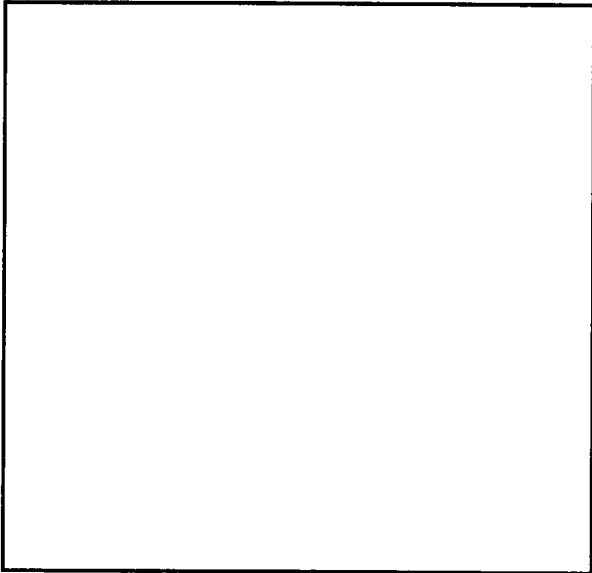
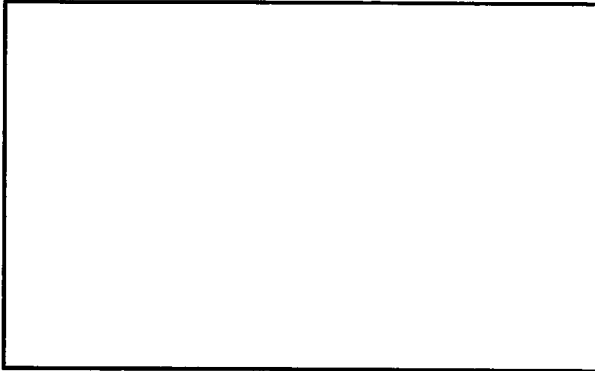


**Chapter 1 – (U) Le Grand Nombre Des Rues Sans Joie:  
American COMINT and the Franco-Vietnamese War,** [redacted]



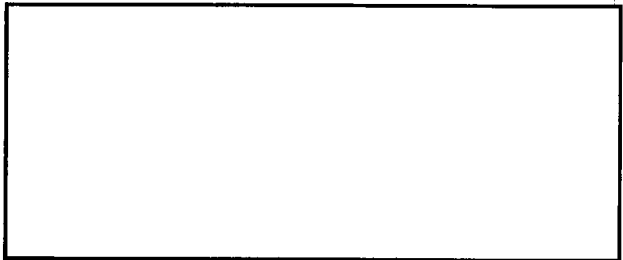
COMINT organizations, the Army Security Agency (ASA) and Navy's Communications Supplementary Activity Washington (CSAW) were "merged" under a Joint Operating Plan (JOP) controlled by a Coordinator of Joint Operations (CJO). More importantly, the agreement, reminiscent of the World War II arrangement, divided the COMINT problem between the Army and Navy. Targets and processes were allocated between the two services. Furthermore, the 1946 Joint Operations Plan of the Joint Processing Allocations Group (JPAG) established three countries of "high interest" – the USSR, China (still the Nationalist regime of Jiang Jeishi at this point, but with some emphasis on intercept from northern China where the struggle between communists and nationalists was centered), [redacted]

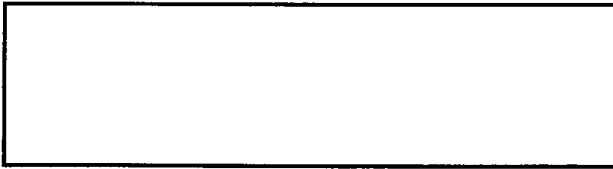
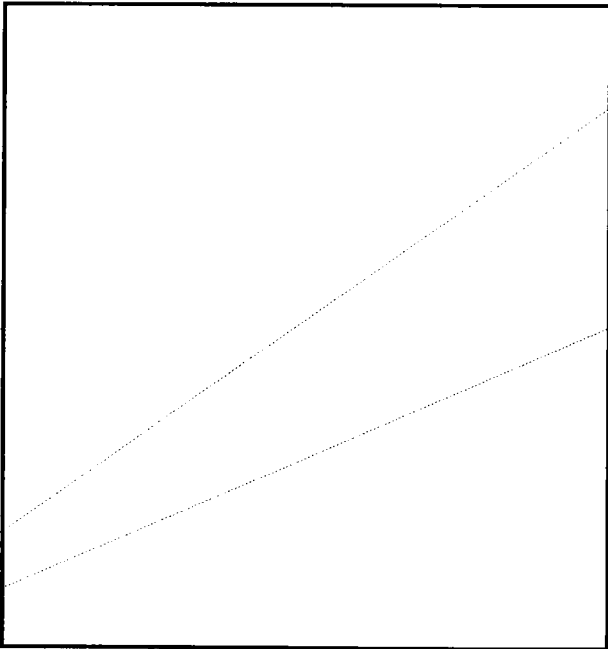
EO 1.4.(c)

**~~(S//SI)~~ America's Postwar COMINT  
Predicament**

~~(S//SI)~~ The United States emerged from the Second World War with a COMINT system still split along service lines. Many of its leaders saw the need for some sort of merger, whether it be a complete organizational union or simply a method of more official coordination between the two service cryptologic organizations. Additionally, the postwar reduction in personnel and resources provided a further impetus for coordination. In April 1946, the two major


(U) France was considered a critical element in the formulation of America's postwar policy, especially as it related to the "containment" of the USSR. France was the largest European continental military power (Germany was still a demilitarized country). Yet, at the same time, France was weak politically. It was a major concern to U.S. planners: caretaker coalition governments that came and went in the wake of Charles de Gaulle's 1946 resignation were failing at alarming rates; in the wings was the French Communist Party, which American policymakers feared would take power and undermine Western Europe's defense against the USSR.





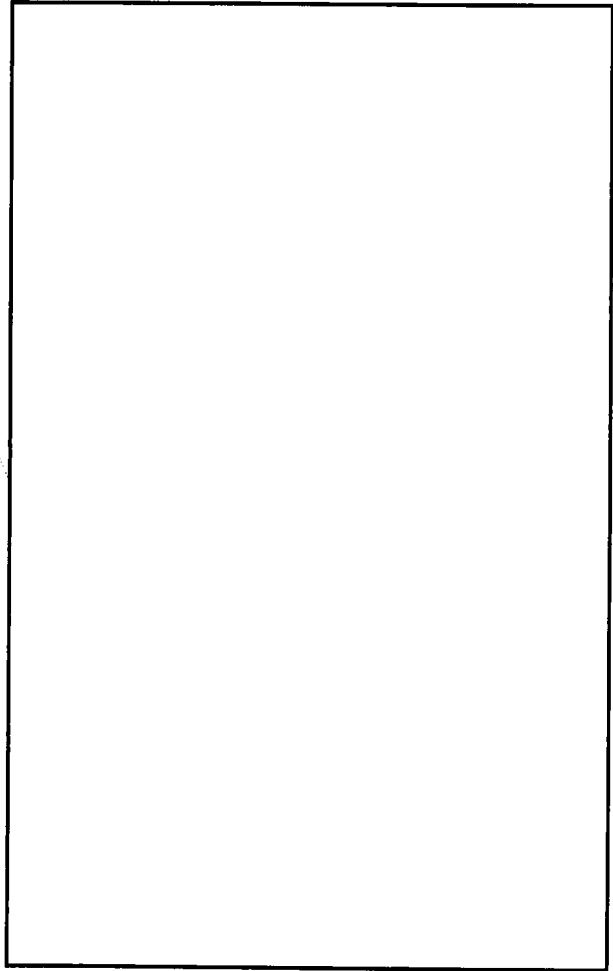
**(U) The Early COMINT Effort against Viet Minh Communications, 1945** 

~~(S//SI)~~ 

 the Viet Minh problem was minuscule for the first few years after the fighting began 1945 in Indochina. Viet Minh diplomatic communications, like those which supported their delegation in Paris in 1946, had disappeared when the Vietnamese communists abandoned Hanoi and the other large urban centers to the returning French. Viet Minh communications during the early part of the war were mostly tactical; what little there was remained difficult to intercept because of its low power and the poor propagation characteristics of the upper Tonkin region. Viet Minh equipment was limited and numbers and quality - leftover Japanese and American radios and whatever French equipment the Viet Minh could steal, capture or buy.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Ironically, the first intercept and reporting of Viet Minh communications occurred on 23 September 1945, the very day the Indochina war began when fighting broke out in Saigon between Viet Minh soldiers and the recently released French colonial forces. On that day, the intercept site at Arlington Hall, MS-1, intercepted a message transmitted by the French colonial radio station in Hanoi (C/S: FYJ) to the French embassy in Moscow (C/S: RKB3). The message, unencrypted and in English, was from Ho Chi Minh to Joseph Stalin, and contained the announcement the formation of the Provisional Government of the Viet Nam Republic, as well as a plea for aid for flood victims in Tonkin.<sup>8</sup> However ominous this message may seem, at least in terms of Ho's connection with a Moscow-controlled international communist conspiracy, it really was the first of many messages that Ho sent

EO 1.4.(c)



to a variety of world leaders asking for various types of political and material support. For example, just three days later, Ho would send a message to the British prime minister, Clement Atlee, asking for London's intervention against the depredations of French troops in Saigon.<sup>9</sup>

(U) Of course, none of these early Viet Minh messages were encrypted or encoded in any fashion. There were really no Vietnamese experienced in any of the skills pertaining to cryptography. The French had never even considered allowing any Indochinese to get involved in any cryptographic work, even when the wartime manpower attrition in Indochina threatened the colonial administration's ability to maintain secure communications.<sup>10</sup>

(U) On 12 September 1945, following up on instructions from Ho Chi Minh and General Vo Nguyen Giap, the Viet Minh's Military Cryptographic Section was formed under the control of the Ministry of National Defense. Starting from virtually scratch, which, in this case, meant a single copy of Captaine Baudoin's *Elements Cryptographic*, the handful of Vietnamese neophytes in the cryptographic section began teaching themselves the rudiments of codes and ciphers, as well as experimenting with virtually every technique it could lay its hands on, including some found in Vietnamese Boy Scout games.<sup>11</sup> The first efforts were in encrypting letters and

WAR DEPARTMENT

**TOP SECRET ULTRA**

TOP SECRET ULTRA

From: Hanoi (HO CHI MINH)  
 To: Moscow (Premier STALIN)  
 23 September 1945  
 ANZ (English)

No number

We beg to inform Your Excellency that the Provisional Government of the VIET NAM Republic has been established under President HO CHI MINH. Ex-Emperor BAO DAI abdicated on 25 August, handing over the rule to a new Government supported by whole nation.

Meanwhile, owing to the collapse of the river dam system, half of Tonkin is flooded, causing tremendous losses. The people have begun to starve. We appeal to Your Excellency for any possible help.

Respectfully,

Inter: 23 Sep 45 (1) Annamese H-207443  
 Rec'd --M--  
 Trans: 0938 25 Sep 45 (14271, 11941-H)  
 RKB3 de FYJ 15455 kca

**TOP SECRET ULTRA**

WAR DEPARTMENT

This sheet of paper and all of its contents must be safeguarded with the greatest care. Utmost secrecy is necessary to prevent losing or this vital intelligence to its source.



(U) Vo Nguyen Giap and Ho Chi Minh in 1945

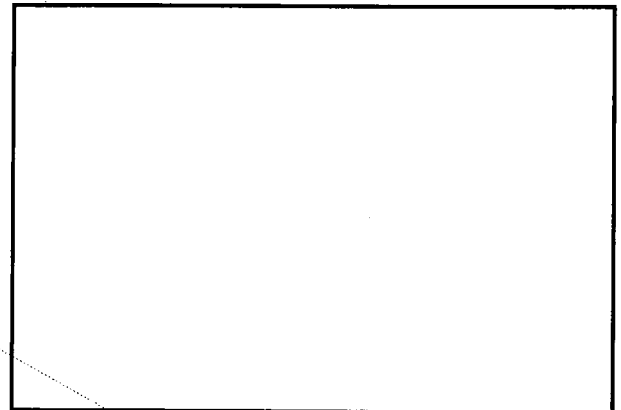
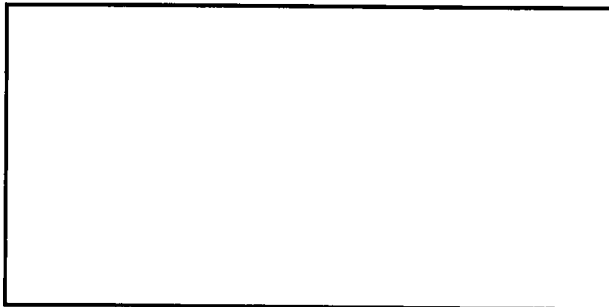
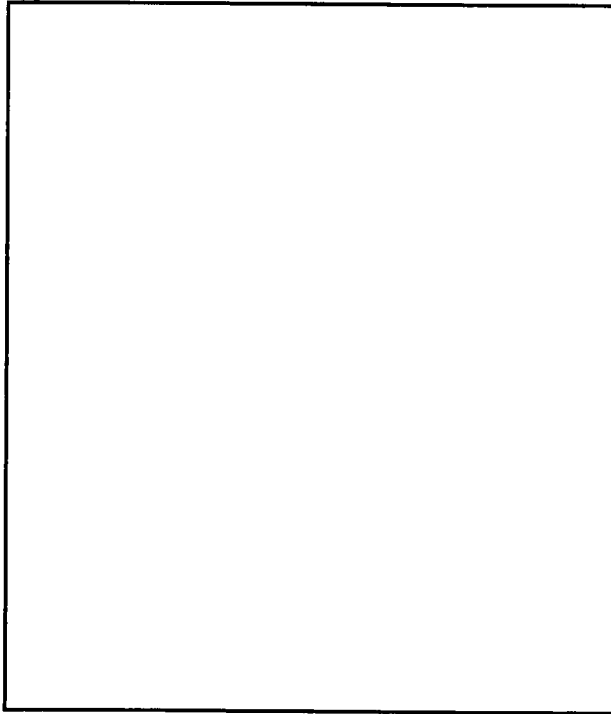
(TS//SI) Message from Ho Chi Minh to Joseph Stalin

courier messages. Elementary substitution and transposition systems were tried, in Vietnamese instead of French, and evaluated by the cryptographers. Chart systems with regularly changing key were the first systems adapted by the Viet Minh military on a force-wide basis.<sup>12</sup>

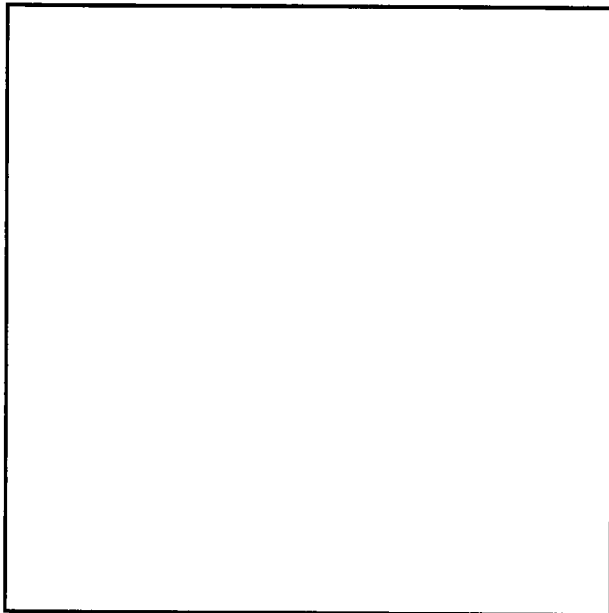
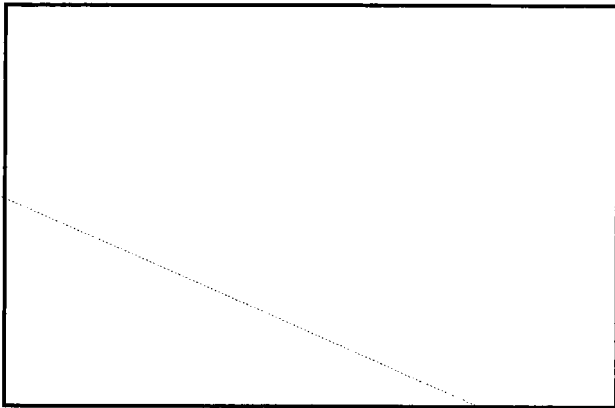
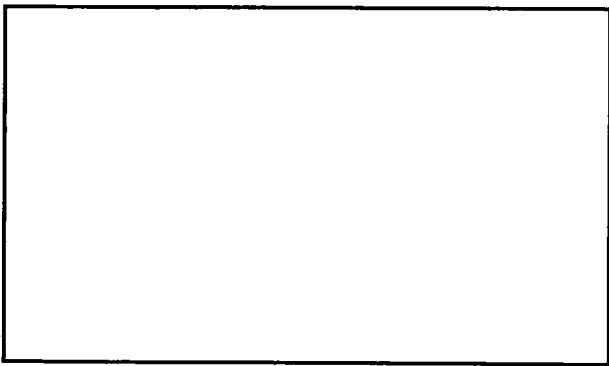
(U) By early 1946, a Viet Minh communications web was taking shape. Hanoi became the control for a network which stretched out across the three regions of Vietnam. Outstations were located in the Viet Bac, Hoa Binh, and Dong Trieu military regions. The revolutionary military affairs committees of Trung Bo (Central Annam) and the cities of Hue and Tourane (Dan Nang) also were in contact with Hanoi.<sup>13</sup>



(U) Ho Chi Minh arrives in Paris for the start of the Fontainebleau talks



EO 1.4.(c)




~~(S//SI)~~ **The Asian Crucible:**

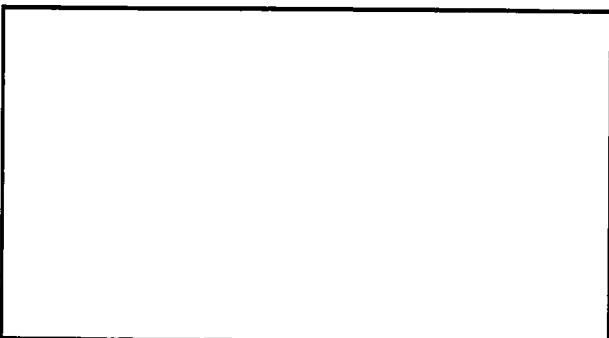


EO 1.4.(c)

**Indochina War, 1950**

(U) The impetus for the  effort against the Viet Minh was part of the U.S. reaction to the radically altered general political and military situation found in Asia in 1950. Just months earlier, in October 1949, Mao Zedong's communist troops had driven Jiang Jeishi's rag-tag Nationalist forces off the Chinese mainland onto the island of Formosa. With the Communist Chinese now in power on the mainland, major communist forces were now sitting across from the northern border of Indochina. On 25 June 1950, North Korean troops attacked across the thirty-eighth parallel and drove south in an effort to unify the Korean peninsula under the Kim Il Sung's communist regime. U.S. troops, committed to battle straight from comfortable peacetime occupation duties in Japan, were fighting for their lives. Suddenly, with Taiwan endangered, the French struggling in Indochina, and UN forces penned up in the precarious toehold in Pusan, Korea, it seemed to Washington that all of Asia had become one massive Cold War battleground.

