek Massif [Cambodia]'. See: Vo Nguyen Giap, *Nhiem vu quan su truoc mat chuyen sang Tong Phan Cong*, dated 1950, p. 37, original in box 10H5443, Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, France. The problem was that the US and even non communist Asian countries like India and Burma did not see things through this Indochinese prism. Even if the Vietnamese had no intention of going beyond Indochina, their movement into Laos and Cambodia was unacceptable to other Asian states who rejected the historical validity of an Indochinese geopolitical space, whether it be colonial or internationalist.

[26] *Dau Tranh*, p. 148.

and Indian diplomats had informed Zhou at Geneva that the "resistance government" forces in Cambodia were extremely small. They made it clear that the Vietnamese would have to agree to pull out of Laos and Cambodia in order for negotiations to go ahead.[27]

Zhou clearly understood that the US and the French were not the only ones opposed to Vietnamese efforts to legitimate the revolutionary governments of Laos and Cambodia. The Indians believed that the royal states of Laos and Cambodia were legitimate. As François Joyaux has shown, Indian opinion was particularly important to Zhou Enlai since his ability to neutralize Asia against the Americans depended on gaining the trust and support of neutralist states like India, Burma, and Indonesia. The success of Zhou peaceful coexistence depended in large part on gaining the support of Nehru, who had long been following the Indochina question.[28] India was the centrepiece of his policy of "co-existence" in non-communist Asia. While China shared non-communist Asia's opposition to Western colonialism, Zhou understood that he had to reassure these same states that the Chinese and Vietnamese were not engaged in the revolutionary internationalism of an expansionist kind. For India, Burma and Indonesia, the DRV was nationally legitimate, but its desire to create revolutionary governments of an Indochinese kind was not indicative of a neutral position. Like the West, non communist Asia rejected the Indochinese model. The Indian refusal to accept Vietnamese revolutionary governments in Laos and Cambodia clearly had an impact on him and on his decision to urge the Vietnamese to back off from their revolutionary conception of Indochina and, eventually, accept the reality and the legitimacy of the royal nation-states of Laos and Cambodia, committed to strict neutrality at the international level. By pushing the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Issarak, Zhou understood that he risked losing the support of key non communist Asian leaders, who feared that the Chinese and the Vietnamese were less than neutral themselves by trying to push communism beyond Vietnam …

This was, I think, a very important mental shift in Zhou Enlai's mind and the arguments he would make to the Vietnamese from this point. For the first time, Zhou understood that "Indochina" was a colonial invention. While he accepted the DRV's nationalist claim to all of Vietnam, the situation in Laos and Cambodia was different. The royal governments there were not necessarily illegitimate. In the 30 May cable**,** Zhou Enlai argued for the first time that the three countries in French Indochina were delimited in "very clear terms" by national borders, not Indochinese ones. Those borders, he added, had existed before the French created the colonial state and that the three countries in question also shared the view that three separate nation-states existed. By referring to history, Zhou had clearly come to the view that Indochina was a colonial invention. Significantly, he went on to argue that the "resistance governments" in Laos and Cambodia had a weak popular (national) base and were weak in revolutionary terms. While he did not say that they were Vietnamese internationalist creatures, he was clearly rethinking the validity of supporting a revolutionary idea of Indochina and leaning towards accepting the national legitimacy of monarchies in Laos and Cambodia. As he wrote:

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[27] 'Dien cua dong chi Chu An Lai, ngay 30 may 1954', excerpts in *Dau Tranh*, p. 142.

[28] Goscha, 'The 'Two Vietnams' and the Advent of the Cold War', in Goscha and Ostermann (eds), *Connecting Histories,* forthcoming.

> We must consider that there are three nations [not one Indochinese unit]. From the time of the dissolution of the ICP until now, there has not yet been established Parties in Cambodia and Laos. The number of cadres in those two countries is still limited. Armed forces (*luc luong vu trang*) in Cambodia add up to 3.000 and in Laos there are less than 2000. If a ceasefire is obtained, then it will be hard to leave Vietnamese troops in Cambodia and Laos, even though the Lao and Khmer people are on very good terms with the Vietnamese troops. Yet Laotian and Cambodian people nonetheless see it as the army of a foreign country. The influence of the two resistance governments is not great. In Cambodia, its influence is still very low. The majority of the Cambodian and Laotian people have a puppet government through legal means. Those puppet governments have been recognied by 50 countries.[29]

It would be interesting to how Vietnamese diplomats, intelligence services and policymakers processed these questions. For example, did DRV understand why the Indian, Indonesian, and Burmese were wary of the DRV's revolutionary intentions in Laos and Cambodia since 1950? Did DRV foreign policy makers understand how their internationalist line on the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Issarak could trouble Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian leaders wary of the DRV's intentions in Indochina? Or how the DRV Indochinese line could even jeopardize vital non-communist Asian support for the Vietnamese position? Did the Vietnamese understand that their own policy was not exactly neutral?

By putting themselves at the helm of an unprecedented Indochinese internationalist bloc in Southeast Asia in 1950 (see above), Vietnamese communists put themselves at odds with non-communist postcolonial Asian leaders who rejected such revolutionary pretensions to Laos and Cambodia. Consider the following. In April 1951, India's ambassador to China, K.M. Panikkar, met with Hoang Van Hoan – the DRV's first ambassador to China, a high ranking communist at the time and one of the very architects of the ICP's internationalist policy on Indochina in the late 1940s.[30] Hoang Van Hoan asked for the meeting because he wanted to know why non-communist Asian nations such as India had refused to recognize the DRV diplomatically. The choice seemed obvious to him: Anticolonialism united them. Panikkar recalls that he was happy to meet Hoan since "the growth of a new democratic state in Indo-China" had become "one of the major facts of Asian politics". He responded that India's view "has been one of strict neutrality". Significantly, Panikkar pressed Hoan on Vietnam's role in the internal affairs of Laos and Cambodia. Hoang Van Hoan assured the Indian Ambassador that there was no need to fear that they would push beyond Vietnam's national borders. As Panikkar later paraphrased Hoan's answer: the "Viet Minh's relations with the resistance movements in those countries were on an international basis, and that the movement which Ho Chi Minh headed was confined to Vietnam proper, i.e. Annam, Tonkin and the territories belonging to the old Empire".[31] Hoan had clearly chosen his words carefully; but he had nevertheless tried to mislead his Indian counterpart. Hoan knew perfectly well that his party was thinking in Indochinese terms; he was one of the

[29] 'Dien cua dong chi chu an lai ngay 30.5.1954', excerpts in *Dau Tranh*, note 1, pp. 142-143.
[30] For Hoang Van Hoan's role in the ICP's revolutionary activities in Laos and Cambodia from 1948 (see above), see my *Le contexte asiatique de la guerre franco-vietnamienne*, sections Laos and Cambodge and his memoirs, Hoang Van Hoan, *Giot Nuoc trong Bien Ca, Hoi Ky Cach Mang,* Beijing, 1988?
[31] K.M. Panikkar, *In Two Chinas: Memoirs of a Diplomat,* London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1955, pp. 141-142.

most important architects of the Indochinese internationalist line.[32] The Indians were not dupes, as we shall see. While Indian anticolonialists certainly admired the DRV heroic resistance against French colonialism, they were wary of Vietnamese revolutionary designs in Laos and Cambodia. The Indians considered the royal states of Laos and Cambodia be separate Nation-states, independent of both the French and the Vietnamese.[33] Juding from his response, Hoang Van Hoan seems to have understood that the Indians were worried about the extension of communism beyond Vietnam's national borders – into Laos and Cambodia.

