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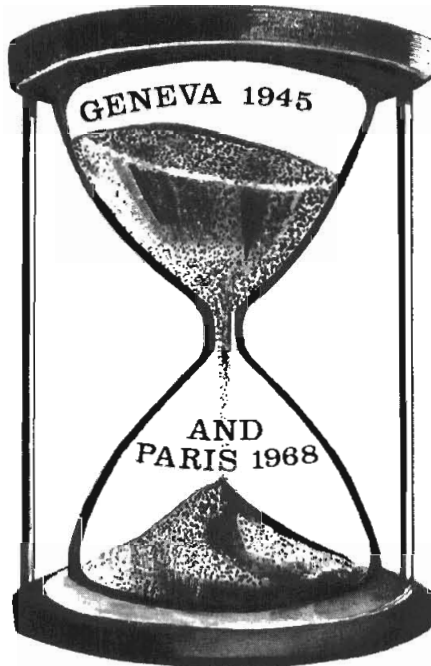
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AN HISTORICAL ANALOGY:



A MONOGRAPH

by

Professor Waring C. Hopkins

Political scientists, historians, and diplomatists are concerned with the extent to which historical analogies provide clues and insights of use to policy-makers. This essay will endeavor to extract from the experience of the negotiations which ended (in theory) the first Indochina war in 1954, what may be of significance in the current effort to end the second Indochina war in Paris in 1968. The basic issue in 1968 remains the same as it was in 1954--whether communism can be contained within the northern part of Vietnam. A related issue is whether the elections that the Geneva agreement seemed to envision for 1956 can, with any hope of success for American policy, be employed to determine the political com-

position of South Vietnam. This paper assumes that if there is to be any agreement in the 1968 negotiations it must be a compromise, that neither side is in a position to win a military victory, that the conflict must then shift from a military to a political competition, and that since both sides have expressed a desire to return to the principles of the Geneva agreements, the only apparent way out is to agree to internationally supervised elections in South Vietnam to determine the political composition of that country.

The question which arises is why there is any better chance of elections settling this question in 1968 since the elections envisioned for 1956 were refused by President Diem with the con-

currence of the United States. An optimist would say that our support of South Vietnam since 1954 has strengthened their position so that they have a chance to compete successfully with the Viet Cong and that our bargaining position, won at heavy sacrifice of lives, money, and prestige, can arrange for more reliable election procedures than were envisioned for 1956. A pessimist would say that the political position of South Vietnam is not much better than it was in 1954, that our bargaining position is not sufficient to ensure impartial elections, and that although elections may represent a way out of the conflict our objective will have failed because the Viet Cong drive and unity will prevail over the fragmented political opposition. Which version is correct (whether the bottle is half full or half empty) will be determined by the future and by the election results (assuming they are held).

In 1954 when the French faced defeat at Dien Bien Phu and French domestic support of the war was crumbling, the Eisenhower Administration considered the use of force to support France. When the requisite domestic, Congressional, and British support failed to materialize, the United States accepted the Anglo-French desire to negotiate a settlement and ultimately accepted the British proposal of partition of Vietnam.¹ Secretary of State Dulles did not wish to preside over the liquidation of non-Communist territory at Geneva, restricted his appearances there to a bare minimum, and hammered out with Anthony Eden the conditions for a settlement which we required if we were to be a participant.² Since we had not been a combatant, since our aims (non-recognition of and minimal gains for the Viet Minh) diverged from the British and French, and, of course, from the aims of China, the U.S.S.R., and the Viet Minh, and from the facts of life on the political and military fields, the joint Dulles-Eden position showed that

we hoped to gain by diplomacy what our ally had not won on the battlefield. It indicated a possible, if not probable, collision with North Vietnam. The agreement contained seven points as follows:

1. Preserve the independence of Laos and Cambodia and assure the withdrawal of Viet Minh forces.
2. Preserve at least the southern half of Vietnam.
3. Impose no restrictions materially impairing the capacity of Laos, Cambodia, or the retained Vietnam to maintain stable non-Communist regimes; and especially (no) restrictions impairing their right to maintain adequate forces for internal security, to import arms, and to employ foreign advisers.
4. No political provisions which would risk loss of the retained area to Communist control.
5. No exclusion of the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means.
6. Peaceful and humane transfer, under international supervision, of those people desiring to be moved from one zone to another of Vietnam.
7. Effective machinery for the international supervision of the agreement.

Points 2, 3, and 4 show that our aim in the negotiations was to attain conditions ensuring a stable, non-Communist South Vietnam which we could arm and without political provisions which would risk its loss to Communist control. Unfortunately, the bargaining power of the Communist side was too great to produce agreement with these aims since the Geneva agreement placed limitations on allying with and further arming of South Vietnam, denied it any permanent non-Communist character, and risked its loss to Communist control by providing for reunification elections in 1956.