~~(S//SI)~~ In May 1949, the Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA) was founded. The two military work centers, WDGAS-93 in the ASA and NY-4 in the CSAW, both which once had handled the Far East COMINT problem, and included the comatose Viet Minh problem, were consolidated into AFSA-23, the General Processing Division.



(U) Aid plans for the French in Indochina, which had been drawn up earlier in the year as part of a larger military aid package to Europe, known as the Mutual Defense Assistance Pact, were hurried up and finalized. Within three days of the Korean invasion, President Truman authorized the first transfers of military equip-

EO 1.4.(c)

ment to the French forces fighting in Indochina, as well as the formation of a Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) to facilitate and coordinate the support and necessary training. By the end of 1951, this aid would be increased as part of an agreement between the United States and France, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam (known as the French Associated States). In 1951, aid totaled over one-half billion dollars; by 1954, annual U.S. military aid topped \$2 billion, or 80 percent of the cost of the French effort.

(U) The French would need all of the help they could get. Even in early 1950, just as the aid package was being organized, U.S. assessments of the French position were pessimistic. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, using intelligence estimates, held the view that the French situation has deteriorated and that "this deterioration will be accelerated."<sup>22</sup> A separate National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) provided a similar estimate of the French position, calling it "precarious."<sup>23</sup> These judgments of the French situation reflected their increasingly poor military posture, especially in the northern Tonkin region.

(U) In the fall of 1950, General Vo Nguyen Giap, the Viet Minh military leader, began his campaign to secure the Tonkin-China border. The target was a series of vulnerable French border forts which, to a very limited degree, had hindered the Viet Minh cross-border supply traffic from Communist China. Using battalion and regimental-sized units for the first time, Giap began a campaign of isolation and reduction of these positions.

(U) Within three months, the border forts at Lang Son, Cao Bang, and Dong Khe had been overrun by Viet Minh assault units. French units trying to fight their way out were nearly annihilated. Tied to narrow roads, French military columns were vulnerable to tactics similar to those used by the Finns against Russian units in 1939: roadblocks at the front and rear and the reduction of the trapped units into smaller and



(U) Dissident-contested and engaged regions in Indochina, November 1950  
(From the Pentagon Papers)

smaller pockets until they were wiped out. For example, a French colonial paratroop battalion of over 400 troops, the *1<sup>ere</sup> Battalion de Coloniale de Parachutistes*, was committed as a relief column for Lang Son. Only sixteen of the paras escaped the Viet Minh trap. In all, 6,000 French troops were killed or captured. Panic overwhelmed the French colonial population in Hanoi. French soldiers and civilians expected a Viet Minh juggernaut to rush down on the city



(U) Viet Minh soldiers attack the French stronghold at Dong Khe.

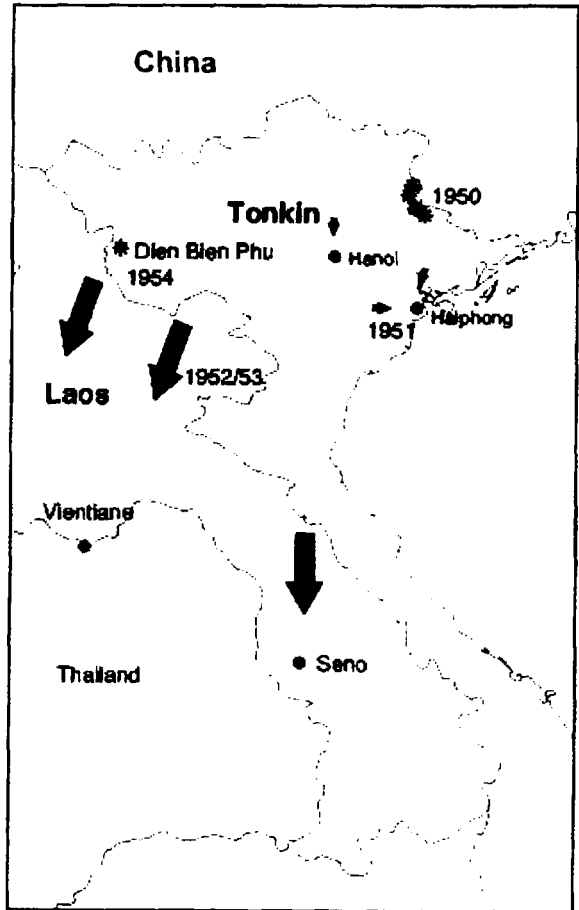
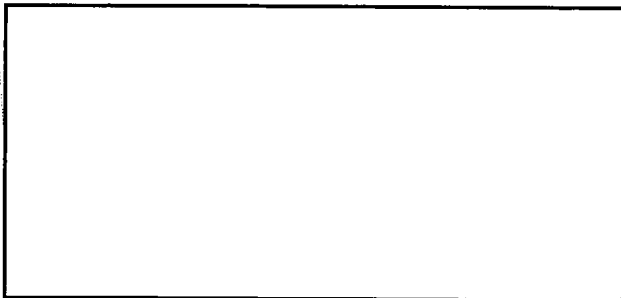
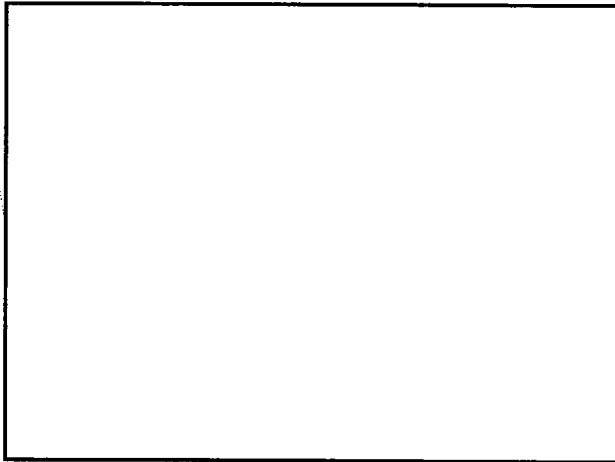
from the north at any day. However, Giap's troops were spread too thin to close in on the Red River Delta. The new commander of the French forces in Indochina, General (later Marshal) Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, steadied the French forces and rebuilt their shattered morale. Still, the campaign for the Tonkin border forts was the worst defeat of French colonial arms since the loss of Quebec in 1767.

(U) More importantly, Giap's Tonkin campaign marked the end of any French strategic initiative in the war. From now on, Giap would dictate the tempo and direction of the war. The French could only hope to fend off successive Viet Minh offensive campaigns. In the spring and fall of 1951, the French, using massed air and naval support, barely beat off Giap's multiple attempts to capture the Red River Delta and the cities of Hanoi and Haiphong. Exhausted as the Viet Minh forces were, the French could not mount any seri-

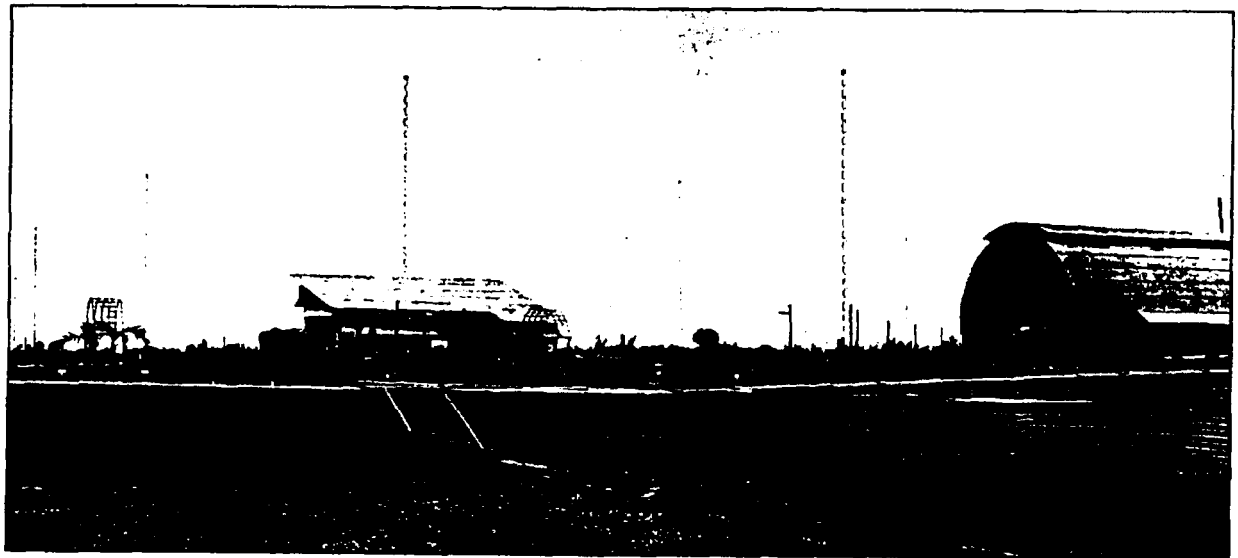
ous counterstrikes. In late 1952, Giap turned west and began his winter-spring campaign in the mountainous regions of Laos and Tonkin. First, he attacked and overran French outposts in northwest Tonkin. Securing this base for operations, in the early spring of 1953 he turned his forces south and invaded Laos. Giap swept the French and native units before him like a flock of quail. The Viet Minh forces executed a series of deft division-sized maneuvers and thrusts that threatened to encircle or outflank defending French colonial formations in northern Laos. By April 1953, Giap threatened the Laotian royal capital of Luang Prabang, French military bases in the Plaine Des Jarres, and the southern panhandle of Laos. Then, before the befuddled French could mount a riposte, Giap prudently pulled up his advance and returned to northwest Tonkin before his extended supply lines and the onset of the rainy season could mire him down in the hills of Laos. Giap's invasion of Laos left

EO 1.4.(c)

French forces exhausted and stretched out all over northern Indochina. Perceiving themselves to be especially vulnerable in northwest Tonkin, the French command in Hanoi looked for a way to retrieve the military situation.



(U) Major Indochina military campaigns, 1950-1954



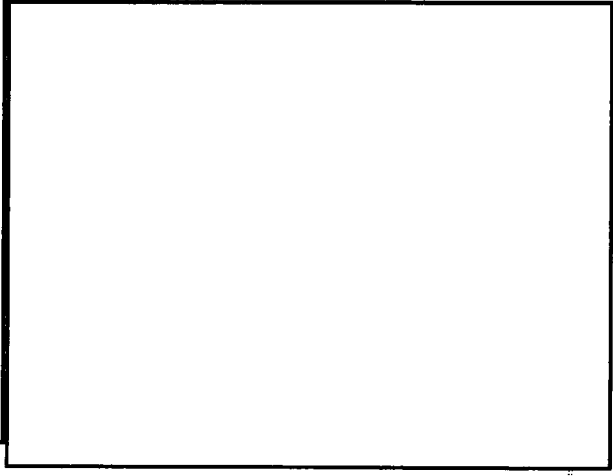
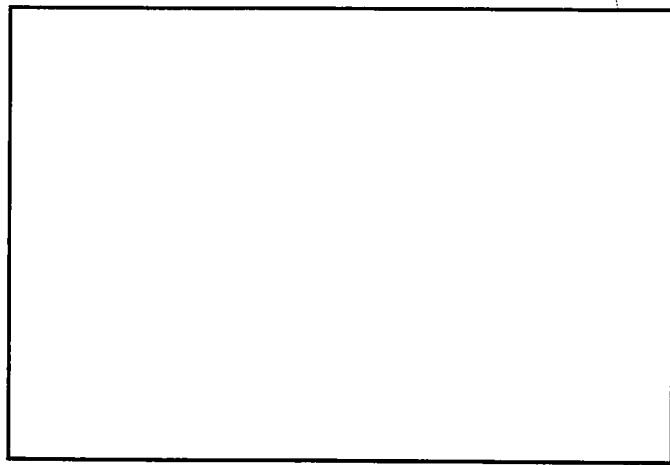
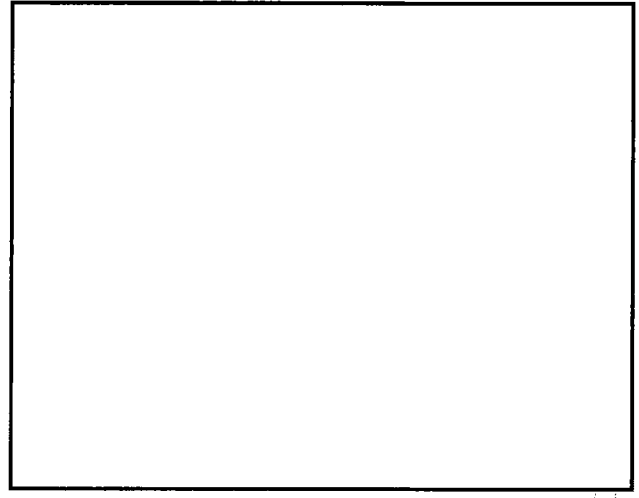
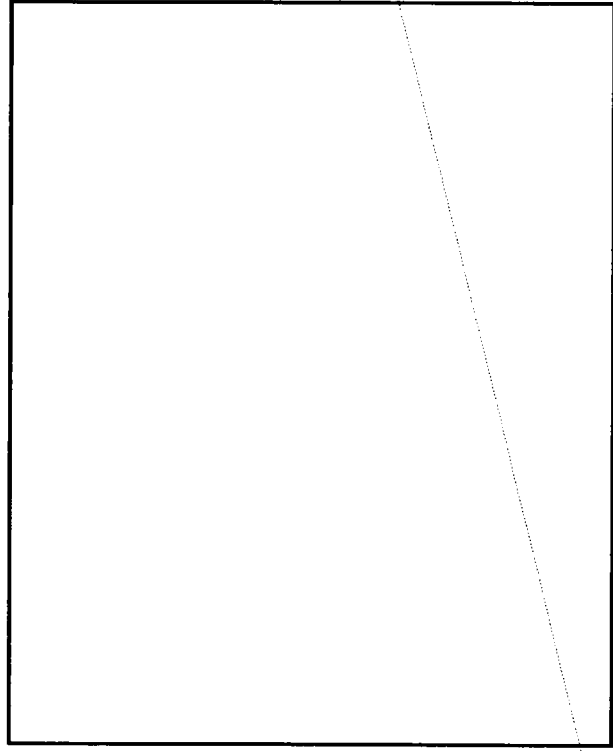
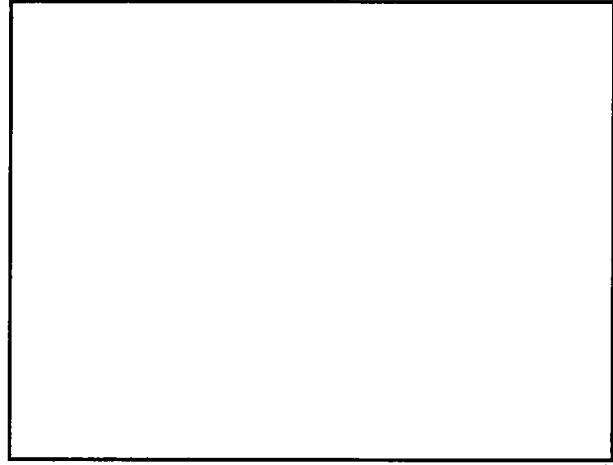
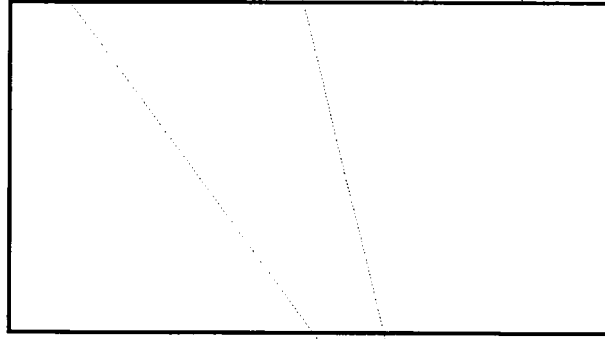
(U) Antenna arrangement of the U.S. Army Security Agency field station, Las Pinas, Philippines, 1946