If the Chinese had been hostile to Indian and Burmese neutrality in the early 1950s, things were different in 1954. Zhou understood that the question of accepting the existence of the two *neutral* royal governments in Laos and Cambodia was directly linked to his ability to secure "peaceful coexistence" with non-communist Asian neutralist states. And this in turn was essential to keeping the Americans out of the region. The questions of Laos and Cambodia had to be solved. On Cambodia, the Chinese side made the following suggestions:

> In Cambodia, because the balance of forces is so heavily weighted against us and because the political situation is so complicated, we realized that although we initially believed we could put forth the principle of readjusting [the boundaries between the two sides] in each individual area, in the end we found that we could only achieve a ceasefire in place. The two sides are trying to resolve the political problem by putting that problem under the control of the neutral nations (meaning that we would recognize the Cambodian and Laotian puppet governments and implement a few democratic policies, while our guerrilla base areas would form their own local governments).
>
> Our Soviet comrades believe that this is the correct way to resolve the problem. Our Vietnamese comrades also agree, but they say that they see problems in how this will be presented. We believe that it is only necessary to clearly spell out the basic plan, while as for exactly how this will be put forward, depending on the situation, we will study this issue and resolve it.[34]

Turning to Laos, he continued:

> As for Laos, the situation in Laos is not like the situation in Vietnam or Cambodia. We believe that we can use the liberated areas and the guerrilla base areas of Laos adjacent to China and Vietnam as the basis for a ceasefire in place and establish a border zone (we will concede the guerrilla area in western Laos). On the one hand we will recognize the puppets, while on the other we will maintain the independent character of the border zone.
>
> Our Soviet comrades basically agree with this plan. Our Vietnamese comrades, on the other hands, have presented the following ideas:

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[32] On Hoang Van Hoan's role in applying the internationalist line from the ICP's highly power Affairs Committee in Thailand, see *Le contexte asiatique de la guerre franco-vietnamienne,* section Laos and Cambodge.

[33] It would be very helpful to consult Hoang Van Hoan's report of his meeting with Panikaar to the DRV's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Did Hoan pick up on the nuances of Indian policy? What recommendations did he make? The question is worth asking because Hoang Van Hoan would accompany Ho Chi Minh to Liuzhou in early July 1954 where Zhou Enlai, arriving from Burma and India, would bring up this very question with the Vietnamese delegation led by Ho Chi Minh. Again, until the Vietnamese seriously open their historical documentation, we can only speculate about such matters.

[34] *Dau tranh*, p. 143, citing 'Dien cua dong chi Chu An Lai, ngay 30.5.1954'.

1/-On one hand we advocate preserving the resistance government and demanding the formation of a coalition government, but we are afraid that our opponents probably will not accept this, and our own cadre there are weak, so if a coalition government is formed it would be easy for the enemy to swallow up our side.

2/-On the one hand we do not oppose the formation of a border zone, but we are concerned about the following points:

a) We are worried that if a border zone is established and then the enemy, or the neutral countries controlling the area, see that the main force troops in the border zone are all Vietnamese troops, they will demand that we withdraw, and Vietnamese troops do not want to remain in Laos forever.

b) We are afraid that if the enemy attacks we will be defeated.

c) We are afraid that if we recognize the puppet government and then the enemy uses governmental orders and decrees to cause trouble, it will be hard to hold the border zone for very long.

d) We are afraid that the enemy will sabotage and absorb the area.

Therefore our Vietnamese comrades have not yet reached a clear-cut, final decision on this question.[35]

Working from Zhou Enlai's opinions, on 4 June, the DRV delegation cabled a report to the VWP Central Committee. In it, the delegation put its Indochina policy as follows

On the Laotian and Cambodian issues, generally speaking we are in agreement with Comrade Zhou Enlai. In the two countries of Cambodia and Laos we should try to achieve a ceasefire in place and adjust the boundaries between the two sides to establish individual areas of control.

In Laos, we should strive to form a relatively contiguous and integrated zone along the Vietnamese and Chinese borders, and a zone along the Vietnamese border in Central and Southern Laos. In Cambodia, we should strive to secure two large zones in the East and in the Southwest.

We recommend that during discussions on the questions of a ceasefire and areas where troops will be stationed, we strive to force the enemy to accept the following points:

-A ceasefire throughout all of Indochina.

-Foreign troops will be withdrawn from Indochina within a short period of time.

-After the ceasefire no additional troops or weapons may be sent into Indochina."

Looking back on it now, although "generally speaking" we agreed with China on a ceasefire in place in Laos and Cambodia, our requirements were different: we demanded that in both Laos and Cambodia there be two zones of control, while China

[35] 'Dien ngay 30 May 1954 cua dong chi Chu An Lai gui ve Trung Uong Trung Cong', *Dau Tranh*, note 1, pp. 143-44.

advocated a ceasefire in place in Cambodia and only the establishment of a border zone in Laos.

Because there was a difference of opinion with our delegation, Comrade Zhou Enlai tried to persuade us to follow China's recommendations and asked our Central Committee for further explanations.

Our Party's Central Committee replied as follows:

Laos:

a) Our opinion is to agree to a ceasefire in place and small readjustments in boundaries leading to the formation of a border zone government that is essentially independent.

b) When making the readjustments, we should strive to attain an area that is relatively contiguous in the provinces of Phongsaly, the Nam Hu River watershed, and Sam Neua. If it is possible, we would like to expand this into northern Houi-sai. We could offer our very large base area that lies between Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Xieng Khoang, or the area along Route 13 in Central Laos, in exchange for the border zone.

c) In addition to the above-mentioned relatively contiguous area in Northern Laos, we should strive to secure a zone along the Vietnamese border with Central and Southern Laos. This matter requires further study because at present in Central and Southern Laos there are places where the free [liberated] zone reaches almost to Route 13 (in Southern Laos, it even includes an area in Bat-xac west of the Mekong River), but along Routes 9 and 12 the enemy still controls a number of important points almost all the way out to the Vietnamese border."