This divergence of the Geneva agreement from the American objectives and hopes explains our refusal to sign and support the Final Declaration and explains our later concurrence in the Diem decision to ignore the reunification election provision. As one authority has said, the United States reconciled itself to a solution which it regarded as ephemeral and that Dulles even found something to be happy about when he (is reputed to have) said, "We have a clean base there without a taint of colonialism."³

It seems obvious that North Vietnam and the United States both tolerated (unwillingly) an ambiguous agreement at Geneva which each intended to interpret to his advantage. North Vietnam apparently felt that its military and political position entitled it to all of Vietnam, but unable to get this at Geneva, it hoped to win South Vietnam by the 1956 elections.

The United States apparently planned that by not signing the Geneva agreement we and South Vietnam would not be obligated to accept the 1956 elections, and we could salvage and assist a non-Communist (and hopefully stable) South Vietnam.

Now, 14 years after Geneva we have turned a full circle (to use Eden's term) and are apparently trying to determine in Paris if internationally supervised elections can salvage a non-Communist (and hopefully stable) South Vietnam.

What conclusions can be drawn from this analogy? Not much, because history clarifies what has happened and illuminates why it happened. But it does not tell us what we should do, although it may indicate what we should not do. One could conclude that it is difficult to assess (and costly to assess incorrectly) the capabilities and intentions of our enemies. The tenacity, ingenuity, and fanaticism of the Vietnamese Communists and military aid from China were predictable on the basis of a study of the first Indochina war from 1945 to

1954, but the amount of military aid from Russia in the 1960's was perhaps an unforeseen but detrimental factor for us.

Another conclusion would be that when two opponents agree to an ambiguous settlement (1954), have totally divergent aims, and arrange weak enforcement (the I.C.C.) provisions for their ambiguous agreement, then a war has been postponed but not settled. If a settlement is to be achieved in 1968 the agreement should not be so ambiguous, the aims of the principal parties should not be so divergent, and the enforcement should not be so weak. It may be a platitude, but it is still obvious that neither side can win through diplomacy what it has not won on the battlefield. Since the battlefield situation represents a stalemate, the determining factor will be which side has won the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese people --the comparative political power position (or perhaps one should say which side has least antagonized the peasants and urbanites). It is apparent that adequately supervised elections are necessary to determine the political orientation of South Vietnam and that what the negotiators failed to do in Geneva in 1954, they must accomplish in Paris in 1968. Failing this, their alternative is to carry on the political struggle by Clausewitz's famous "other means"--an alternative that is increasingly obnoxious to much, if not most, of the world.

In 1954 the United States succeeded by means of diplomacy and subsequent commitments in limiting Communist control to the northern half of Vietnam. The following factors, not available to us now, made this compromise possible: Mendes-France threatened mobilization of conscripts if there were no satisfactory compromise; the United States had been considering military intervention in the Hanoi area; the United States had been organizing the SEATO alliance; the U.S.S.R. seemed more interested in French obstruction of the

E.D.C. (German rearmament) than in supporting the Vietnamese Communists; Communist China desired a détente in Asia in 1954.

In 1968 our bargaining power consists of airstrikes against North Vietnam, half a million U.S. troops in South Vietnam, half a million South Vietnamese troops, and a government in South Vietnam controlling the cities and about 20 percent of the rural areas (for a total of about 60 percent of the population).

In the present circumstances both sides have poured so much blood, treasure, and prestige into the conflict that neither side could be expected to accept defeat.

An acceptable compromise for both sides could encompass a cease-fire, phased withdrawal of North Vietnamese and United States troops, continued Viet Cong control of the rural areas they now control, continued South Vietnamese control of areas they now control and to include autonomy for ethnic and sectional entities, internationally supervised elections to determine control of the disputed areas, and an internationally agreed on and supervised neutralization of the neighboring countries. This would result in a neutralized and Balkanized South Vietnam with no winners, no losers, and no (or minimum) reprisals. Ethnic, religious, and communal groups would have the

incentive and opportunity to protect and govern themselves with intergroup relations to be determined by mutual bargaining. While not a perfect solution, which is unattainable, this could be the least unsatisfactory solution in the circumstances and one which would seem to accord with the political and military power position of the parties concerned.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Professor Waring C. Hopkins holds a B.A. in Economics from Duke University; he was awarded a fellowship from the Institute of International Education to study for his doctorate in France and

holds a Doctorate in Political Science from the Université de Paris. He also attended the University of Pennsylvania, the National Institute of Public Affairs, and the American University in Washington, D.C.

Professor Hopkins was Assistant, Associate, and Full Professor of Political Science at Berea College. He was a Fulbright Lecturer in Political Science at the College of Arts and Sciences in Bagdad, Iraq, and a Lecturer in Political Science in the European Division of the University of Maryland. He is presently Professor of International Affairs on the faculty of The George Washington University Center, Naval War College.

FOOTNOTES

1. Melvin Gurgov, *The First Viet Nam Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 111-114.
2. Sir Anthony Eden, *Full Circle* (Boston: Mifflin, 1960), p. 149.
3. Gurtov, p. 130.