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OGA

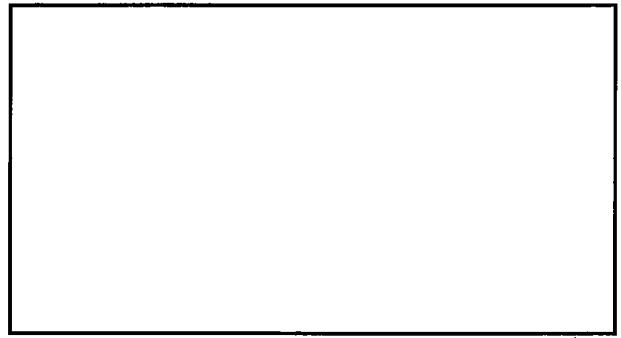
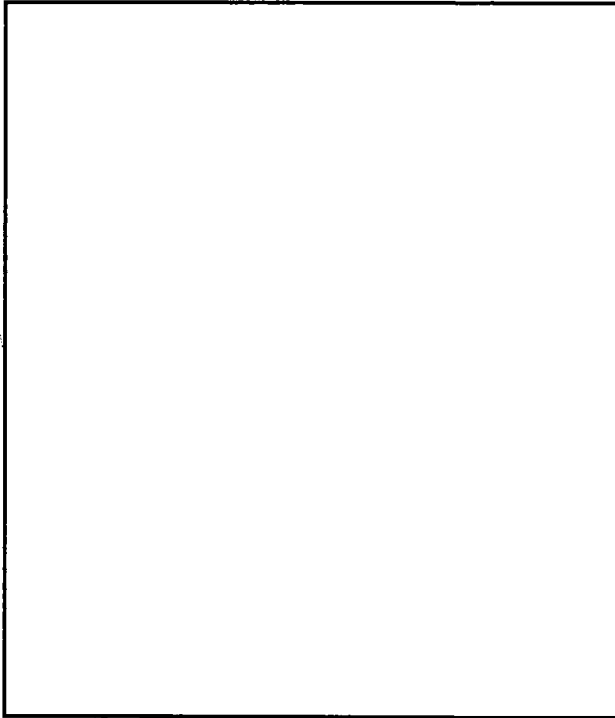
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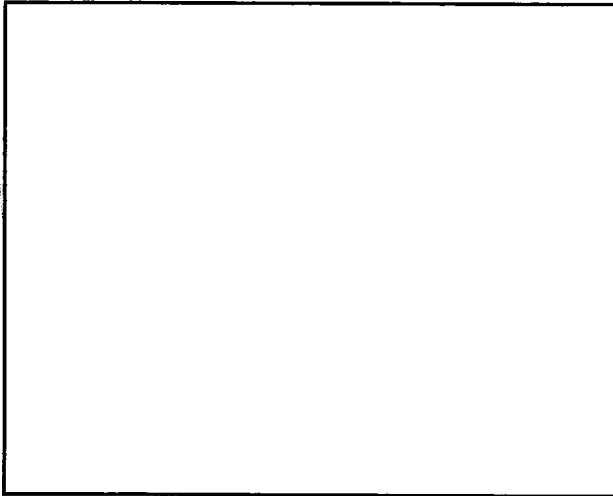
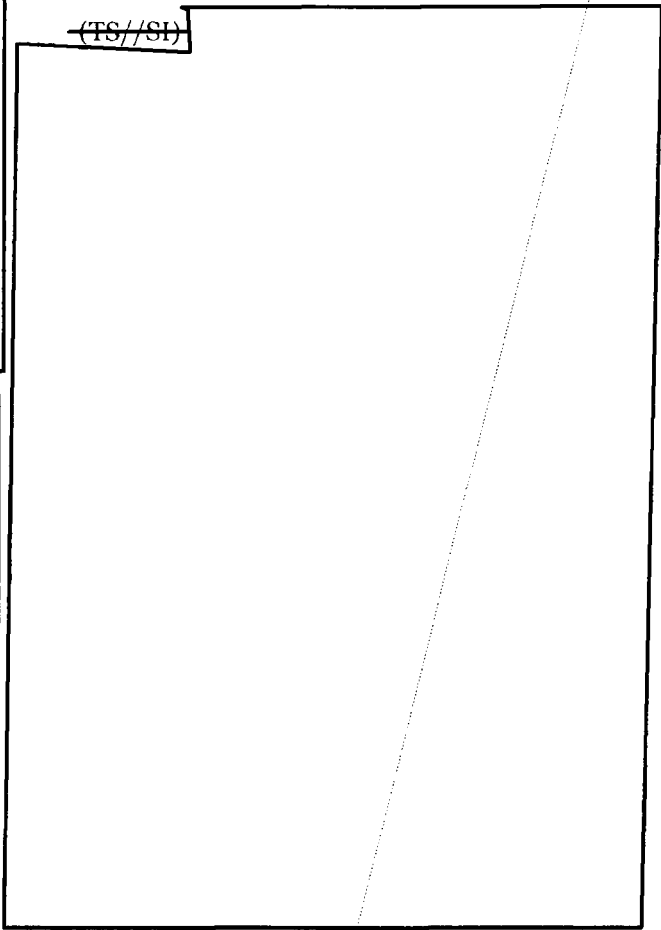
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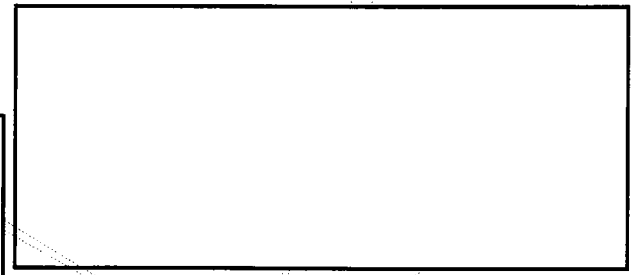
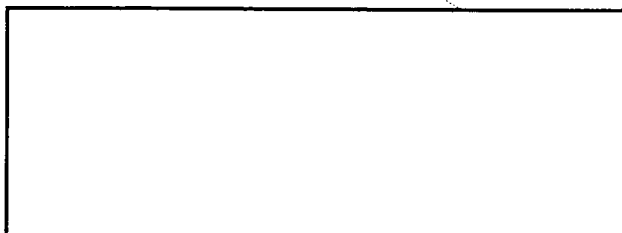
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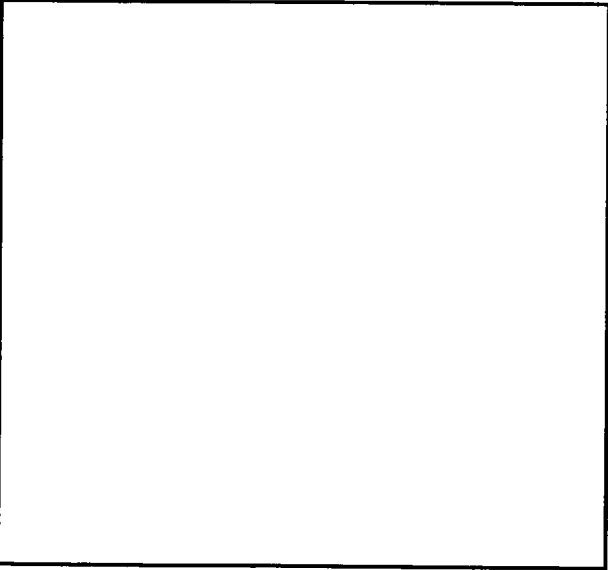
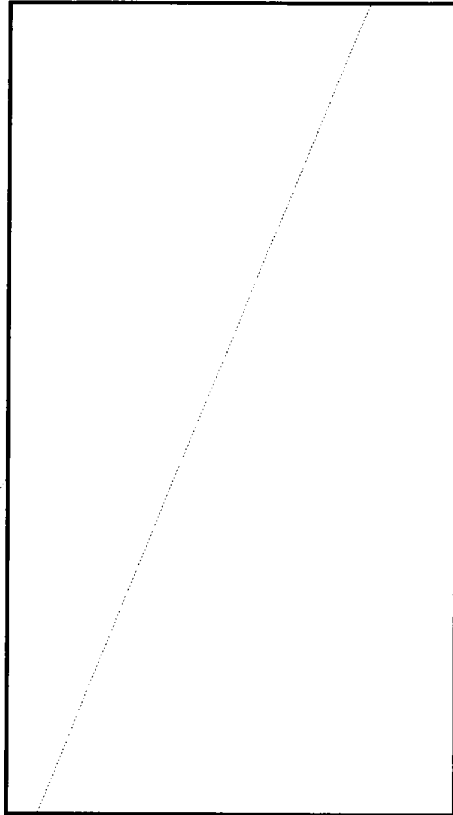
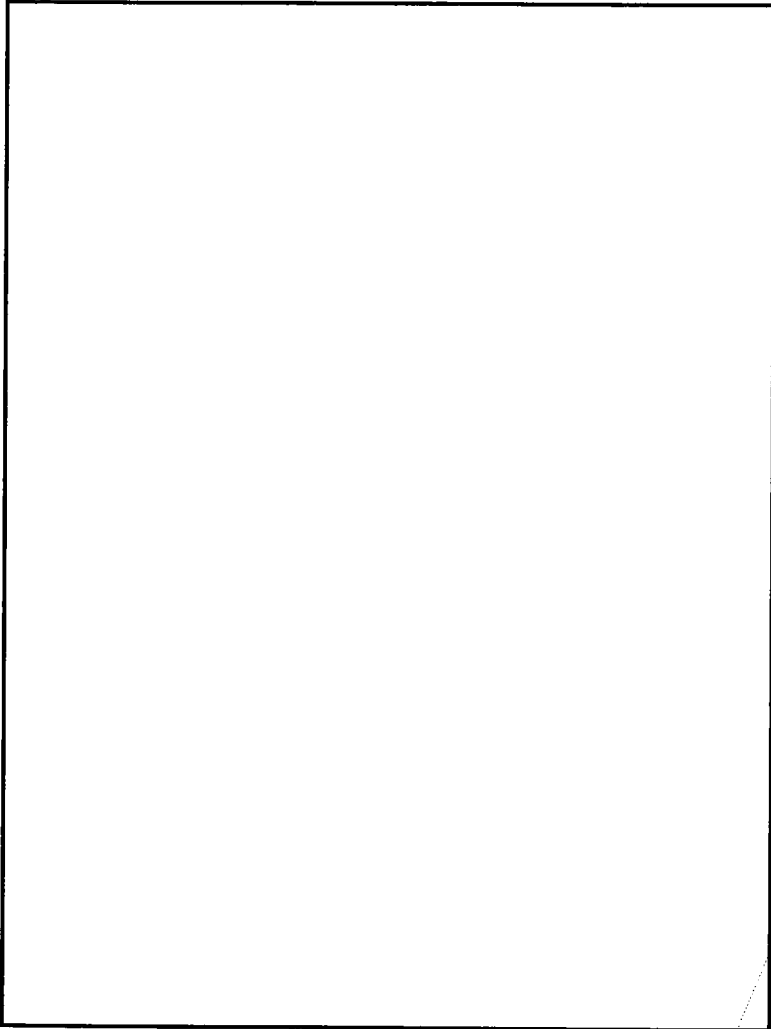


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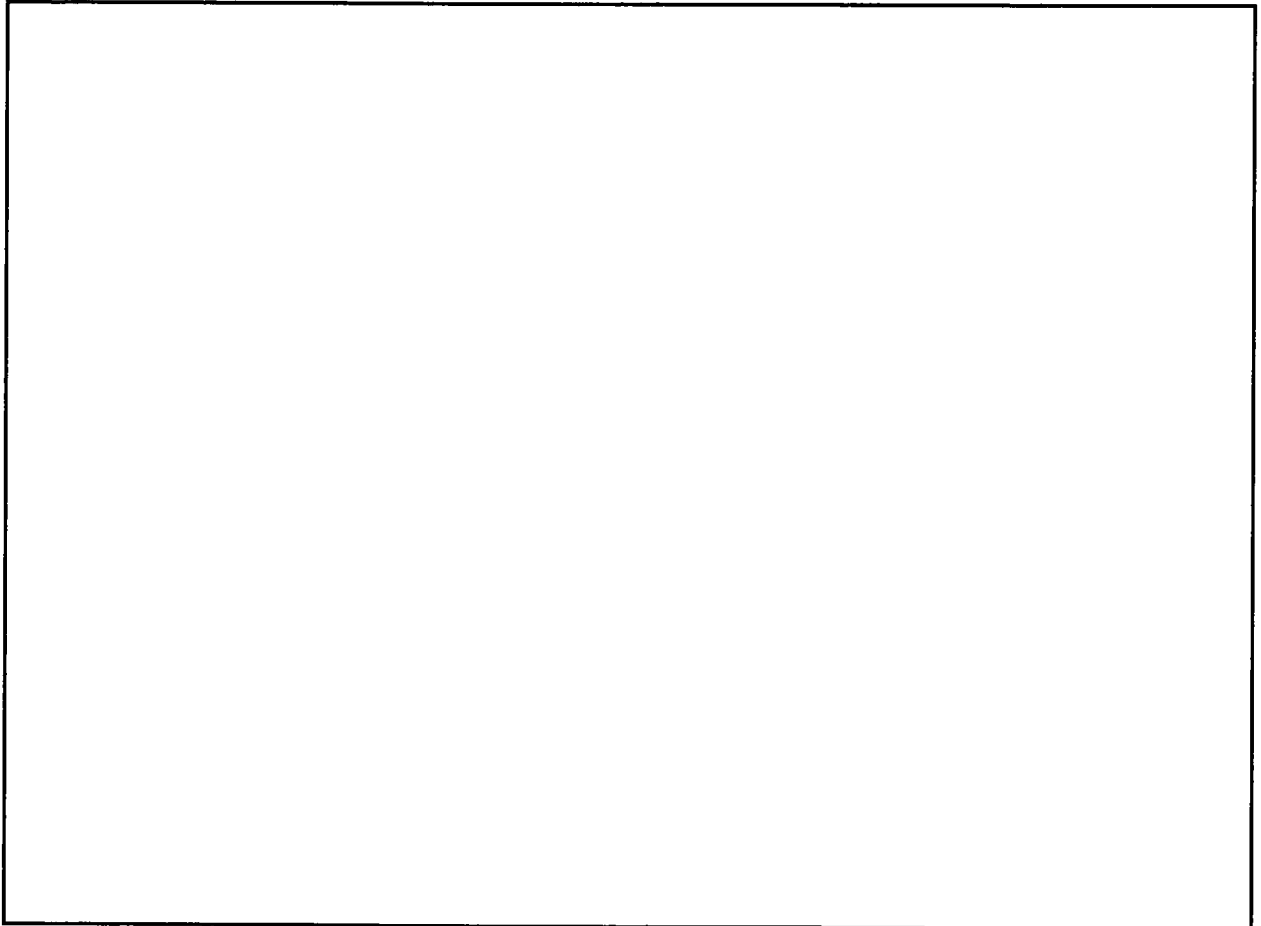


~~(S//SI)~~ Uncertain Relations:  
COMINT Partnerships with

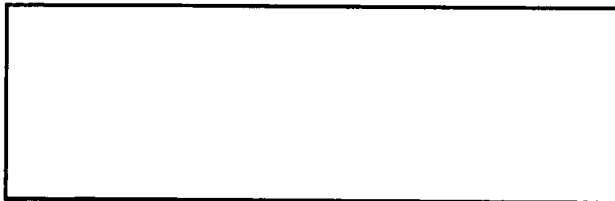
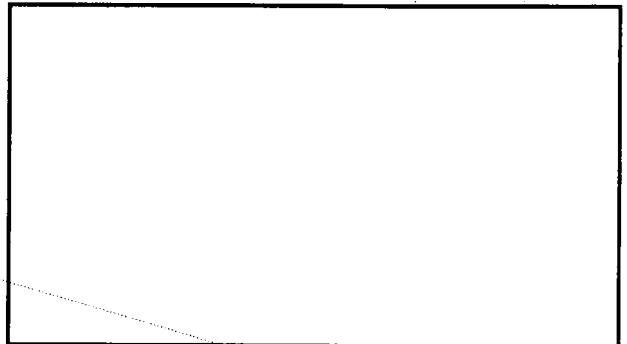
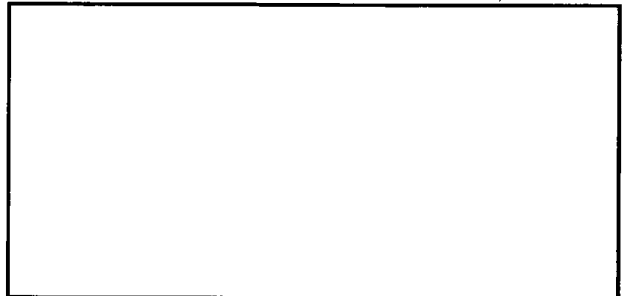