Cambodia:

a) Our opinion is to agree to a ceasefire in place and to make small readjustments in boundaries leading to the formation of local governments.

b) At present our guerrilla bases and guerrilla zones in Cambodia are very dispersed and scattered – we have such bases and zones in the southeast, the southwest, the northwest, and the north. Therefore we need to strive to have a minimum amount of readjustments in order to withdraw our forces from the small, isolated zones and concentrate them in two relatively large zones, one in Eastern Cambodia (the rural area east of the Mekong River) and one in Southwestern Cambodia. That will give our local areas conditions that will allow them a better chance to consolidate and survive. If we leave the current situation, with individual small, scattered areas all over, many of these places will be swallowed up by the enemy.[36]

The neutralization of Laos and Cambodia quickly became key questions. On 12 June 1954, according to the Vietnamese, the French delivered a letter in which they said that five things had to be done in order for the French to pull out of the northern delta, one of which was that the DRV had to pull its armies out of Laos and Cambodia. The French let it be known that the British and the Americans considered this condition to be "a prerequisite" for going ahead. The French argued that Laos and Cambodia had to follow the Swiss model of neutrality. All foreign armies had to be withdrawn, and that meant the DRV's. In exchange, Laos and Cambodia would pledge not to allow any

[36] Cited in *Dau Tranh*, p. 145.

foreign country to set up bases in those two countries. According to Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affair's study, the Vietnamese delegation refused to accept this as a "prerequisite condition" for reaching an agreement at Geneva.[37]

Zhou Enlai, however, supported the idea of neutralizing the royal states of Laos and Cambodia as part of his larger strategy of neutralizing Asia. But to do so, Zhou would have to reconcile differences between the Chinese and the Vietnamese on this question. On 16 June1954, Zhou Enlai told Eden that he could persuade the DRV to pull its troops out of Laos and Cambodia. As François Joyaux points out, this implicitly meant that Zhou accepted that the Vietnamese troops were 'foreigners' and 'invaders' in Laos and Cambodia. The Chinese would no longer insist on the recognition sine qua non of Souphanouvong's Pathet Lao or Son Ngoc Minh's Khmer Issarak. Zhou also made it known that he was ready to consider the royal governments of Laos and Cambodia as the legitimate nation-states on the condition that they not allow foreign bases on their territory. In short, Laos and Cambodia had to be neutral.[38] On that same day, Tep Phan for Cambodia and Phoui Sanankinone for Laos delivered speeches in which they demanded that the DRV pull its troops out of Cambodia and Laos, respectively.

Following the Khmer and Lao speeches, Zhou Enlai made a new proposal in six points, two of which were designed to "deinternationalize" Indochina: 1) a distinction had to be made between "local forces" and those of "foreign forces" which referred both to French and DRV troops and 2) China was ready to accept that Laos and Cambodia could import, after the cease fire, arms necessary for their defence, but on the condition that neither country allow the creation of foreign military bases on their territories.[39] The DRV and the USSR supported this proposal[40], as did the French, British and the Royal governments in Laos and Cambodia. While the Ministry of Foreign Affair's internal study of this question does not go into details, Pham Van Dong accepted that the questions of Laos and Cambodia were not the same as those of Vietnam. This was a major concession. In a vain, though revealing attempt to prop up the "resistance governments" against their myriad of detractors, Pham Van Dong adopted an aggressive tone. The Pathet Lao and the Khmer Issarak were not, he insisted, Vietnamese creations but legitimate national states:

> La logique des faits exige que l'on reconnaisse les mouvements de libération dans ces deux pays et elle refute les affirmations tendancieuses de ceux qui voudraient les expliquer par une influence extérieure. La délégation du Viet Minh salue avec sympathie et respect ces mouvements de libération, produits d'une oppression féroce, issus des profondeurs du peuple et qu'il est impossible de créer artificiellement et de l'extérieur.[41]

The Vietnamese were backpeddling from their internationalist line on Indochina. While Pham Van Dong most certainly believed in what he was saying, he also knew that the Vietnamese had played the key role in creating both governments in the late 1940s. Like Hoang Van Hoan, he had himself had been involved in that very process as head of Inter Zone 5 in the late 1940s, located at the intersection of central Vietnam, southern

[37] *Dau Tranh*, p. 150.
[38] Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indohcine,* p. 227.
[39] *Dau Tranh*, p. 151 and Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indohcine,* p. 228.
[40] *Dau Tranh*, p. 151.
[41] Cited by Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine*, p. 229.

Laos and north-eastern Cambodia.[42] While it is unclear to whom Pham Van Dong was addressing his heated defence of the "resistance governments", it is clear that the Vietnamese and the Chinese had a different understanding of revolutionary Indochina from this point.

The 17th of June was a key date in forcing the Vietnamese to withdraw further from their idea of Indochina. In a clear effort to prepare for his upcoming trip to India and Burma, Zhou Enlai understood that the neutralization of the royal governments in Laos and Cambodia was essential to his wider effort to neutralize non communist Asia against the Americans, as described above. Zhou understood that gaining the support of India, Burma, and Indonesia meant reassuring them that Laos and Cambodia would be neutral, that internationalism only reached as far as Vietnam. On 17 June, Zhou announced that

> Nous voulons voir ces deux Etats devenir des pays démocratiques et pacifiques, *à l'instar des nouveaux pays du Sud-Est asiatique tels que l'Indonésie, la Birmanie ou l'Inde.* Qu'ils fassent partie, s'ils le désirent, de l'Union française, et qu'ils coexistent en paix avec tous les pays […]. Mais nous ne voulons pas voir le Laos et le Cambodge devenir des bases militaires américaines […] Ce serait une menace pour la sécurité de la Chine.[43]

The linkage was clear and crucial, as we shall see below.

Zhou went on to state that Vietnamese troops who had been in Laos and Cambodia in light of the Indochinese wide war with the French would be pulled out. Pham Van Dong agreed that "Il y a eu des volontaires du Viet Minh dans ces deux pays. Ils ont été rétirés. Si'll en existe encore, ils seront également retirées ». After this meeting, on 18 June Comrade Pham Van Dong sent the following cabled report back home to the Central Committee:

> The Chinese delegation has presented a proposal that contains a number of concessions, such as acknowledging that there are dissimilarities between the Laotian and Cambodian problems and the Vietnam problem and that there are dissimilarity between Laotian problem and the Cambodian problems as well, and the position that all foreign troops would be withdrawn from Laos and Cambodia (the proposal means that if our troops are present they too will have to be withdrawn).

> Zhou Enlai's 17 June cable contained the following line defending this action, according to the *Dau Tranh* study:

> The above-mentioned concessions on the issue of solving the Cambodian and Laotian problems are based on a formula that has been discussed by the three delegations – Chinese, Soviet, and Vietnamese – and that has been approved by the Central Committee.[44]

That same day Mendès France became Prime Minister and announced that he would resign if a solution to the Indochinese problem were not reached within a month. While the Vietnamese may have been pressured, they agreed with Zhou's actions. Pham

[42] See Goscha, *Le contexte asiatique de la guerre franco-vietnamienne*, section Laos.
[43] Cited by Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine*, p. 231. *My emphasis.*
[44] *Dau Tranh*, p. 151, citing the cable of Pham Van Dong.