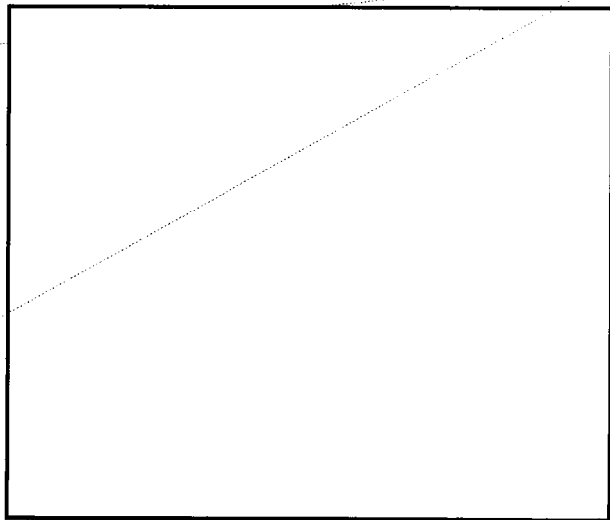
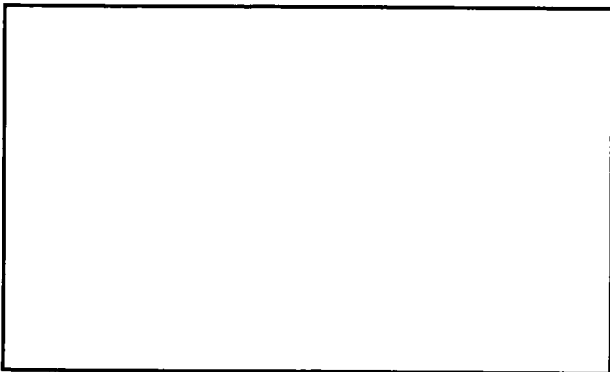
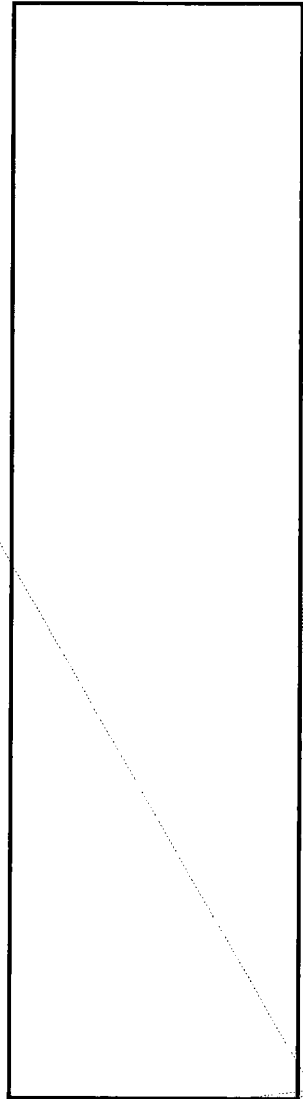
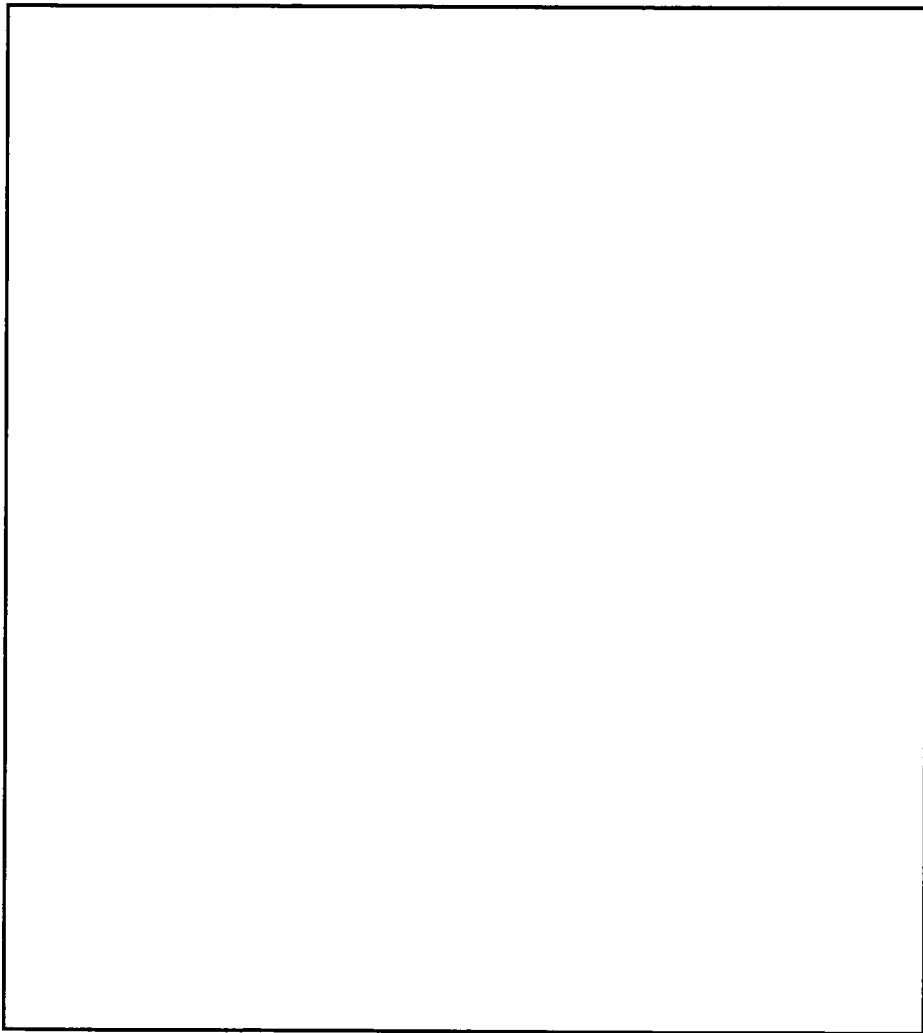
~~(TS//SI)~~ The French had a COMINT effort of sorts within Indochina dating back to the days of World War II. This primarily entailed a radio broadcast monitoring mission with a handful of military and civilian stations, located throughout the French colonies, which belonged to a subsection of the French Colonial Office and, at the same time, was immediately subordinate to the Governor General of Indochina. These sites were manned by over forty radio direction finding technicians (*specialistes de la radiogoniometrie*).<sup>40</sup> In addition, the Gaullist military and diplomatic missions in Chungking, China, had a small monitoring mission which probably listened in on official broadcasts from the colonial government radio in Hanoi.<sup>41</sup> This small group returned to Indochina with the first French forces which landed in Saigon in the fall of 1945.



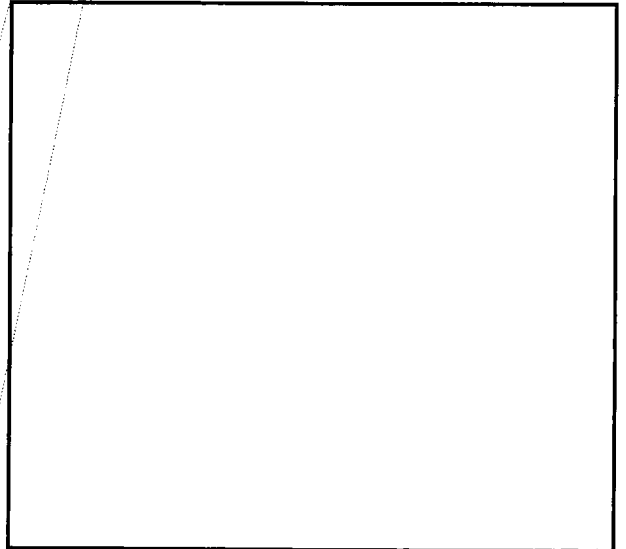
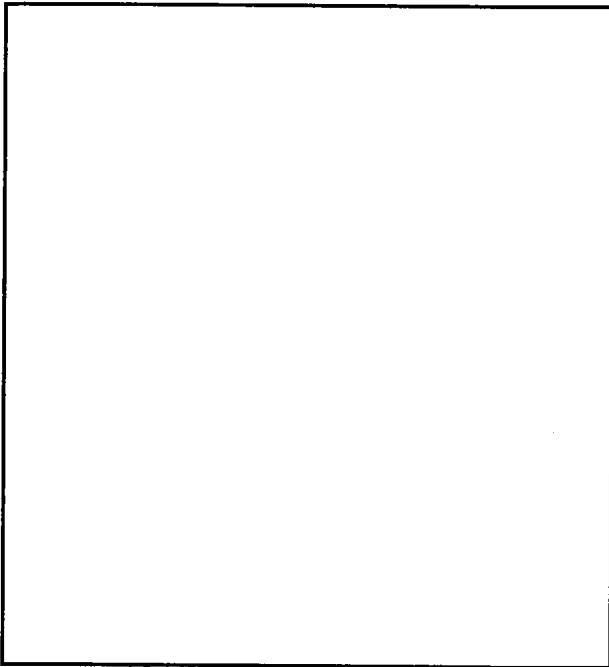
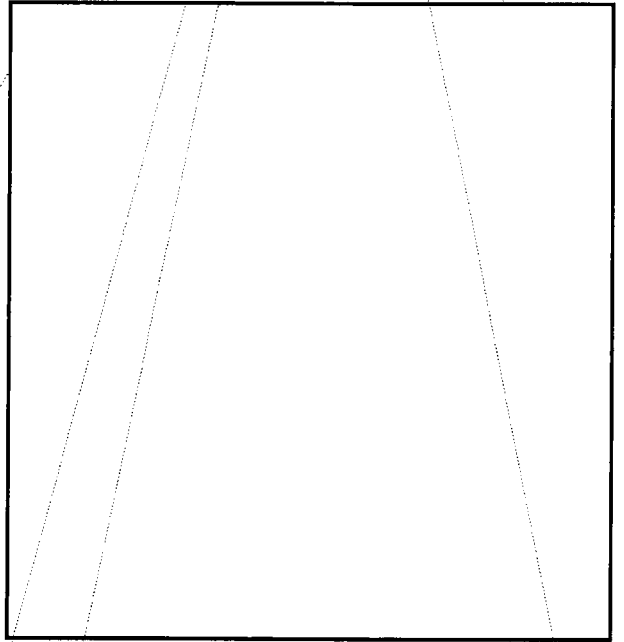
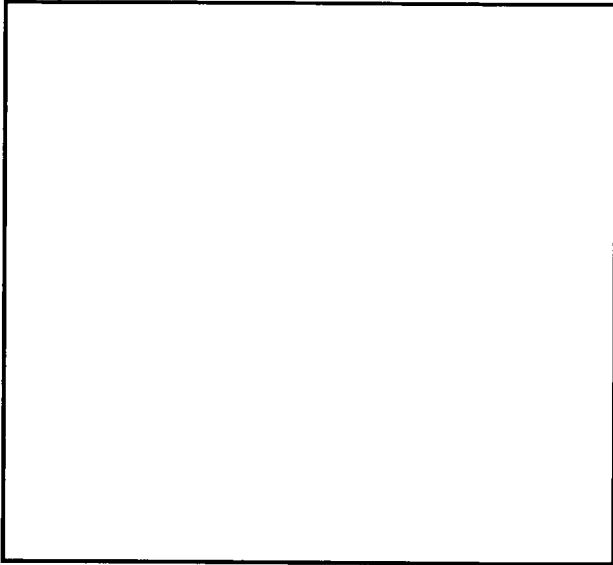
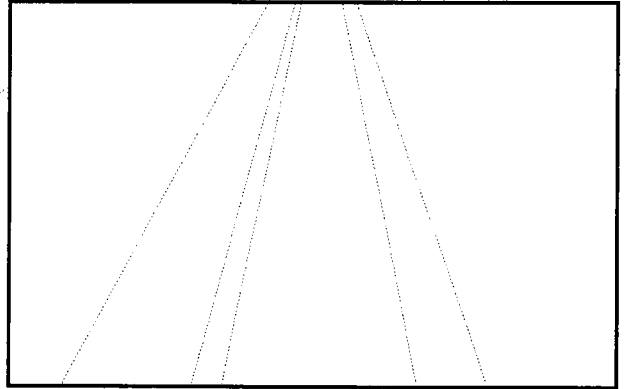
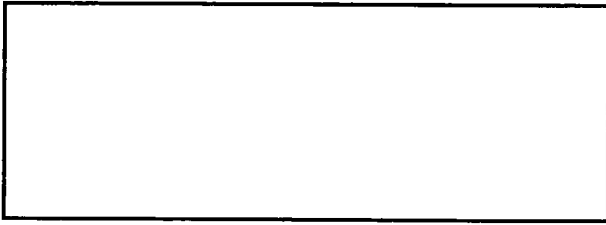
~~(TS//SI)~~ By 1946, the GCR was operating a full-fledged intercept organization inside Indochina headquartered in Saigon. The GCR had managed to isolate some of the early Viet Minh radio nets, including those that linked Ho's headquarters in Hanoi (and later in the Viet Bac region) with Viet Minh military commands, as well as sympathetic political groups in Laos and Thailand.<sup>42</sup> In addition to the Viet Minh intercept, the GCR also targeted Chinese communications, both Communist and Nationalist, as well as British, Dutch, and Indonesian communications.<sup>43</sup>

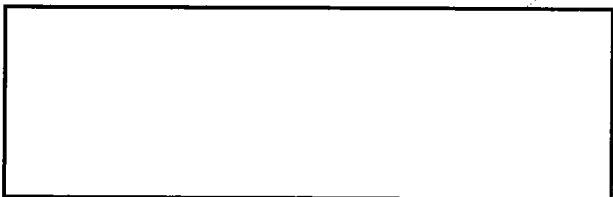
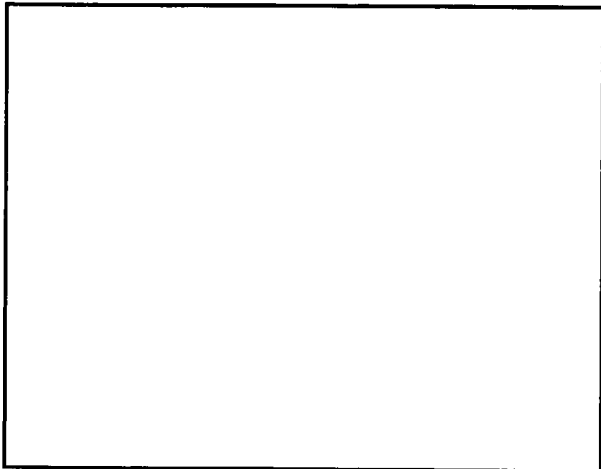
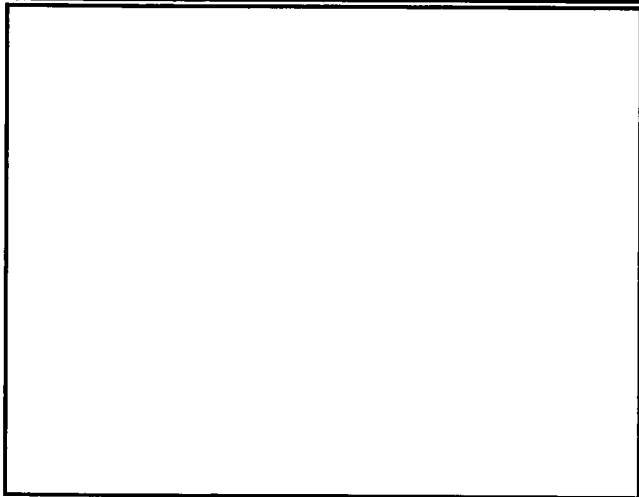
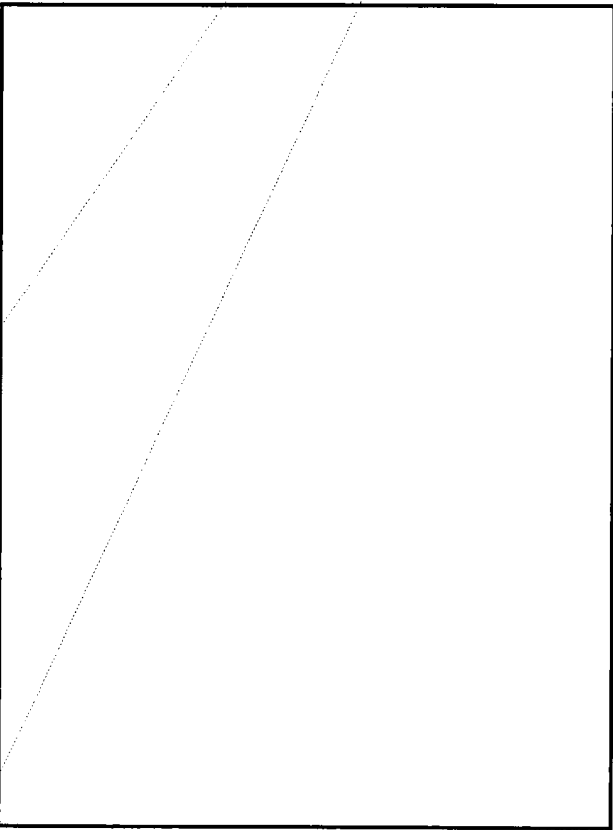
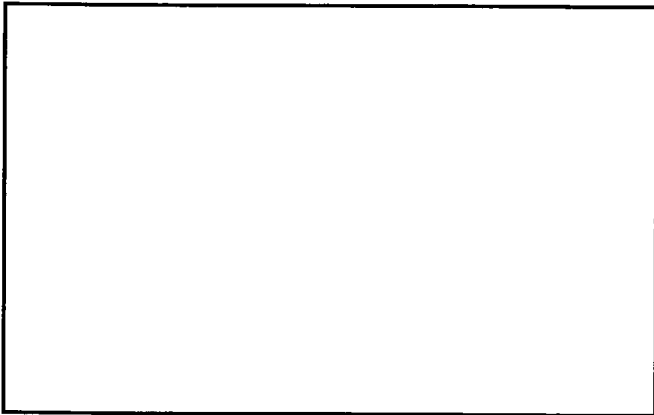
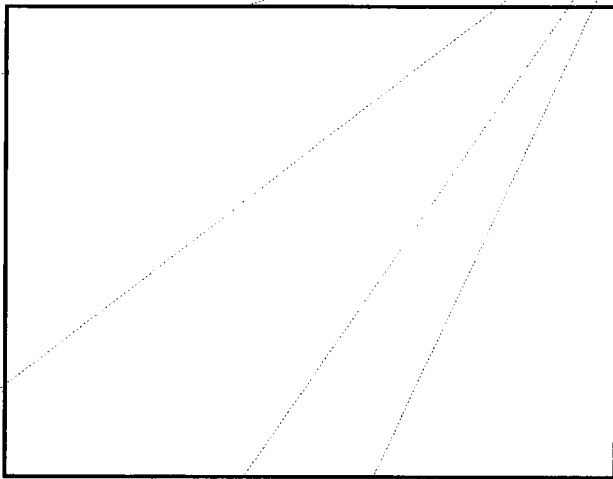


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EO 1.4.(d)



EO 1.4.(c)  
EO 1.4.(d)





EO 1.4.(c)  
EO 1.4.(d)

[Redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The [Redacted] derived information [Redacted] was distributed throughout the U.S. government, with the CIA, State Department (through its Special Projects Staff), and Defense Department, being the largest customers. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Usually, the information was filtered through the CIA, which in turn provided summary reports which included strategic analyses, order of battle information, and status of ongoing [Redacted]

[Redacted] This distribution system remained in effect through the end of the war in 1954. Whether or not COMINT played any role in any U.S. policy decisions, [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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depth and exploitation; for T/A, analysis of trends and development of indicators and warnings

[Redacted]

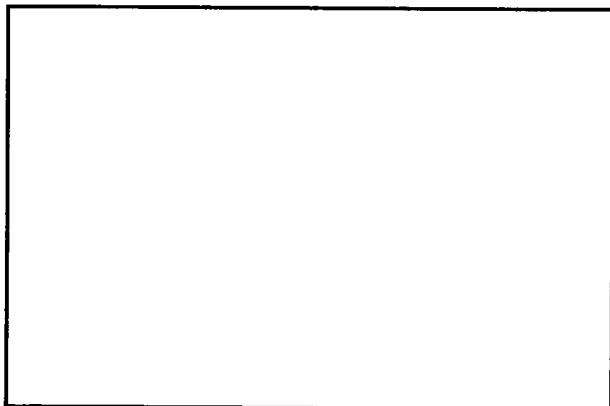
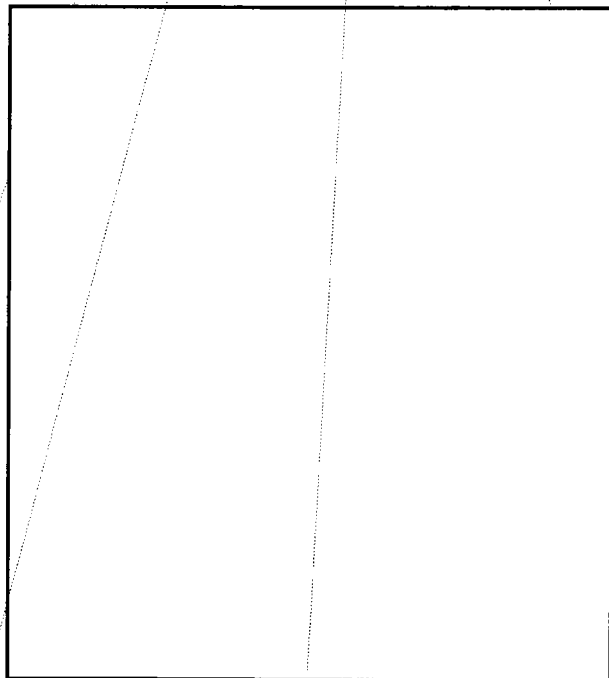
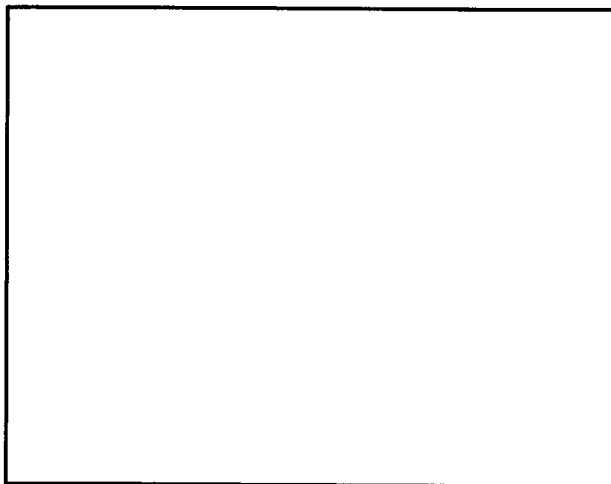
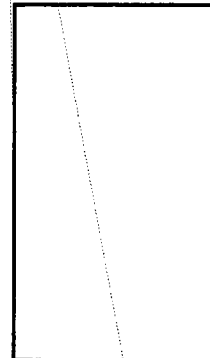
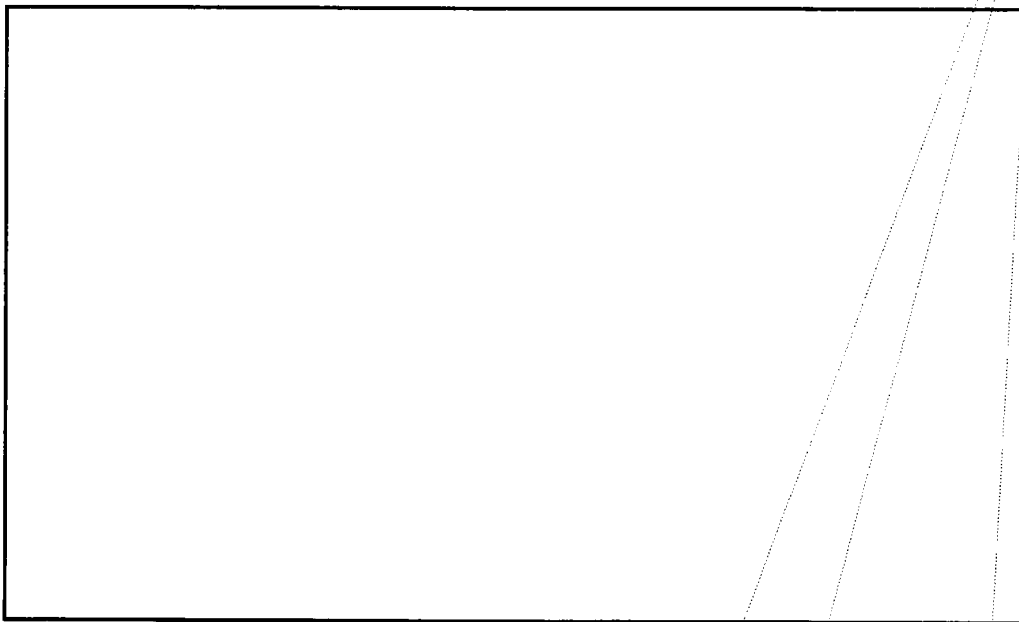
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(U) However, even under the best of circumstances, any [redacted] edge meant little if the strategic and tactical military situation was lost. For France, despite all the aid it was receiving, the war was continuing to turn against them. A last

desperate measure was made to retrieve the situation. It became one of history's most decisive battles, Dien Bien Phu.

~~(S//SI)~~ **Eavesdropping on Hell:**  
**[redacted] the Battle of**  
**Dien Bien Phu**

(U) In late 1953, the French, hoping to retrieve their declining military and political situation in northern Indochina, conceived of a plan to build an "impregnable" position in the rugged terrain of northwest Tonkin near a village known as Dien Bien Phu. It was a strategic gamble on the part of the French high command, as well as part of larger, ambitious strategy to bring the war to the Viet Minh strongholds, especially in Tonkin and central Annam, through a series of hard-hitting military operations known as the Navarre Plan.

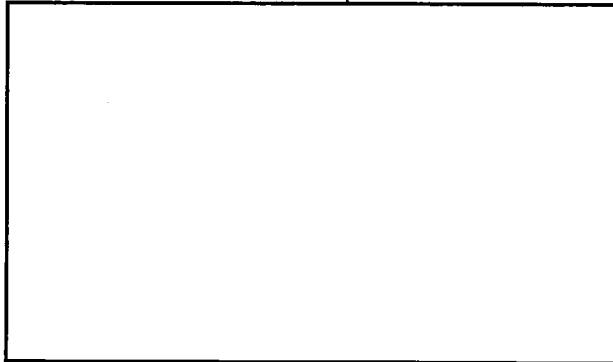
(U) This was not the first time that Dien Bien Phu had been used as a major point in French strategic military planning for Indochina. In the abortive French scheming against the Japanese occupation forces within Indochina in late 1944 to early 1945, Dien Bien Phu was selected as a rallying point for French forces withdrawing from the cities and positions on the Indochinese littoral. The town promised easy access to a then friendly China, as well as allowing for possible Allied air supply of French and Laotian guerrilla teams operating in northern Laos. However, the French were caught off guard by the swiftness and thoroughness of the Japanese coup of 9 March 1945, in large part made possible by the Japanese monitoring of French colonial communications. A few thousand French and Vietnamese colonial troops along with some civilians, managed barely to escape Japanese forces as they retreated northwest to Dien Bien Phu and then into China.

(U) The French rationale for seeking a decisive battle there remains controversial. The French themselves often point to the previous

year's debacle in Laos and the subsequent need to protect the region from Viet Minh encroachments. The area was home to several mountain tribes whose continued loyalty the French felt was critical to their holding Indochina.<sup>70</sup> The French also wanted to use the tribes, especially the Tai, as partisan units to harass the Viet Minh "rear" in western Tonkin. Dien Bien Phu would act as a *mole d'ammarrage* ("mooring point") for these operations in the Tonkin and Laotian interiors.

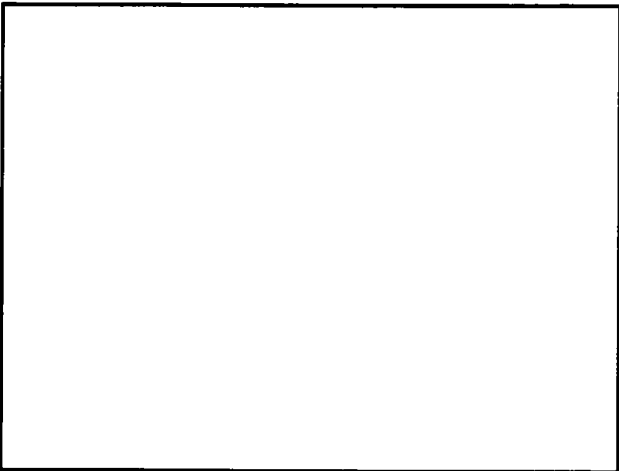
(U) Other observers have suggested that the French, impressed with the American tactic of so-called "killer" operations in Korea – whereby overwhelming firepower was brought down on Communist troop concentrations – were seeking a similar situation in which they could win a "climactic battle." The French hoped to lure a large Viet Minh force into terrain of France's choosing and then eliminate it through the application of superior firepower, which, in this case, included artillery, tactical air support (some of it flying from an airstrip within the base), and armor. Dien Bien Phu would be the bait. This multitude of explanations probably reflected the confusion in the French command at the time as to what was the purpose of the battle. In a sense, all the explanations could be correct; it has been illustrated elsewhere that the French commanders in Indochina were split over what role Dien Bien Phu was to play.<sup>71</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ Giap, the Viet Minh military chief, fully and immediately grasped the larger implications of the French buildup at Dien Bien Phu.

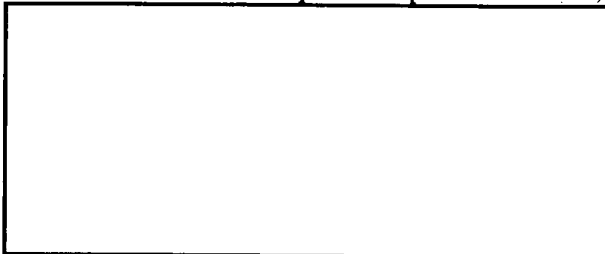


(U) Giap reasoned that the French position at Dien Bien Phu was a political and military gamble and one that they could ill afford with their forces stretched out and engaged by Viet Minh forces all over Indochina. The lack of major, mobile reinforcements and the limited French airlift capability (due more to a lack of trained aircrews than from a shortage of aircraft) meant that the garrison there could expect little help if Giap's forces cut them off. At the same time, Viet Minh forces in the rest of Indochina would be free to threaten to take control of more territory since the bulk of Navarre's mobile forces were locked up in their own fortress.

[redacted] The question for the French command in Hanoi was: Were these Viet Minh units full divisions or detached units?



~~(TS//SI)~~ Whatever the initial French intent at Dien Bien Phu, their later plan to consolidate and fortify the position was in reaction to information [redacted] In November 1953, when French paratroops first were dropped onto Dien Bien Phu as part of Operation Castor,



(U) The French commander for Indochina, General Henri Navarre, ignored this intelligence. He believed that the logistics support needed to for a multidivision action was beyond the Viet Minh capability and committed the cream of his elite, though lightly armed, paratroop, Foreign Legion, and colonial units to the buildup of Dien Bien Phu.<sup>77</sup> But, Giap, who, if anything, was a master of logistics and movement, outfoxed

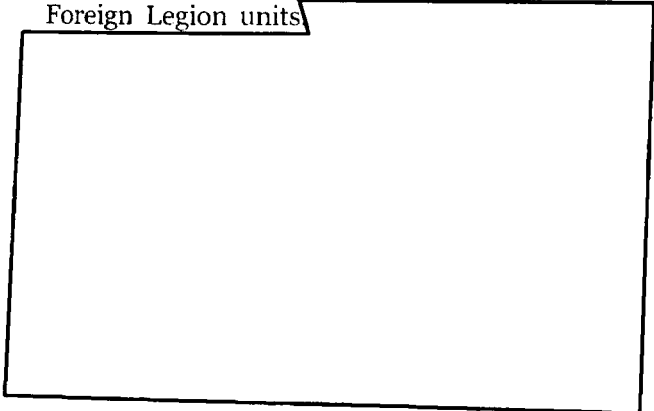


(U) French Colonial and Foreign Legion paratroops during Operation Castor

everyone. Ultimately he would mass four divisions of infantry and one division of heavy artillery around the French position in the vulnerable valley.

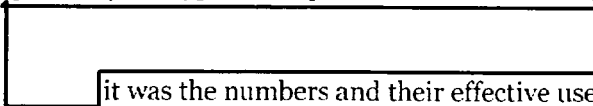
(U) From November 1953 through March 1954, Viet Minh units concentrated in the hills surrounding the French garrison. Dien Bien Phu sat in a basin about twelve miles long by ten miles wide resembling a bean bisected by a stream. The surrounding hills offered the Viet Minh an excellent view of the entire French complex. The base's airstrips were also exposed to Giap's artillerymen.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The French base consisted of two airstrips defended by nine strongpoints which were given women's names. (Popular sentiment has that these were the names of the mistresses of the garrison commander, then Colonel Christian de Castries.) This "land-air base" was stocked with artillery and tanks and manned by 13,000 of France's colonial troops, including some of its best mixed colonial, Algerian, Moroccan, and Foreign Legion units

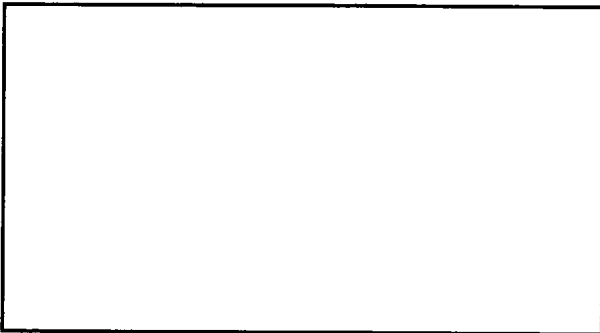
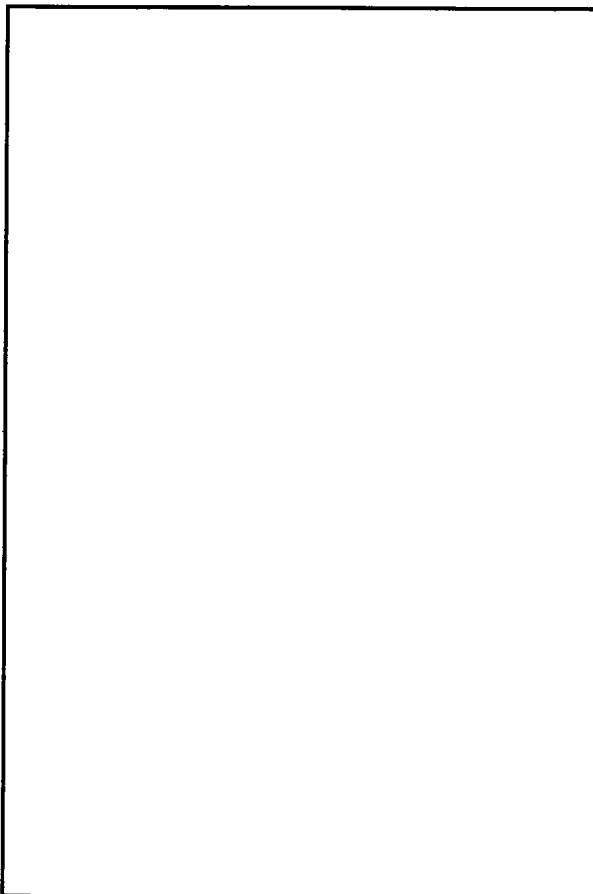


(U) Throughout the winter of 1953-54, Giap moved up his troops, carefully driving out any French units in nearby villages and strongpoints that could threaten his supply lines, and massing the Viet Minh formations in the nearby hills. Effectively, this produced a "cordon sanitaire" that ensured that any possible relief columns would have to fight their way through to relieve Dien Bien Phu. His four dozen American 105-millimeter howitzers were carefully placed in the surrounding hills, set on retractable sleds and hid-

den in caves. This near invisibility hampered French counter-battery fire. The Viet Minh also had the advantage of direct fire for their artillery; they looked down on the fortress. However, contrary to popular myth, the French were not surprised by the type of weapons the Viet Minh had;

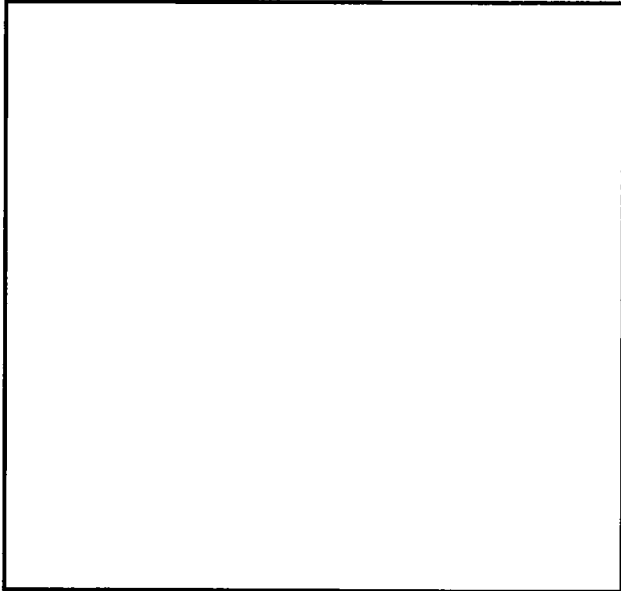
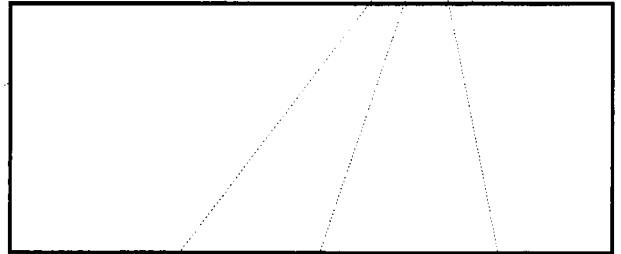
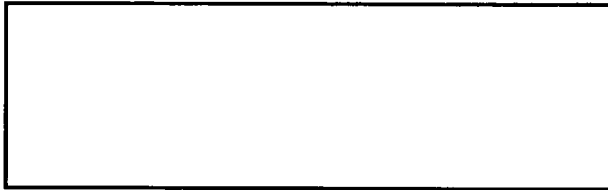


it was the numbers and their effective use that shocked them.