Van Dong reported to the Party Central Committee that Zhou Enlai had written in a cable dated 17 June 1954 that "Su nhuong bo noi tren ve viec giai quyet van de mien lao la theo Phuong cham cua ba doan dai bieu Trung Xo Viet ban dinh va da duoc Truong Uong chuan y".[45]

On 20 June, as the negotiations moved on, Zhou crossed an important line when he decided to meet with representatives of the royal governments of Laos and Cambodia. The meeting with Tep Phan, the Cambodian delegate to the conference, was particularly important. The latter told Zhou that the Cambodian delegation wanted to stress "very strongly" that it had achieved its independence peacefully, without shedding blood, via negotiations with the French. Cambodia, he insisted, was a fully independent, legitimate nation-state. He added that the "Vietnamese want to replace the French in dominating Cambodia". But Tep Phan also assured Zhou that Cambodia would not sign treaties with USA, or allow foreign bases to be built on Cambodia soil.[46] This was what Zhou Enlai wanted to hear. It meant that a royal Cambodian state could become part of a wider neutralized Asia, together with India, Indonesia and Burma.

The Chinese continued to "deinternationalize" Vietnamese policy by bringing Pham Van Dong to meet with the representatives of the very royal governments his own government, Party and army had been trying to overthrow for years. Thanks to Zhou Enlai, Pham Van Dong would meet with Tep Phan on 22 and 24 June and with Phoui Sananikone on 23 June. Zhou Enlai informed Mendès France that the DRV was now ready to recognize the independence and the unity of the royal governments in Laos and Cambodia. An important obstacle seemed to have been surmounted. In a cable sent to the Central Committee on 24 June, Comrade Pham Van Dong reported that

> The representative of the Kingdom of Laos agrees that Souvana Phouma will meet with Souphanavouvong. He agreed to hold a meeting in Geneva of the military representatives of the two sides to discuss issue related to a ceasefire in Laos, including the issue of dividing the troop concentration [regroupment] areas of the local armies and the withdrawal of foreign forces. This meeting will include, on one side, our people and the representative of the Lao Liberation Army's High Command, and on the other side the military representatives of France and the Lao puppets. This meeting will be held immediately.
>
> … The results of the discussions with the Cambodian puppet representatives were not as successful as the discussions with the Lao puppet representatives. However, in comparison with his attitude during the conference, their attitude has improved somewhat. The first time they agreed to send a military representative to hold discussions with our representatives in Geneva. … Our opponents are very recalcitrant. They refuse to admit the existence of a Cambodian resistance movement and they do not want to hold discussions with the representative of the Cambodian resistance …
>
> In summary, our direct discussions with both the Laotian and the Cambodian puppet representatives have made some initial progress, but the discussions with the Lao puppet representative were more successful …[47]

[45] *Dau Tranh*, p. 152 citing Pham Van Dong's report in which he cites Zhou's cable.
[46] *Dau Tranh*, p. 153.
[47] *Dau Tranh*, p. 155, citing 'Dien bao cao ngay 24 June 1954 cua Pham Van Dong'.

If the Vietnamese had made a major concession in talking to the representatives of the royal governments of Laos and Cambodia, they remained adamant in their attempts to bring the Khmer Issarak and Pathet Lao into the picture in other ways. On 24 June 1954, military meetings began on Laos, during which the DRV requested that the Pathet Lao be allowed to participate. The French and the Lao Royal government refused. On 28 June, the DRV's representative Ta Quang Buu said that the Pathet Lao forces were in control of over half of Laos in the east and much of the Bolovens highlands, and thus deserved a role in the talks.[48] The French refused. Not to be stopped, Ta Quang Buu asked in a meeting on 3 July that the Pathet Lao should be given a regrouping zone in eastern Laos stretching from the Chinese border in the north to the Cambodian one in the south. The French refused yet again.[49] On 6 July, one of the DRV's big guns stepped in, Ha Van Lau. He explained that the Pathet Lao controlled about half of Laos.[50] Within that area he said, two provinces were completely liberated by the Pathet Lao, those of Sam Neau and Phongsaly and about another half of all the northern provinces of Laos. The French and Royal government controlled one third of the country and the rest was contested between the two sides.[51] While the talks would stall given these major differences between the two sides, it was clear that the Vietnamese were positioning to obtain regrouping zones for the Pathet Lao in areas along the Chinese and Vietnamese borders.[52]

The Vietnamese hand was much weaker in Cambodia than in Laos given the harder line of the Cambodian royal government and the weaker position of the Vietnamese in Cambodia going into Geneva.[53] In the meetings between Ta Quang Buu and Nhiek Tioulong, the latter refused outright to let the DRV represent the Cambodian resistance government or even to talk about the reality of the Khmer Issarak.[54] The questions of Laos and Cambodia were clearly still posing problems in Zhou's absence.

The Liuzhou Meeting between Zhou Enlai and Ho Chi Minh (3-5 July 1954)

Zhou Enlai's meeting with Nehru in New Delhi between 25 and 27 June 1954 is directly connected to our discussion of the deinternationalization of communist Vietnam's conception of Indochina. The linkage between the neutralization of royal Laotian and Cambodian governments on the one hand and the emergence of a neutralized zone of non-commuinist Asian countries on the other was established in clear terms during the Nehru-Zhou meetings. The crucial connection was confirmed on 25 June 1954 during the first of five sessions held between the two men. Both agreed that the situation in Laos and Cambodia was not the same as those dividing Vietnam. When Nehru tested Zhou on the difference between Vietnam on the one hand and Laos and Cambodia on the other, the Chinese diplomat immediately reassured his Indian counterpart that he saw things in the same way:

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[48] *Dau Tranh*, p. 156.
[49] *Dau Tranh*, p. 156.
[50] It would be more accurate to say that the DRV controlled large parts of eastern Laos.
[51] *Dau Tranh*, p. 156 and Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine*, p. 275 for confirmation from French sources.
[52] Because of space limitations here, I cannot go into the details surrounding the carving out of regroupment zones for the Pathet Lao in Phongsaly and Sam Neau.
[53] Goscha, 'La guerre *pour* l'Indochine', pp. 29-58
[54] *Dau Tranh*, pp. 156-57.

> JN : The positions are different. If there is trouble and conflict in Laos and Cambodia, that is a disturbing factor in other countries of South-East Asia … [in original]. A peaceful settlement of Laos and Cambodia would produce a climate of peace for larger areas.
>
> Chou En-lai: Yes, Your Excellency has said that these two countries should have neutral states. That is exactly what I said. They should become States of the South-East Asian type. Then they would enable the peaceful forces in Sout-East Asia to strengthen. It would strengthen peace and avoid internal conflicts and external pressure.
>
> JN: Your Excellency considers these two countires as those of South-East Asia, which you consider to be neutral and peaceful and you would like Laos and Cambodia to become part of South-East Asia – neutral and peaceful.
>
> Chou En-lai: Yes, that is true.
>
> JN: I am sure that will have a wider influence for peace in South-East Asia and in other countries also, particularly in Burma and Indonesia, the two chief countries in South-East Asia.[55]