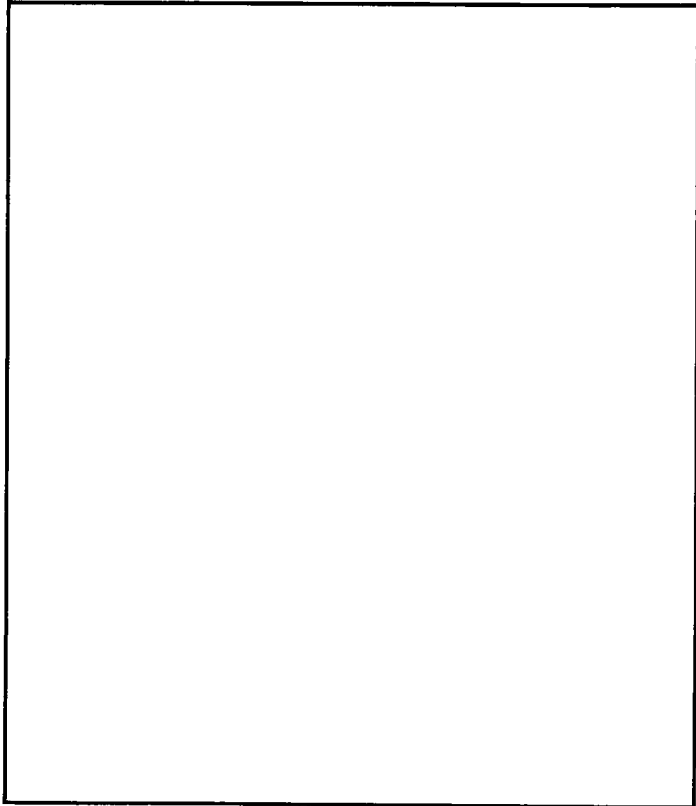
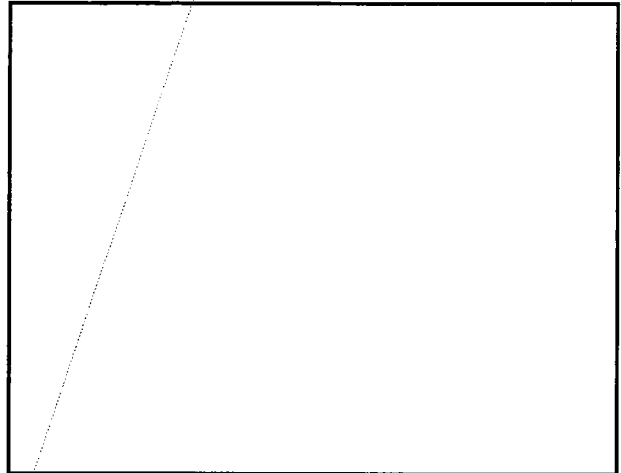


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EO 1.4.(c)  
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The result was a rare opportunity to watch the development of the battle for Dien Bien Phu from vantage point of both sides. There was little that occurred in the fighting that Washington did not know about.



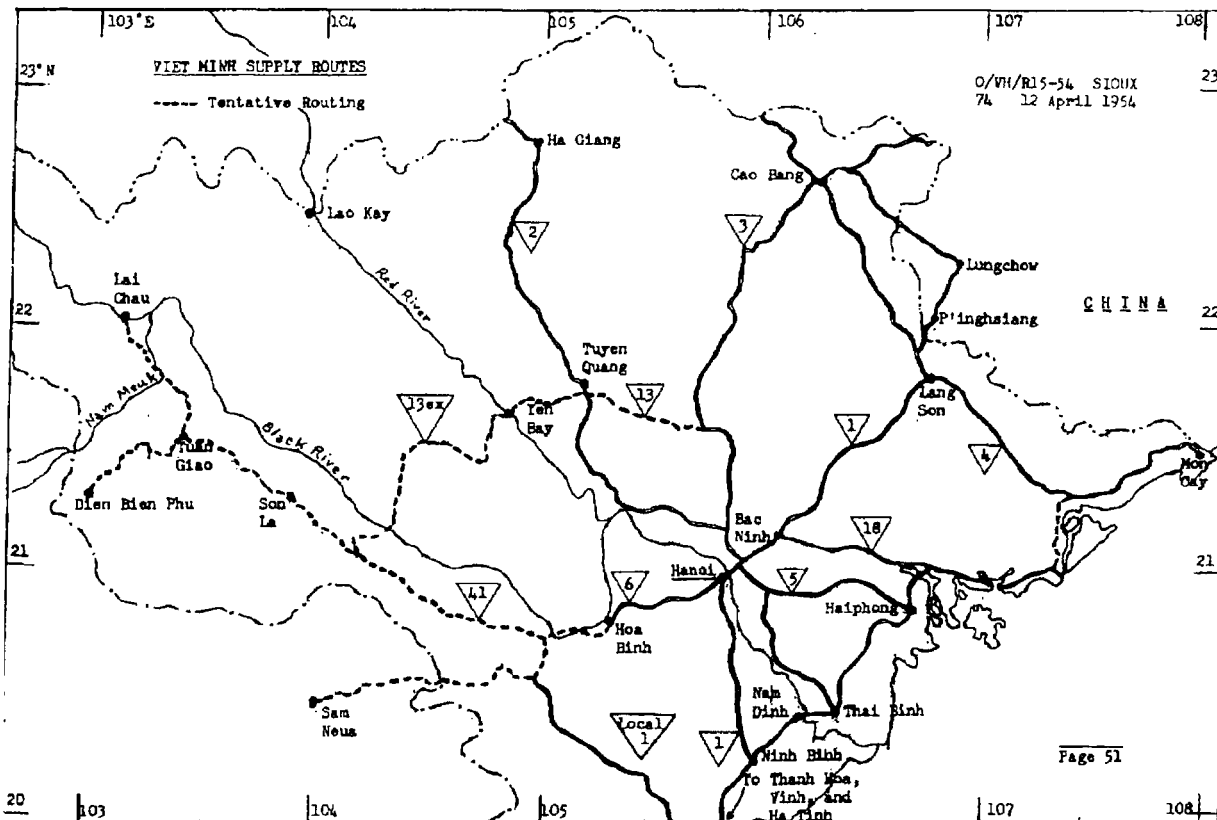
***(U) The Battle Begins***

(U) At 5:00 P.M. on 13 March, Giap launched his attack. Viet Minh artillery blanketed the French guns and blasted the fortified French positions. At midnight, Giap's troops rose up and seized the first French fort, Beatrice. In four more days of heavy fighting, another French fort, Gabrielle, fell while two more were partially occupied. The northern part of Dien Bien Phu was now occupied by the Viet Minh, with the added danger of a totally unobstructed view of the main airstrip. The French artillery commander, Colonel Charles Piroth, realizing he had failed to

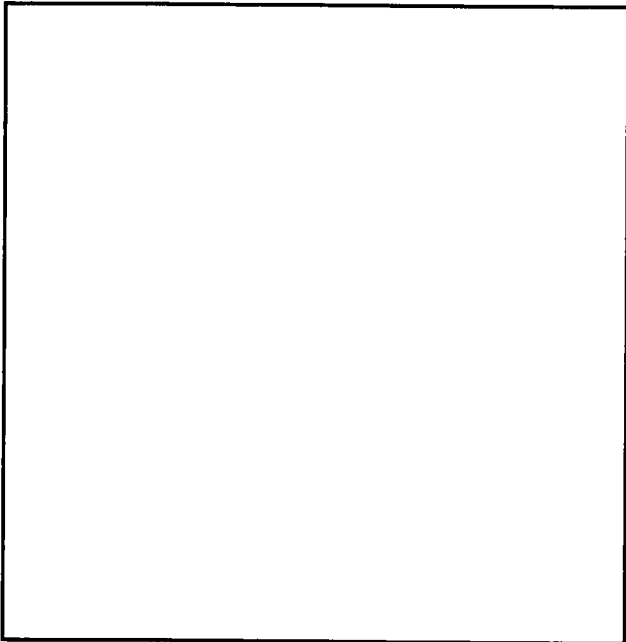
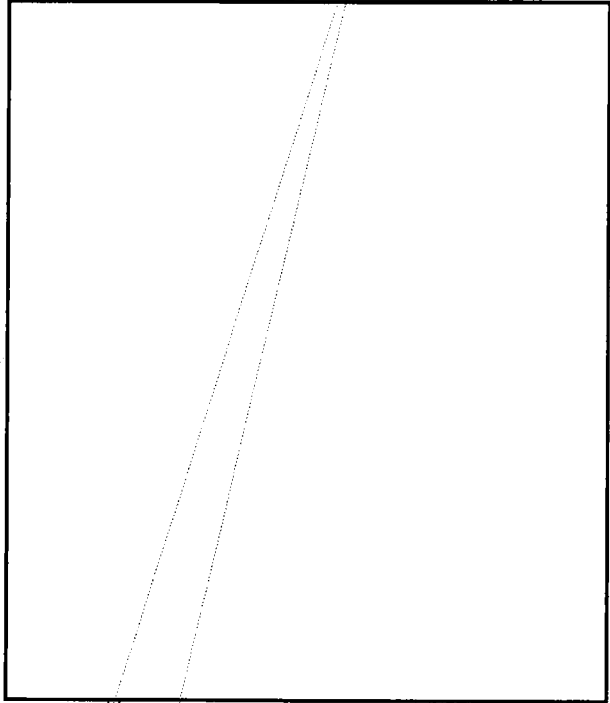
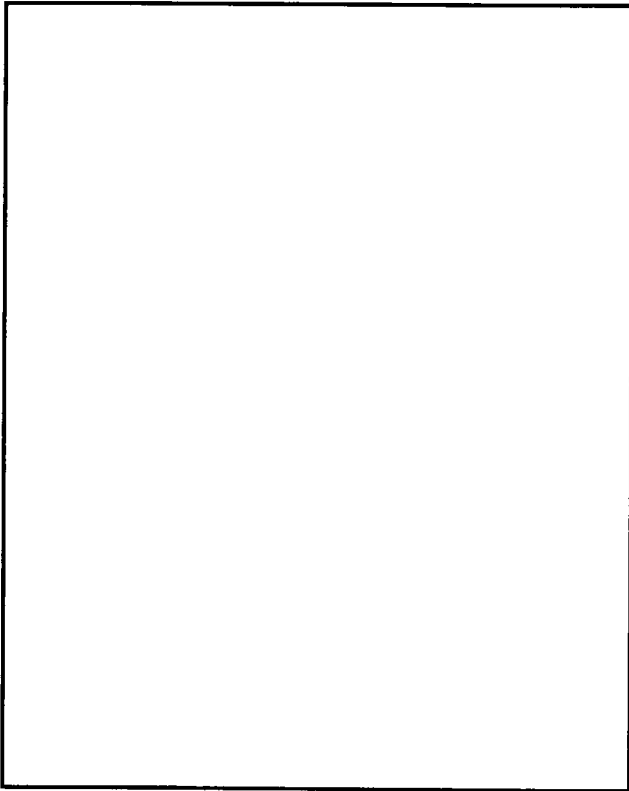
silence the Viet Minh artillery he had dismissed so easily before the battle, committed suicide. The two French airstrips were wrecked beyond normal flight use; supply and reinforcements could come only by parachute; wounded could leave only when pilots were brave enough to risk dodging Viet Minh artillery that bracketed their vulnerable aircraft. Giap's losses from the early assaults were also heavy, and he changed his tactics to overcome the remaining French positions. Viet Minh troops and engineers, resorting to classic siege and World War I tactics, began digging assault trenches right up to the edge of the French lines of entrenchment. When close enough, the Viet Minh troops would emerge from them and attack the French positions.

(U) Even as early as the first day of Castor, the French command had realized that the Viet Minh would have to organize a major supply

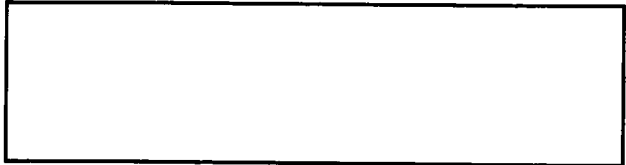
effort for all of the troops massing at Dien Bien Phu. The French air force in Indochina, specifically the northern Tactical Air Group (*GATAC Nord*) could call on about one hundred strike aircraft, while the French navy had two aircraft carriers which supplied another two squadrons of fighter bombers in support. The French tried two tactics in an effort to interdict the Viet Minh supply routes: the big single cut or multiple smaller cuts along the major Colonial Routes 13 and 41 that ranged from the Chinese border (see map below). Both interdiction tactics failed. Giap had massed an army of support troops and local peasants who maintained the supply system intact despite the French aerial assault. The road system was also protected by a massive flak envelope – AAA concentrations manned by both Viet Minh and Communist Chinese troops – which succeeded in keeping the supply roads from Communist China open.<sup>87</sup>



(U) Viet Minh supply routes from Chinese border to Dien Bien Phu



(U) As their forces were being strangled by Giap's troops, the French command approached the Americans with an extraordinary proposal to intervene in the battle. In early March 1954, the chief of the French general staff, General Paul Ely, arrived in Washington to deliver his pessimistic appreciation of the military situation throughout Indochina and specifically his fears on Dien Bien Phu. After talks with the U.S. chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Arthur Radford, Ely returned to Paris with the impression that the Americans had agreed informally to provide direct U.S. air support to the surrounded base.<sup>93</sup> The proposed plan was called Operation Vulture.



(U) The air intervention plan called for the use of B-29 flying fortresses based in the Philippines to attack the Viet Minh ring of positions around the embattled French. The U.S. navy would position the carriers *Essex* and *Boxer* and fly ground support strikes from the Gulf of Tonkin.



OGA

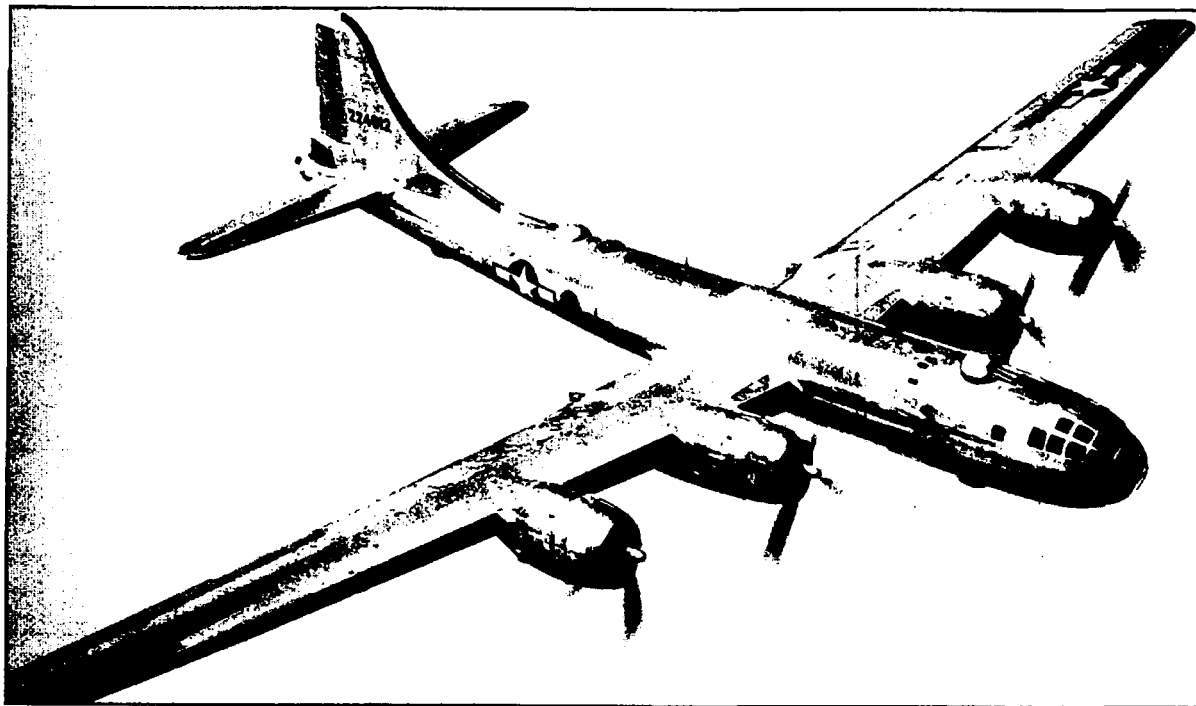


[ ] The planning division of the JCS also chipped in with a ground assault plan which envisioned seven to ten U.S. ground divisions to land in the Red River delta and move northwest into the Viet Minh strongholds in the Thai Nguyen region of the upper Tonkin. By 25 March, the National Security Council had approved Radford's original plan for an air strike.

(U) There was now a distinct chance the U.S. would involve itself in the battle. The new Eisenhower administration favored intervention. At a 7 April news conference, the president made his now-famous statement of the domino theory: "You have a row of dominoes set up, and you knock over the first one and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly." <sup>95</sup> Later, this statement was expanded: "Indochina was the first of a row of dominoes, which is knocked over, making the fall of the last one a certainty. The fall of Indochina would lead to the fall of Burma, Thailand, Malaya, and Indonesia. India would then be hemmed in by



(U) Paratroops from the 3rd Colonial Parachute Battalion attacking Viet Minh troops in Laos, 1954



(U) The B-29: the solution to Dien Bien Phu?

Communism, and Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Formosa, and Japan would all be gravely threatened." A week later, Vice-President Nixon told a convention of newspaper editors that the U.S. may be "putting our own boys in [Indochina] . . . regardless of allied support." 96 This idea of direct involvement, though, had not sprung up overnight. Much thought had already been given to what might happen in Indochina.

~~(S//SI)~~ **The NSA Emergency Plan for Southeast Asia**

~~(TS)~~ Surprisingly, while Dien Bien Phu was being squeezed by Giap's troops, a series of Five-Power (U.S., U.K., Australia, France, and New Zealand) military planning conferences held since the beginning of the year already had envisioned the worst case scenario - that is, a large-scale intervention by Communist Chinese forces, sometime around the summer of 1954 - regardless of the outcome at Dien Bien Phu. The early planning conferences had presumed a certain equilibrium between the French and Viet Minh; perhaps even a sort of impasse.

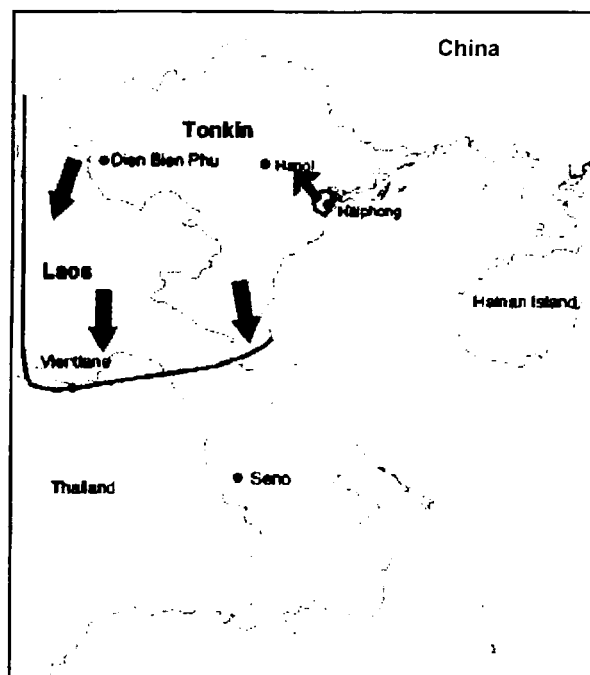
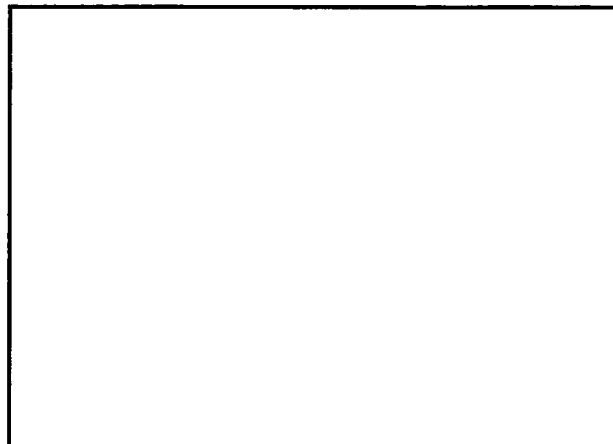
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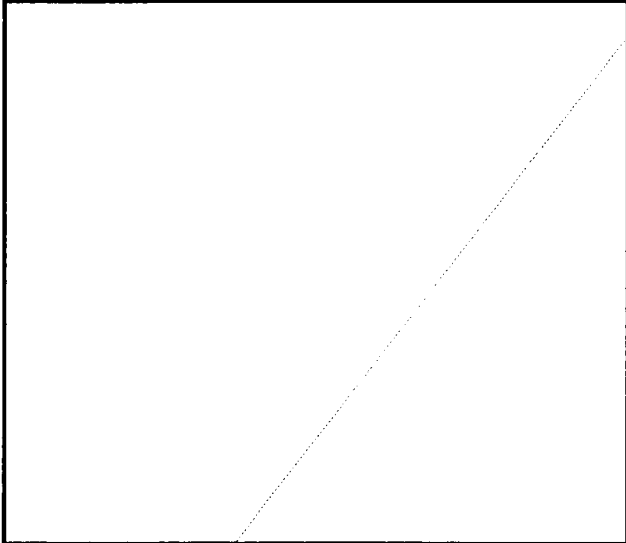
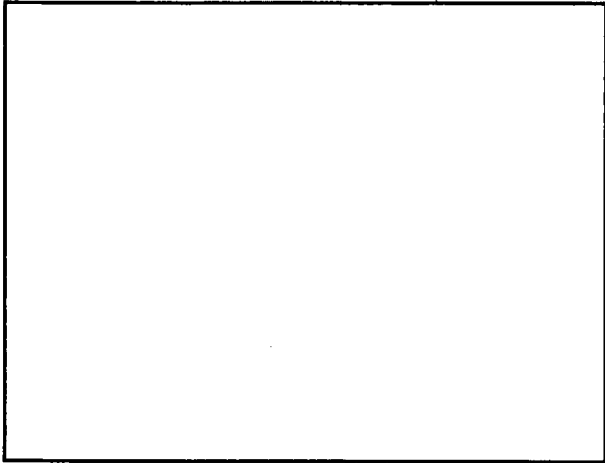
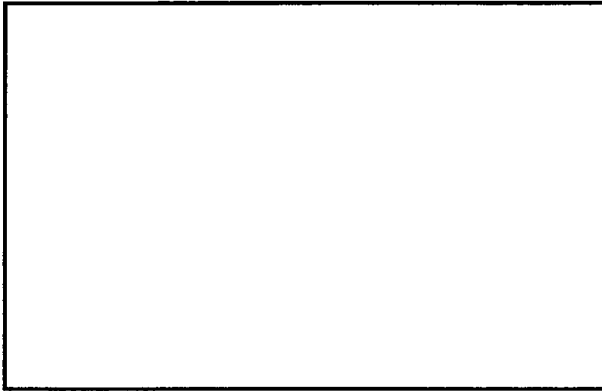
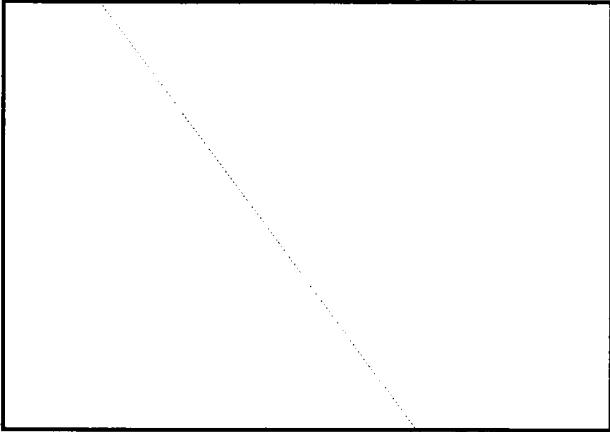
The attack would be supported by aircraft and small naval units moving along the coast. It was expected by the Pentagon planners that the Chinese would sweep Allied, in this case mainly French Union, forces ahead of them. Within fifty-five days of the initial attacks, it was expected that the Chinese would occupy a line roughly along the 19th parallel, from Vinh in Vietnam to Takhet and Vientiane in Laos. Hanoi would be occupied, while it was hoped that a small Allied redoubt would hold on in the Red River delta, anchored on the port city of Haiphong. 98

~~(TS)~~ The Allied riposte would take some time to organize. A special effort would be made to hold Hanoi - its military and political significance was paramount. Failing that, the Haiphong toehold would have to be maintained at all costs.

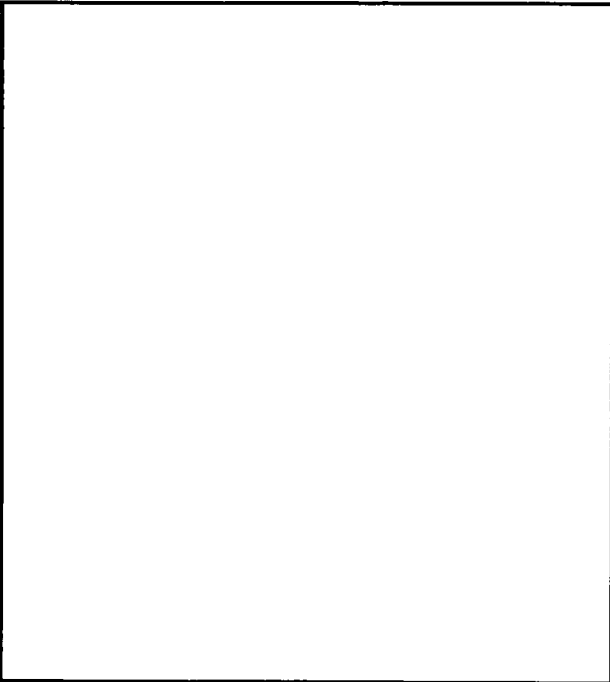
The Allied planners figured to use that port as the springboard for its counterattack. When the Allied forces were at full strength, a force of about eight divisions would strike northwest up the Red River back to Hanoi and beyond to Yen Bai, where, it was expected, the supply lines for the forward Chinese forces would be so endangered as to potentially isolate them. At that point, the situation would be stabilized. 99



(U) Projected military situation in Indochina after a Chinese Communist assault into Laos and Tonkin. The Allied riposte would stage from Haiphong.



EO 1.4.(c)  
EO 1.4.(d)



**(U) "We are blowing up everything. Adieu."**

(U) Within the next three weeks, however, the momentum for intervention of any kind by any country was lost. A variety of factors undercut the Eisenhower administration's plans. Most notably, the French stalled on the issue of the nature of U.S. intervention. The truth was the French were looking for a one-time strike to retrieve the tactical situation at Dien Bien Phu. Talk of the insertion of American ground forces made them fearful of losing control of the war: that, in this instance, France would become simply a junior partner in any coalition, and, in the process, would have to grant total independence to Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, something it

was not then prepared to do.<sup>105</sup> At the same time, the U.S. was unable to stir up support from its allies, principally the British. The British viewed intervention as counterproductive to the start of talks in Geneva which they, along with the Soviets, were co-chairing. When the idea of intervention was presented to the prime minister, Winston Churchill, he told the visiting U.S. secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, that a military operation of the type the Americans proposed would be "ineffective" and "might well bring the world to the verge of a major war."<sup>106</sup>

(U) The lack of any allies who were interested in participating in the Indochina intervention left the U.S. with the prospect of unilateral action, which did not sit well with congressional leaders. At a meeting in early April with a congressional delegation, Secretary of State Dulles had been told by Senators Richard Russell and Lyndon Johnson that they would not support any project without British and other Allied participation.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, the congressmen and senators in the delegation were skeptical of the outcome of Operation Vulture. They asked the hardest question of all: What if the bombing failed? What,

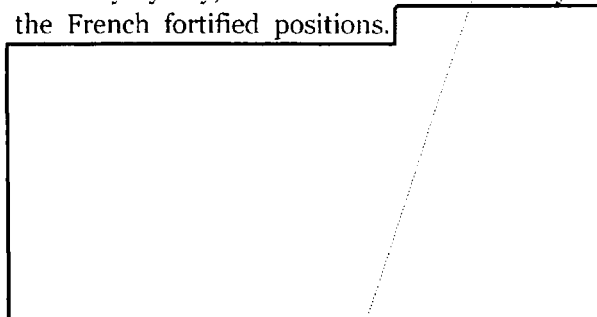


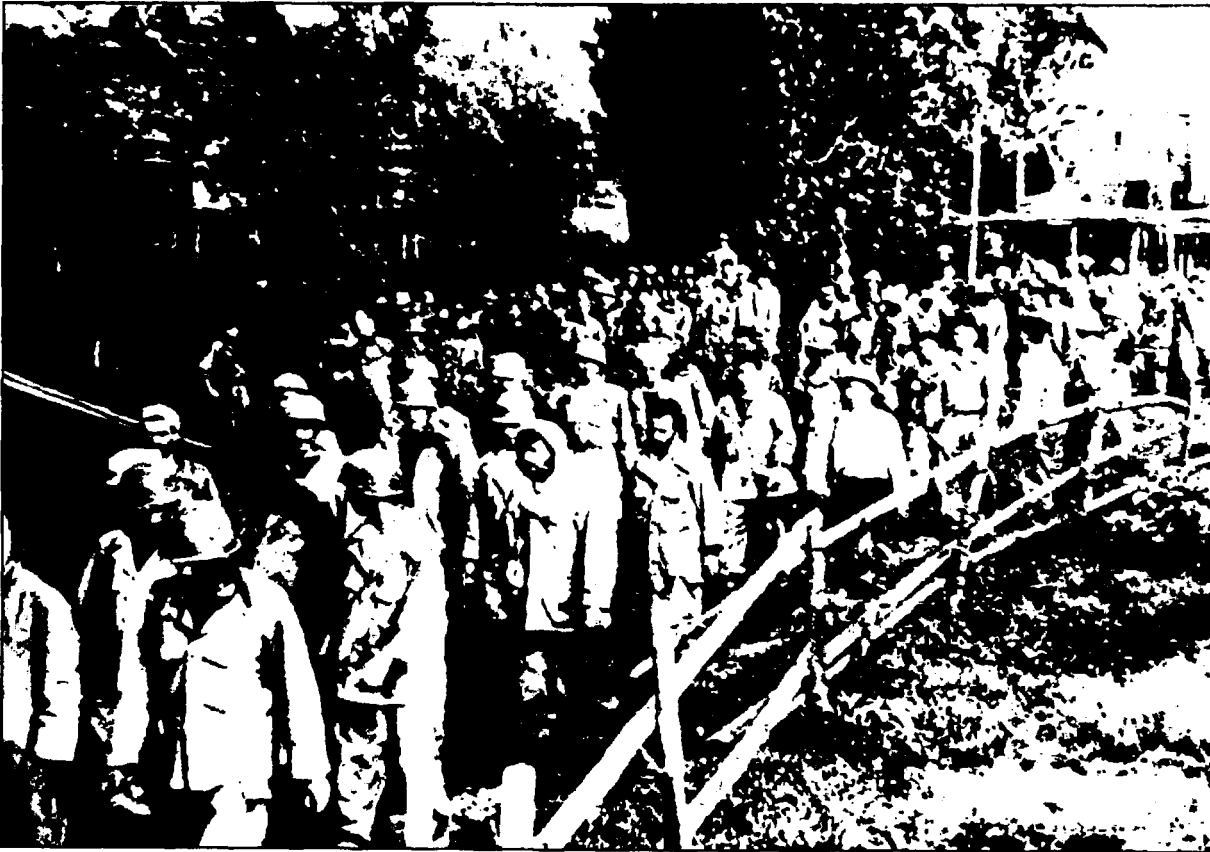
(U) French casualty being treated at Dien Bien Phu

then, was the next step? The next step, of course, was intervention by the U.S. ground forces.

(U) The clinching argument against intervention came from the U.S. Army's chief of staff, General Matthew Ridgeway. Ridgeway, who had come to his JCS position straight from his command of UN forces in Korea, was well aware of the difficulties of a conventional land war fought in a backward Asian country. He was less than dazzled with the claims by the air force and navy regarding the effectiveness of air power against the Viet Minh positions around Dien Bien Phu. Ridgeway understood how difficult it would be just to establish any type of support base during the invasion. Port facilities that existed in Haiphong were inadequate for the size of the force expected to go in. The transportation system would be unable to support movement or supply without a major engineering effort. His assistant chief of staff for plans, Lieutenant General James Gavin, called the plans to invade "utter folly."<sup>108</sup> Ridgeway reported to Eisenhower that it would take anywhere from seven to eleven army divisions about ten years to eradicate the Viet Minh, depending upon the response of the Chinese Communists. President Eisenhower, hardly a foe to intervention, but realistic in what could be accomplished in a land war, realized the costs of getting into Indochina, and on 29 April 1954 announced that there were no plans for U.S. intervention of any kind.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The French were now left on their own. [redacted] the prolonged, lonely agony of their defeat at Dien Bien Phu. Day by day, the Viet Minh nibbled away at the French fortified positions. [redacted]





(U) French POWs from Dien Bien Phu being marched to Viet Minh prison camps

[Redacted]

At 1750 hours, a lonely, last outpost of the French 31st Combat Engineer Battalion (callsign "9DMO") radioed Hanoi with the simple message: "We're blowing up everything. Adieu." <sup>111</sup>

(U) The French had finally emerged from their experience in the tunnel of Indochina only to discover defeat's infinite darkness.

**(U) Notes**

1. ~~(TS//SI)~~ National Cryptologic School, *On Watch: Profiles from the National Security Agency's Past 40 Years*, 1986, 24.
2. ~~(TS//SI)~~ JPAG Memo, State Department Correspondence, Memorandum for Coordinator of Joint Operations, "Communications Intelligence

Priorities." 19 November 1946, NCA, CBNH 66. ACC# 19322.

3. ~~(TS//SI)~~ George Howe, Narrative History of AFSA and NSA, [Redacted] September 1949, Technical Annex I.A. Reference to Volume V.A.16, 7.

4. ~~(TS//SI)~~ ASA Cryptanalytic Annual Report 1945-46, 25, Series V.C.I.P.

5. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 7 fn.

6. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 16-19.

[Redacted]

8. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Hanoi to Moscow, 23 September 1945, H-207443, NCA, ACC# 2022C.

9. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Hanoi to London, 26 September 1945, H-212427, NCA ACC# 2022C.

10. (U) Vichy to Hanoi, SIS #116843, 3 February 1944, NARA, RG 457, ASA Multi-national Diplomatic Translations. The failure to include Vietnamese in the

EO 1.4.(c)

colonial administration was a consistent practice in French Indochina. It was not until after World War I that any appreciable number of the native populations were brought into the administration. See Buttinger, Joseph, *Vietnam: The Embattled Dragon* (NY, London: Frederick A. Praeger 1967), 35-37.

11. (U) David W. Gaddy, Editor and Translator, *Essential Matters: A History of the Cryptographic Branch of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1945-1975*. Center for Cryptologic History, 1994. 4.

12. (U) Ibid., 6.

13. (U) Ibid., 2.

[Redacted]

15. (U) Gaddy, 8.

[Redacted]

17. ~~(TS//SI)~~ JPAG U.S. Monthly Summary Report, November 1946, #6, 2, NCA ACC# 42466, Box CBPC26.

[Redacted]

19. ~~(TS//SI)~~ JPAG, November 1946.

20. ~~(TS//SI)~~ JPAG, January 1947, 2.

21. ~~(TS//SI)~~ JPAG June 1949, Appendix 2, 2.

22. (U) Office of the Secretary of Defense, United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office). Book I: Vietnam and the United States, 1940-1950. Volume IV.A, "Aid for France in Indochina, 1950-1954," 5.

23. (U) Ibid.

[Redacted]

26. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 192.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

31. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 184.

32. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 195.

33. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 193; also see 1034.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

36. (U) For more on this experience see Sharon Maneki's *Quiet Heroes of the Southwest Pacific Theater: An Oral History of the Men and Women of CBB and Frumel*, Center for Cryptologic History, National Security Agency, 1996; and Geoffrey St. Vincent Ballard's *On ULTRA Active Service*, (Richmond: Spectrum Publications, 1991).