Zhou reassured Nehru of China's peaceful intentions in the region and both men expressed their desire to see Laos and Cambodia remain neutral so as to transform them into "a bridge for peace".[56] The Chinese were clearly not the only ones to pressure Vietnamese communists to let go of Laos and Cambodia. Non-communist Asia – above all India, Burma and Indonesia – were behind Zhou Enlai's policy at Geneva. In fact, they had gone a long way to convincing Zhou himself of the importance of this point.[57] And implicitly it suggests that the Indians, Indonesians and Burmese did not quite see the communist DRV as a part of this "South-East Asie type", to borrow Zhou Enlai's terminology.[58]

After meeting with Nehru and then U Nu, Zhou Enlai returned to China where he held a crucial meeting with Ho Chi Minh, Vo Nguyen Giap and Hoang Van Hoan. This exchange occurred between 3 and 5 July in the southern Chinese city of Liuzhou. Thanks to recent research using Chinese sources, we now know a good deal about what was said

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[55] Conversation with Chou En-lai I, Record of the first session, 3.30 pm to 6.15 pm, 25 June 1954, V.K. Krishna Menon Papers, NMML, Extracts, in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, volume Twenty Six (1 June 1954 – 30 September 1954), New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 371. T.N. Kaul, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs kept the minutes of this meeting. He confirms the importance of neutralizing Laos and Cambodia in this meeting. See T.N. Kaul, *My Years through Raj to Swaraj*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1995, pp. 110-111. See also Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine* and Gilles Boquérat, 'India's Commitment to Peaceful Coexistence and the Settlement of the Indochina War', p. 223.

[56] Zhou Enlai in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, (1 June 1954 – 30 September 1954), p. 372.

[57] Also see François Joyaux's excellent analysis of India's role in the Geneva conference and position on Laos and Cambodia and the recent article of Gilles Boquérat, 'India's Commitment to Peaceful Coexistence', p. 222, suggesting that Krishna Menon "strove to ovnince Molotov that the Vietminh's refusal to withdraw from Laos and Cambodia could jeopardize the Soviet Union's friendhisp with the independent nations of Southern Asia".

[58] See my 'The 'Two Vietnams' and the Advent of the Cold War', in Goscha and Ostermann (eds), *Connecting Histories,* forthcoming. The Indochinse fault-line dividing South and Southeast Asia was evident in the Indian, Burmese and Indonesian positions towards the "Indochinese" question between 1950 and 1954. This help throw light on later periods in the history of international relations in the region. See Amitav Acharya, *The Quest for Identity: International Relations of Southeast Asia,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, chapter 4. "South-East Asia", as used by Nehru and Zhou Enlai here, included "South Asia".

during this crucial meeting.[59] The Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' internal study only mentions that to that point the Chinese and Vietnamese points of view "on the problem of Laos and Cambodia were not yet unified".[60] According to Chinese sources, Zhou asked the Vietnamese about the military situation and the prospects for winning before discussing with his Vietnamese counterparts the international consequences of continued war, especially in terms of its effects on Southeast Asia. According to Qiang Zhai's recent work, Zhou Enlai admitted that he did not really know the real revolutionary situation in Laos and Cambodia. Significantly, however, he explained to his Vietnamese counterparts that he finally understood that "Indochina" was not a nation but rather a colonial state which had been decolonized into three "national states". Zhou was clearly determined to get the Vietnamese to roll back their internationalist model of Indochina

> Indochina consists of three countries. But in the past we thought there was only one country there … In fact, all three countries are national states. They have remained this way for the past several thousand years. We had not realized this until we arrived in Geneva.[61]

This statement would tend to corroborate our argument that Zhou Enlai actually revised his conception of Southeast Asian geopolitical borders during the Geneva Conference by replacing "Indochina" with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. This argument was clearly linked to his conversation with Nehru and their agreement to neutralize the royal Laotian and Cambodian governments against all foreign intervention, coming from either bloc. While Zhou Enlai accepted that Indochina had been one battlefield during the war against the French, he had come to the conclusion by Liuzhou that "Indochina" was not a viable Nation-state, nor a viable internationalist model for the communist bloc to advocate.

Again, this was linked to his desire to neutralize the royal governments of Laos and Cambodia, reassure India, Burma and Indonesia of the peaceful intentions of the communists in the Southeast Asian region, and thereby gain the trust of a non-communist neutralized Asian region in order to keep the US at bay. The US was already moving on creating a South East Asia Treaty Organization. In India, Zhou and Nehru had put forth five principles of peaceful co-existence. Deinternationalizing the communist geopolitical perception of "Indochina" was thus a litmus test for making "neutralization" work. If the DRV recognized and accepted neutral, non communist governments in Laos and Cambodia, countries like India, Burma and Indonesia would be willing to support the DRV's national case. To make this work, Zhou Enlai had to show the Indians and the Burmese that the Chinese and Vietnamese "internationalists" accepted to recognize the legitimacy and the neutrality of the royal governments in Laos and Cambodia. This was most certainly not the only thing discussed at Liuzhou[62], but it was one of the most important and was at the heart of salvaging the negotiations. What Zhou was arguing to the Vietnamese in early July 1954 was similar to what the Indians, Indonesians and

[59] See Qiang Zhai, *China & the Vietnam War*, pp. 58-60.
[60] *Dau Tranh*, p. 146. "Ta va Trung-quoc chua thong nhat duoc ve chu truong ve van de Lao va Mien".
[61] Qiang Zhai, *China & the Vietnam War*, p. 59.
[62] A divisive point was the line of demarcation for dividing Vietnam. This could not be agreed upon at Liuzhou. See *Dau Tranh*, p. 128, citing the minutes of the Liuzhou meeting.

Burmese had been intimating to them since 1950 (see Panikaar's conversation with Hoang Van Hoan above).[63]

Ho Chi Minh apparently signed on to Zhou's policy of peaceful co-existence in non-communist Asia and its linkage to recognizing neutral royal states in Laos and Cambodia. As Zhou reported to the Chinese government in August 1954 on the Liuzhou meeting, Ho "exprima l'opinion que les cinq principes (de co existence) étaient entièrement applicables pour la consolidation et le développement de relations amicales entre le Vietnam, le Laos et le Cambodge".[64] Zhou meant the royal governments of Laos and Cambodia. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affair's internal study, the Vietnamese and Chinese sides were eventually able "to be united on the policy for Laos and Cambodia".[65] The Vietnamese party informed Pham Van Dong of the conclusions reached at the Liuzhou meeting in a directive called the "July 5th Document". Based on the agreement reached with Zhou Enlai at Liuzhou, Pham Van Dong was ordered to move towards reaching an agreement. This meant dividing Vietnam at the 16th parallel, designating Sam Neau and Phong Saly as groupment zones for the Pathet Lao and reaching a political solution for Cambodia.[66] Zhou returned to Geneva on 12 July and immediately went to work to reach an agreement. According to Qiang Zhai, Pham Van Dong remained unwilling to make real concessions. Ho Chi Minh even had to cable him on 15 July to direct him to move towards an agreement as outlined in the "July 5th document". This time Pham Van Dong obeyed.[67] Time, however, was increasingly short. Mendès France's deadline for making a deal was rapidly approaching.

While the 1976 internal study does mention a "July 5th Document", it does reveal that Ho Chi Minh (using the alias Dinh) prepared and sent instructions to the delegation in Geneva entitled "The Issue of Plans and the Geneva Talks." He instructed the DRV delegation in Geneva to move ahead quickly to reach an agreement on the demarcation line (16th parallel), elections, and ceasefires in all three countries:

> In view of France's positive attitude, we must take the initiative to secure a cessation of hostilities in the three countries of Indochina, leading to an agreement on, first of all, the issue of division of areas of control in Vietnam, second, the issue of designating regroupment areas for the resistance army in Laos; and general issues regarding the ceasefire in Cambodia. We must strive to reach an agreement. We must use the formula of being positive, aggressive, and pushing an agreement. We must not

[63] See: Goscha, 'The 'Two Vietnams' and the Advent of the Cold War', in Goscha and Ostermann (eds), *Connecting Histories*, forthcoming. Again, were Vietnamese diplomats and analysts aware that Vietnamese internationalists claims to western Indochina caused a problem for non-communist Asia or that Nehru and U Nu attached a great deal of importance to delinking Laos and Cambodia from Vietnam's revolutionary vision of Indochina? It is hard to believe that Vietnamese diplomats missed the bigger Asian picture, given the efforts undertaken by the DRV to gain diplomatic recognition from non-communist Asia in 1950-51. Again, what did Hoang Van Hoan report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Party following his meeting with Panikkar in Beijing in 1951? Did Hoang Van Hoan provide such an analysis for the Party and Ho in preparation for the talks at Liuzhou? Writing in the 1990s, one former member of the Vietnamese delegation to Geneva in 1954 wrote in his memoirs that Zhou Enlai's five principles of co-existence and his concomitant promise "not to export revolution" meant for the Vietnamese communists that they could "not bring Marxism-Leninism from Vietnam to Laos and Cambodia". *Hoi Nghi Genève nam 1954,* p. 16. According to this Vietnamese diplomat, Krishna Menon, Nehru's lead diplomat in negotiations with the Chinese over Tibet and at Geneva, convinced Zhou of the importance of separating the Vietnamese question from that of Laos and Cambodia. *Ibid*., p. 16.

[64] Cited by Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine*, pp. 262-263.

[65] *Dau Tranh*, p. 146.

[66] Qiang Zhai, *China & the Vietnam Wars*, p. 60.

[67] Qiang Zhai, *China & the Vietnam Wars,* p. 62.

be passive, sitting back to wait. We must take the initiative by putting forward our plan …[68]

In a cable sent from the Chinese presumably to the DRV, dated 20 July, we learn that these were the concrete measures agreed upon for Laos and Cambodia on the eve of the signing of the accord:

In Cambodia:

-A ceasefire simultaneous with the ceasefires in Vietnam and Laos.

-Withdrawal of foreign troops and military personnel.

-Cambodian resistance troops will regroup locally in the places where they are located at the time of the ceasefire. Negotiations will be held between the Royal Cambodian Government and representatives of the resistance to resolve what to do with the resistance troops in accordance with their aspirations – to be integrated into the national army, to become a local police force, or to be assigned to work with the various governmental agencies.

-No foreign military bases or military alliances.

-Recognize the Royal Government and demand that representatives of the resistance be appointed to serve as province or district chiefs. There is little chance that this demand will be accepted.

-Demand the promulgation of democratic freedoms. Prepare for the public formation of the Cambodian Workers Party.

-Hold general elections within one year and amend the constitution.[69]

This same Chinese cable reveals that during the Conference's third session, the Vietnamese, Chinese, and Soviet delegations held discussions and laid out the following final plans for the regroupment zone [troop concentration zone] for the resistance army in Laos:

a) Initially, fight hard to demand the formation of a regroupment zone made up of two provinces, Phongsaly and Sam Neua, in northeastern Laos.

b) If no agreement can be reached on plan (a) above, then put forward a plan for two regroupment zones. In this plan the regroupment zone in the northeast must be large, while the regroupment zone in the south may be smaller.

c) If no agreement can be reached on either of these two plans, then we can agree to 11 regroupment points in northern and southern Laos.

However, until the political questions are resolved, the Royal Lao Army will not be permitted to enter the above-mentioned regroupment zones**.**[70]

[68] Excerpts cited in *Dau Tranh*, p. 119.

[69] *Dau Tranh*, p. 148, citing 'Trich dien so 42 ngay 20.7.1954 cua Trung Quo[c]' [Excerpts from the telegram no. 42 dated 20 July 1954 from the Chinese].

This was approved on 20 July the day before the accords were signed.[71]

The situation in Cambodia was less favourable to the DRV. As is well known, the last minute declaration of Sam Sary, the "personal delegate of His Majesty the King", that Cambodia reserved the right to allow foreign governments, even the US, to establish military bases in Cambodia, almost derailed the signing of the accords. The Cambodian request was accepted by Molotov, as well as extended to Laos, but significantly Zhou Enlai was not present during these eleventh hour negotiations over a point which had been at the heart of Zhou's very grand strategy.[72] On Cambodia, the DRV had to agree that there would be no regrouping zones for the "Khmer Issarak", it would be integrated into the royal government.[73]

IV. Putting the Internationalist Model on Hold?

The Geneva accords effectively rolled back the Vietnamese internationalist vision of Indochina. What was left of it was regrouped in Phongsaly and Sam Neua for the Pathet Lao, while the Khmer Issarak was transferred to northern Vietnam, faded away, went home or joined ranks with a new group of Cambodian communists happy to take over from the Vietnamese along increasingly nationalist lines.

The Geneva accords obviously had major implications for the nature of the VWP's foreign policy and its activities in Laos and Cambodia in the future. The meeting between Ho and Zhou in Liuzhou had been crucial to breaking the deadlock in Geneva and allowed for important concessions to be made on Laos and Cambodia (and the demarcation line for a divided Vietnam). But such a major accord and change in Vietnamese policy needed the approval of the VWP. On 18 July 1954, during the Party's 6th Plenum, the general secretary Truong Chinh took up the issue of the party's policy on Laos and Cambodia in the present and with an eye on the future. He pointed out that there were three main tasks that had to be carried out in order to "develop friendship and mutual help among the Vietnamese, Lao and Cambodian people": 1) create revolutionary parties of the working and people's classes in Laos and Cambodia; 2) consolidate and widen the united fronts there; 3) make efforts to create cadres there.[74] As the Vietnamese prepared to sign the Geneva accords, Truong Chinh explained the Party's new policy on Laos and Cambodia as follows:

> Laos and Cambodia are two fraternal neighboring countries. Our policy toward the Lao and Cambodian peoples is to maintain solidarity with them and to help them.
>
> Since the Sam Neua Campaign was conducted, the situation in Laos has changed a great deal. The liberation of Sam Neua and Phongsaly had provided the Lao Revolution with a relatively large base area whose rear is protected by the Vietnamese and Chinese borders. During the Winter-Spring Campaign, the Laotian Liberated Zone was expanded to include almost half of the country. However, the liberated zone in Laos is in sparsely populated mountain jungle areas with little agriculture and few roads and lines of communications.