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

39. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 3.

40. (U) H-58855, 7 October 1942, Hanoi to Vichy; H-43946, 1 July 1942 Hanoi to Vichy, NARA RG 457.

41. (U) H-187165, 24 May 1945, Chungking to Paris, NARA RG 457.

42. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Multi-national Diplomatic Translations, H-234254, Saigon to Moscow, 10 June 1946, NCA ACC# 2022C.

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59. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 14.  
60. ~~(TS//SI)~~ "Historical Study of COMINT Production, Processing Volume, 1949-1953," CCH Series VI.I.13.  
61. ~~(TS//SI)~~ William Gerhard, *In the Shadow of War: (To the Gulf of Tonkin)*, Cryptologic History Series, 1969, 15-16.

45. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

62. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Peterson, Appendix B, Terms of Reference.

[Redacted]

63. ~~(TS//SI)~~ "Historical Study of COMINT Production," CCH Series VI.I.13.

[Redacted]

65. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 183.

48. ~~(TS//SI)~~ AFSA-23 #0265. 2 June 1950, 7-8, CCH Series XII.NN.II.B.5.  
49. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 7.

[Redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)

[Redacted]

51. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 4.  
52. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 8.

70. (U) Ronald Spector, *The U.S Army in Vietnam: Advice and Support, 1941-1960* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, U.S. Army), 182.

[Redacted]

71. (U) Bernard Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985), 31-35. To this confusion of reasonable military rationales can be added another popularly held conception that the French move was inspired by its intelligence services' desire to retain a highly profitable source of funding for its operations through opium trafficking. See Porch, *The French Secret Services* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1995). In reality, it probably was the Viet Minh who prospered from the opium trade, using it for its own pharmaceutical needs and selling or trading the rest for weapons and supplies. See Schulzinger, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 59.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

74. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Bruce Davidson, *Vietnam at War* (New York: Oxford University Press), 196; also see

58. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 12

EO 1.4.(c)  
EO 1.4.(d)

[Redacted]

(CH<sub>2</sub>BrCOCH<sub>3</sub>) is a colorless and highly toxic liquid used as a lachrymatory compound in tear gas.

[Redacted]

93. (U) Spector, 193.

94. (U) Spector, 200. Aboard the *Essex* was a detachment of navy cryptologists. The detachment, known as "Communications Supplemental Radio," collected and reported on the air and air defense situation. See Korn, John, "Vietnam 1984," *Cryptolog*, Vol. 22, No. 1, Winter 2001.

95. (U) John S. Bowman, Editor, *The World Almanac of the Vietnam War* (New York: Bison Books, 1985), 35.

96. (U) Ibid.

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(c)  
EO 1.4.(d)

77. (U) Davidson, 189.

[Redacted]

79. (U) Davidson, 234, 256.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

83. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Peterson, 9.

[Redacted]

98. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 3.

99. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 7.

100. ~~(TS//SI)~~ NSAEPI, Annex I, "Communications Intelligence Production," 16 April 1954, 3-7.

[Redacted]

102. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

103. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

104. ~~(TS//SI)~~ NSAEPI, Annex I, "Communications Intelligence Production," 16 April 1954, 3.

105. (U) James S. Olson, and Randy Robert, *Where the Domino Fell: America and Vietnam, 1945 to 1990* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 44.

106. (U) Bowman, 36.

107. (U) Spector, 203.

108. (U) Ibid., 208. Both Generals Ridgeway and Gavin would reemerge as critics of the intervention of U.S. ground forces in Vietnam in 1965.

[Redacted]

87. (U) Fall, 131-133.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

(U) Fall, 91-92.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

91. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid. (U) Chloracetone (C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>3</sub>ClO<sub>2</sub>) is a colorless, lachrymatory, poisonous liquid used chiefly in organic synthetics and in the manufacture of insecticides and perfume; ethyl bromacetate

111. (U) Fall, 408.

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(c)  
EO 1.4.(d)



~~(S//SI)~~ **First Interlude: The Geneva Settlement and  
[REDACTED] Drawdown, 1954-1955**

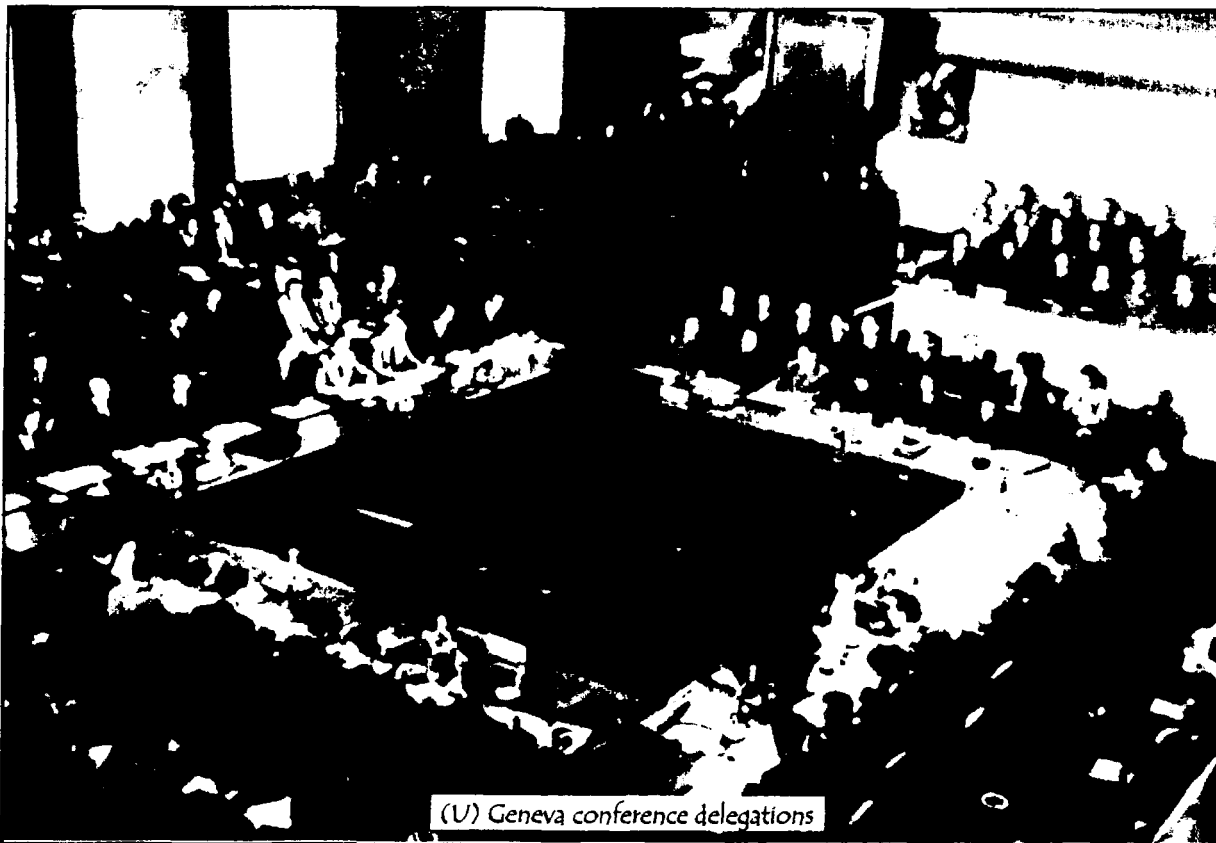
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(U) Even as French Union and Viet Minh troops grappled in the battleground of Dien Bien Phu, delegations from France, the Viet Minh, the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, the United States, the Republic of Vietnam, and the Kingdoms of Laos and Cambodia, were meeting at the Far Eastern Conference in Geneva, Switzerland, to settle both the Korean Conflict and Indochina War. The Korean War phase began on 26 April. On 8 May, the day after the French surrender at Dien Bien Phu, the Indochina phase of the conference started.

mise, Geneva was it. The French, militarily humiliated at Dien Bien Phu, publicly refused to entertain any suggestion for a possible partition of Vietnam. They argued along the American line, espoused mainly by United States Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and echoed by the government of Vietnam, that only "free" countries could defend themselves against communist aggression. The Viet Minh, on the other hand, were aiming for a complete political settlement with the French leaving all of Vietnam.

~~(TS//SI)~~ [REDACTED]

(U) If ever a conference was begun with all its main participants determined not to compro-



(U) Geneva conference delegations

EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted] Secretary of State Dulles did not want the U.S. even to be involved at all; his ideological inflexibility had let him entertain the possibility of refusing to acknowledge the very existence of the Viet Minh as a "state" and therefore exclude them from the conference.<sup>1</sup> He had further infuriated the Chinese by refusing to shake Zhou Enlai's hand, considering even this gesture as a form of legitimizing another government he did not want to recognize. Bao Dai's delegation took its cue from the Americans and tried to undercut any compromise.<sup>2</sup> This inflexible, yet almost detached, attitude bothered some southern Vietnamese who felt that the American position at Geneva subverted the chances for a military intervention; nor did it seem to them that the U.S. was prepared to make concessions at the table.

[redacted]

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)  
EO 1.4.(d)

(U) For the French, the collapse of Dien Bien Phu left them in a perilous military position, especially in the Tonkin region. Fearful of a Viet Minh onslaught in the Red River valley, Generals Navarre and Cogy rearranged their remaining troops around Hanoi and along an escape corridor down Colonial Highways 5 and 18 to the port of Haiphong. Whether Giap intended to assault the Hanoi-Haiphong area along the Red River is debatable. At Dien Bien Phu he had sustained almost 23,000 casualties and had captured 10,000 French prisoners. Giap still had sizable French forces in Laos and Cochin to deal with. A campaign eastward into the Red River valley towards Hanoi might have undone the recent and

costly victory at Dien Bien Phu. There is some evidence that he was prepared to move into the region, but what he ultimately would have done if there was no sign of a settlement at Geneva, is unknown.<sup>4</sup>

(U) However, it was pressure from internal politics in France that proved decisive for the conference. On 12 June the government of Prime Minister Joseph Laniel resigned and Pierre Mendes-France, a supporter of De Gaulle but also something of a maverick leftist, took over. Aware of the public disenchantment with the seemingly endless "la sale guerre" (the "dirty war"), he stunned the French nation and Chamber of Deputies with the announcement that he would have a settlement by 20 July or resign. Under the raised hammer of this deadline, the French moved to draw up a compromise partition, originally aiming to have it established at the eighteenth parallel.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The Viet Minh, certain of their military position, soon would learn the true nature of socialist "solidarity," and see their gains evaporate at the conference table.

[redacted]

However, rather quickly into the conference, the Chinese and Russians began to pressure Pham Van Dong and the rest of the Viet Minh delegation to accept a partition plan. The Chinese, mostly out of historic geopolitical considerations, preferred a partitioned Vietnam on their southern border - always concerned with the French presence, they now could not brook an independent and unified Vietnam.<sup>6</sup>

[redacted]

The Russians, anxious not to wreck the conference, further squeezed the Viet Minh. Pham Van Dong, realizing how little leverage the Viet Minh had without Chinese and Soviet support, relented and agreed to the partition idea. Eventually, the

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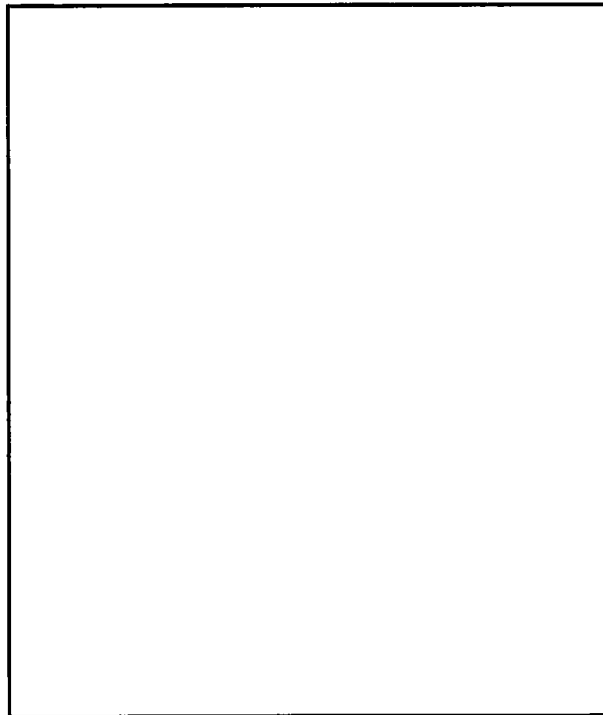
seventeenth parallel was picked as the point of division.

(U) On July 21, the cease fire "Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet Nam" was signed by the Viet Minh and French. A further protocol was agreed to by seven of the nine attendees - the United States and the Republic of Vietnam refused to even agree to its provisions, which were (1) Vietnam was provisionally divided at the seventeenth parallel into North and South Vietnam, pending a permanent solution through nationwide elections; (2) for a period of three hundred days all persons could pass freely from the northern to southern zone; (3) limits were imposed on foreign military bases in both the North and South, on military personnel movement, and rearmament; (4) nationwide elections were scheduled for 20 July 1956; and (5) an International Control Commission made up of representatives of India, Canada, and Poland was established to supervise the detailed implementation of these agreements.

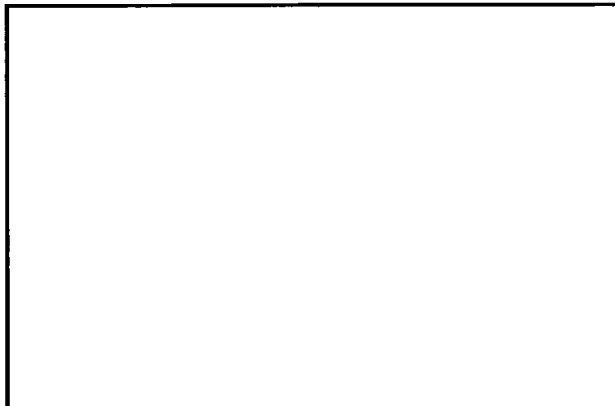
(U) The Americans, along with the South Vietnamese, who had abstained from participating in the negotiations, further refused to sign the agreement. At the time of the signing of the accords, the U.S. stated that it would refrain from using force to disturb the agreements. Washington also stated that it viewed any renewal of aggression as a violation of the agreements, and supported the idea of unification through the supervised elections. However, the Americans knew that the North would win a plebiscite: Ho's popularity with nationalists in the southern areas and the population edge in the North virtually assured that. So Secretary Dulles scrambled to make the best of the situation.

(U) Within two months of the Geneva Accords, he got the Manila Treaty signed, which formed the basis for the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). The treaty obligated its eight signatories, the United States, Great Britain, France, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand,

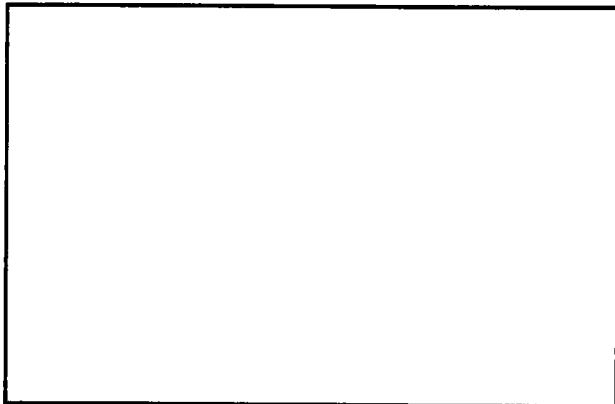
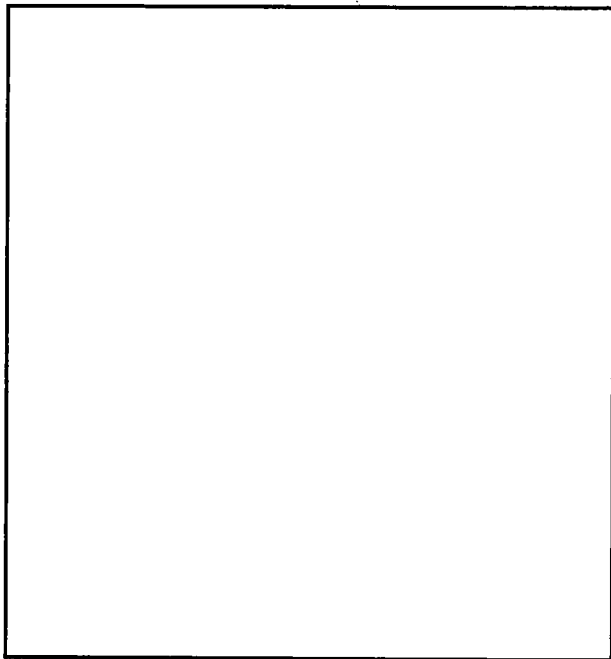
Australia, and New Zealand, to defense commitments, though these were not as stringent as NATO's provisions. Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam, which would have been the expected targets of any communist aggression, were excluded from SEATO because of the provisions of the Geneva accords; still, they were included in the territorial jurisdiction of the treaty. Already the battle lines were being drawn for the next phase of the Indochina War.



EO 1.4.(c)



EO 1.4.(c)



EO 1.4.(c)  
EO 1.4.(d)

**(U) Notes**



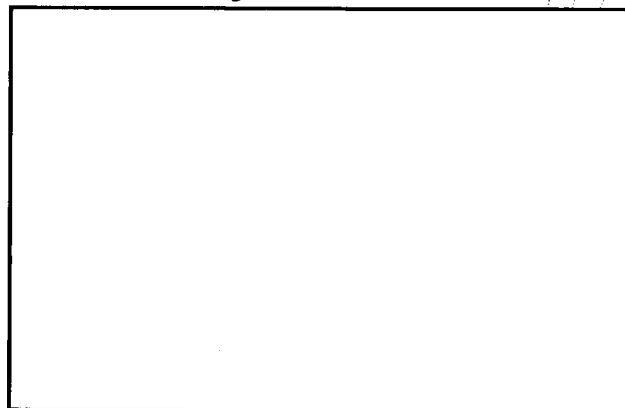
2. (U) Olson and Roberts, 46.



4. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 47.



6. (U) Schulzinger, 76.



EO 1.4.(c)