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[70] *Dau Tranh*, p. 148, citing 'Trich dien so 42 ngay 20.7.1954 cua Trung Quo[c]'.
[71] *Dau Tranh*, p. 148, citing 'Trich dien so 42 ngay 20.7.1954 cua Trung Quo[c]'.
[72] Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine,* pp. 292-293.
[73] *Dau Tranh*, p. 159.
[74] *Dau Tranh*, p. 162, citing the speech of Truong Chinh to the VWP's 6th plenum.

> Because the situation changed so rapidly, the Lao resistance has run into new problems, problems of growth and expansion:
>
> a) The liberated zone had grown, but there is a tremendous shortage of Lao cadre, so there are not enough cadre to conduct propaganda, to organize the masses, and to form people's governments in the newly liberated areas.
>
> b) The Laotian armed forces are small, but the newly liberated area is large and guerrilla warfare has not yet developed. For a long time, most of the combat responsibilities have been shouldered by Vietnamese volunteer troops.
>
> c) The Laotian revolution has a United National Front and a resistance government led by Prime Minister Souphanouvong, but the former members of the Indochinese Communist Party in Laos have not yet been reorganized into a people's political party to lead the people and to appeal to the people to struggle in accordance of an overall revolutionary program.
>
> In summary, the successes of the Lao Revolution are rather substantial, but the true strength of the Lao resistance is still low. That is a major shortcoming of the Laotian revolution.[75]

Cambodia was different, Truong Chinh continued. Though the revolutionary level was slightly better than in Laos, the resistance there was weaker. There was no real Cambodia communist party to speak of since the dissolution of the ICP in 1951.[76] In spite of 8 years of Vietnamese assistance, resistance forces in Laos and Cambodia "are still weaker than the forces of the puppet enemies".[77]

> As for the Cambodian situation, Cambodia's military forces are still small. There are only a limited number of Vietnamese volunteer troops in Cambodia. Although there are a large number of resistance bases in Cambodia, most of them are in mountain jungle areas that are only sparsely populated and have little agriculture.
>
> [The level of revolutionary consciousness and organization of the Cambodian people is a bit higher than that of the Laotian people][78]. The Cambodian people have the Cambodian Issarak National United Front and Son Ngoc Minh's resistance government. There are more former members of the Indochinese Communist Party in Cambodia than there are in Laos. However, Cambodia, like Laos, does not have a revolutionary party to lead and appeal to the people to struggle in accordance with an overall revolutionary program.
>
> For that reason, although they have fought a resistance war for eight years and although the Democratic Republic of Vietnam has given them our whole-hearted

[75] *Dau Tranh*, p. 160, citing Truong Chinh's address to the 6th Plenum. It is also reproduced in 'Bao Cao tai Hoi Nghi lan thu Sau cua Ban Chap Hanh Trung Uong Dang (khoa II)', dated 15 July 1954, *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap, 15, 1954*, Hanoi, Nha Xuat Ban Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2001, pp. 210-211.
[76] *Dau Tranh*, p. 160.
[77] *Dau Tranh*, p. 161.
[78] This entire sentence is censured from the 2001 *Van Kien* edition. The only clue left behind are the "…". 'Bao Cao tai Hoi Nghi lan thu Sau cua Ban Chap Hanh Trung Uong Dang (khoa II)', dated 15 July 1954, p. 211, beginning of 6 paragraph.

> support and assistance, the resistance forces of Laos and Cambodia are still weaker than the forces of their puppet enemies.[79]

From a security standpoint, however, the stakes were enormous for the Vietnamese. They did not need the Chinese to point out the threat represented by the Americans. This was indeed one of the reasons why the Vietnamese wanted to hold on to their forces in Laos and Cambodia. Indeed, the Vietnamese feared that by pulling out of these two countries, they would be in a weaker position to defend Vietnam in the event that the US moved into to Laos and Cambodia in a bid to isolate the DRV. In Truong Chinh's analysis, the Americans and the "warmongering faction" in France wanted to break Laos and Cambodia off from Vietnam in order to turn those two countries into strategic bases, stepping stones for attacking and occupying Vietnam.[80] The Vietnamese, Truong Chinh said, would sign the Geneva accords, but they nonetheless had to be prepared to take action to protect themselves and their "revolutionary" clients in the event that the Americans intervene

> The American imperialists are now blatantly intervening against the Cambodian and Lao revolutions. They are encouraging the Thai militarists to look for every opportunity to intervene militarily in those two countries. The scheme of the American imperialists and the French warmongers is to separate the problems of Laos and Cambodia from the Vietnam problem, and then if France signs an armistice with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam the war will continue in Laos and Cambodia in order to give the United States a chance to turn these two countries into strategic bases for the Americans and the French warmongers that they can use as a springboard from which to attack and reoccupy Vietnam once again.
>
> Faced with this situation, we need to maintain solidarity with the Lao and Cambodian peoples by struggling to demand the restoration of peace throughout all of Indochina on the basis of respect for the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of all three nations. If peace is restored in one of the nations of the Indochina Peninsula but the other two nations still do not enjoy peace, then the peace of the one nation will not be guaranteed.
>
> However, if we want to restore peace in Cambodia and Laos, we must find an appropriate solution that is beneficial for the people's of the two countries and for the peace and security of the nations of Southeast Asia, a solution that it will be impossible for the Mendes France government to refuse to accept. This solution must guarantee to the peoples of the two countries the <u>rights of freedom, independence, and unity to the extent that is necessary and to the extent that conditions will permit</u>. [Emphasis in the original text]
>
> We must explain to the Lao and Cambodian peoples that this solution is rational and essential in order to achieve a ceasefire in the two countries and that this is being done first of all for the sake of the current and long-term best interests of the people's of the two countries, and not for the interests of Vietnam alone or for the sake of the peace-loving peoples of the world.
>
> However, in Laos and Cambodia, as in Vietnam, it is possible that there will be a ceasefire, but it is also possible that the war will continue. Even if there is a ceasefire,

[79] *Dau Tranh*, p. 161, citing Truong Chinh and 'Bao Cao tai Hoi Nghi lan thu Sau cua Ban Chap Hanh Trung Uong Dang (khoa II)', dated 15 July 1954, p. 211.
[80] *Dau Tranh*, p. 161.

> peace in Indochina will still not yet be definitely guaranteed. If the peoples of these two countries want to secure true, permanent independence, unity, democracy, and peace, they must conduct a further protracted, long-term, arduous struggle. In order to do that, they must have powerful forces and they must constantly strengthen and nourish the victorious elements and factors of the resolutions of these two countries. For that reason, we must help the peoples of these two countries carry out the following primary tasks:
>
> a) Form revolutionary parties of the Lao and Cambodian workers and laboring peoples classes.
>
> b) Consolidate and expand their United National Fronts.
>
> c) Work to train additional cadre.
>
> If we accomplish these tasks properly, then, whether there is peace or continued warfare, the peoples of these two countries will be benefited.[81]

As this internal study summed up the implications of the new Vietnamese line on Laos and Cambodia: "Our success in obtaining the two provinces in Laos opened up a new posture and strength for the Lao revolution (although it later encountered difficulties), but the settlement in Cambodia caused many immediate difficulties for Cambodian revolutionary forces."[82] The creation of two regroupment zones in Phongsaly and Samneua saved the Pathet Lao from extinction and provided the Vietnamese a security check once the Americans started pushing too hard in Laos in the late 1950s. As the Politburo summed it up nicely on the need to support the Lao revolution in these two zones:

> … No matter how the situation develops [in Laos], we must use all effort to strengthen the task of consolidating the two provinces [of Phongsaly and Samneua], building the army, building the people's foundation and pushing forward the political struggle everywhere, all over the country, especially in regions from which our army has recently withdrawn.[83]

In many ways, Geneva was a crucial victory for the survival and coming into being of the Pathet Lao nation-state.[84]

Conclusion: Beyond "sell-outs" and "victims"

In the end, I think the Vietnamese put their conception of Indochina on hold in July 1954 because they ***agreed*** with Zhou Enlai that it was essential to neutralizing Southeast Asia in order to prevent direct American intervention in Indochina. And the Chinese were not the only ones asking the Vietnaemse to give up their revolutionary

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[81] *Dau Tranh*, p. 161 and 'Bao Cao tai Hoi Nghi lan thu Sau cua Ban Chap Hanh Trung Uong Dang (khoa II)', dated 15 July 1954, pp. 212-213.
[82] *Dau Tranh*, p. 222.
[83] Christopher E. Goscha, 'Vietnam and the World Outside: The Case of Vietnamese Communist Advisors in Laos (1948-1962)', *South East Asian Research,* volume 12, no. 2, (2004), pp. 141-185 and to appear in translation in the forthcoming issue of the *CWIHP Bulletin*.
[84] See the astute analysis of Paul F. Langer and Joseph J. Zasloff, *North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao: Partners in the Struggle for Laos,* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1970, pp. 58-59.

vision of Indochina. Non-communist, neutralist Asian leaders in India, Indonesia and Burma were equally opposed to the DRV's conception of a Vietnamese-dominated Indochinese space.

Moreover, the Vietnamese communists shared the Chinese desire to prevent the Americans from intervening directly in Southeast Asia via Vietnam. Not only would the Americans threaten Chinese security, but they would also threaten that of the Vietnamese people who had been fighting 9 years of war already. The Vietnamese people were tired of war in 1954 and the Vietnamese army, heroic though it most certainly was, had won a battle but not a war. During the all important 6th plenum held between 15 and 18 July 1954, Truong Chinh provided more details as to the Party's justification for the signing of the Geneva Accords and its reasoning for *not* continuing the war. Extracts from this document deserve to be cited at length here. As Truong Chinh explained the current situation and the policy to adopt:

> The more we fight, the stronger we grow, while the more the enemy fights, the weaker he becomes. After the Dien Bien Phu Campaign the balance of forces shifted toward our side. However, this change was not a fundamental shift in the balance of forces. On a certain, specific battlefield, or in some specific area, we are stronger than the enemy, but generally speaking, nationwide, our strength and the enemy's strength are about the same.
>
> The Indochina War has caused a clear split in the French ruling class: The pro-war faction wants to rely on the U.S. to continue the war and fight to the end, while the pro-peace faction wants to end the war through peace negotiations with our government …
>
> After the ceasefire in Korea, the American imperialists have begun preparations to intervene in the war in Indochina. They are trying to implement a plan to prolong and expand the war in Indochina with the aim of turning Indochina into an American imperialist colony and an American imperialist strategic base.
>
> Peace forces around the world have grown stronger. Hundreds of millions of the world's people ask themselves, 'Why has it been possible to restore peace in Korea but impossible to restore peace in Indochina?" They are demanding that the war must be ended through negotiations. The Berlin and Geneva Conferences are in fact a response to the sincere demands of the peace-loving people's of the world.[85]

Like the Chinese and the Soviets, the VWP was most worried about possible US internvention in the war. As Truong Chinh then resumed his argument as follows for signing on to the Geneva accords:

> In the world today there are two policy positions that are directly opposed to one another: the peace policy advocated by the Soviet Union, and the warmongering policy of the American imperialists. Our people follow the policy of peace.
>
> There are two possible courses of development for the situation in Indochina: the possibility that the war will be prolonged and expanded, and the possibility that peace will be restored in Indochina through peaceful negotiations. Our people are now fighting for the achievement of the second possibility. If peace is achieved, that

[85] *Dau Tranh*, pp. 93-94 and also in 'Bao Cao tai Hoi Nghi lan thu Sau cua Ban Chap Hanh Trung Uong Dang (khoa II)', dated 15 July 1954.

> outcome will benefit the people of Indochina and the people of the world, because it will mean that the American imperialist plot to prolong and expand the war in Indochina will have been disrupted and that tensions in Southeast Asia and throughout the world will have been reduced. In the past our policy of conducting a self-sufficient, self-reliant protracted resistance war was correct. Today, however, because the situation has changed, we now advocate trying to achieve peace while at the same time we continue to prepare for war, should that become necessary.
>
> ... [… in original] Our primary enemies today are the American imperialists and their lackeys, the French warmongers, and the pro-American puppets. We must aim the sharp point of our struggle directly at them and isolate them in order to overthrow them.86

Based on this analysis of the international situation and the reports from Geneva, the Politburo gave the order to "use the method of negotiations inrder to re-establish peace in Indochina …" (*dung Phuong phap thuong luong de lap lai hoa binh o Dong duong ...*). The number one enemy for the Chinese and the Vietnamese in 1954 was the United States. The Vietnamese did not want to have to fight the Americans in Indochina at this time: "If the American imperialists directly intervene in the war in Indochina, the balance of forces may shift against us". (*Neu de quoc My truc tiep tham gia chien tranh Dong-duong thi luc luong so sanh giua ta va dich se co the thay doi khong loi cho ta*).[87] The Vietnamese came under pressure to sign on to the Geneva accords. This is clear. But they, like the Chinese (and the Indians), feared or came to accept the interpretation that the US would indeed intervene in Vietnam, as it had in Korea. As Truong Chinh instructed the 6th Plenum of the Party on the eve of the signing of the accords

> We must strive to sign a ceasefire agreement with the Mendes France government within a short period of time. We must not miss this excellent opportunity. We must not allow the American imperialists and the French warmongers to exploit a prolongation of the Geneva Conference by creating a climate of pessimism and despair in order to sabotage the negotiations.[88]

The Vietnamese were not necessarily "sold out" at Geneva …

[86] *Dau Tranh*, p. 94.
[87] *Dau Tranh*, p. 95.
[88] Excerpts from Truong Chinh's report to the Party on the Geneva accords in Dau Tranh, p. 122, citing Ho So Hoi Nghi Gio-ne-vo, Luu Tru van Phong Trung Uong Dang.