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INDIA AND SOUTH EAST ASIA 1947-1960

*A STUDY OF INDIA'S POLICY
TOWARDS THE SOUTH EAST ASIAN COUNTRIES
IN THE PERIOD 1947-1960*

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CHAPTER V

INDIA AND VIETNAM

*"Vietnam, the Cinderella of South East Asia,
is fighting unhonoured, unwept, and unsung".*

The Madras Mail (1948)

In "Greater India", Vietnam lies farthest from India, and is also the least close to her culturally. Its importance to India is nonetheless great.

Strategically, Vietnam forms a "protecting pad" for South East Asia — to borrow a phrase from Mr. A. Eden —. It controls the sea lanes as well as the land routes from North and North East Asia to South East Asia. A power which controls Vietnam would be in a position to strike at the rest of South East Asia with greater ease. This fact was well proved by Japan's rapid conquest of this area during World War II, after it had secured control of Vietnam. To India, Vietnam represents, therefore, a first line of defence against a possible attack from North and North East Asia.¹

Economically, Vietnam is an important exporter of foodstuff — in particular, rice, — and of raw materials — in particular, rubber and coal —. It has a large and active population (24 millions in 1947), and represents an interesting market.

Politically, Vietnam is perhaps the most energetic and the most sophisticated people of South East Asia. It has been an active agent of Chinese civilisation, and has dominated the whole Indochinese peninsula in the past. Indeed, the rise of Vietnam and its expansion from the gulf of Tongking to the gulf of Siam can be regarded as an expansion of Chinese civilisation, through the agency of the Vietnamese people. While the Vietnamese resisted fiercely against Chinese domination and absorption, they themselves carried Chinese-influenced systems of political and social organisation from the banks of the Red river to those of the Mekong, destroying in the process the indianised kingdom of Champa in the XVII century, pushing back another indianised kingdom, Cambodia, across the Mekong in the XVIII century, and extending its

¹ For a discussion of Vietnam's strategic importance, see also chapter 3.

suzerainty over yet a third indianised state, the Lao principality of Xieng-Khouang, in the first half of the XIX century.

As with Chinese, so also with Western ideas: the Vietnamese assimilated the ones, as the other, with equal ease, and the struggle which took place in Vietnam from 1945 onwards could be considered partly as a struggle between two ideologies, one imported *via* China, and the other *via* France, which had been espoused with equal earnestness by different sections of the Vietnamese people. Paradoxically enough, the conflict between communism and nationalism in Vietnam was also a facet of a deeper two-phased struggle waged by the Vietnamese people for independence from both China and the West: an anti-Western phase from 1945 to 1954, and an anti-Chinese phase from 1954 onwards.

A victory of communism in Vietnam, therefore, would be not only a victory for the Vietnamese communists, but also a victory for China, and, in the long run, an expansion of Chinese influence not only in Vietnam, but throughout the Indochinese peninsula. The Vietnamese would be the agents of an ideology which may affect India's position in this Indo-chinese peninsula. A victory of the communist forces would affect India's position adversely, while a victory of the nationalist forces would have the opposite effect.

Nowhere else in South East Asia was the struggle between nationalism and colonialism as bloody as in Vietnam, just as the struggle between nationalism and communism there has been. Further, because France gave up her power in Vietnam "too little and too late", the communists had captured the leadership of the national freedom movement of that country. The Vietnamese nationalists were thus caught between communism and colonialism, and had to struggle to extricate themselves from both. Further, neither communism nor colonialism could hope to defeat each other without allying themselves with nationalism. Thus, in Vietnam, nationalism, communism and colonialism were inextricably mixed up. Indeed, in the years following World War II, Vietnam was an ideological tangle.

To a country like India, which was intensely anti-colonialist, and which favoured nationalism rather than communism, the situation in Vietnam looked very complex. All the three "isms" there were so intertwined that to support nationalism without strengthening colonialism and communism amounted to tight rope walking.

Yet, in no small measure, India has been successful in helping the forces of nationalism in Vietnam without strengthening colonialism and communism there. Indeed, India's policy in regard to this country provides an example of how, in spite of outward appearances, she has actually contributed to the strengthening of nationalism at the expense of communism in South East Asia.

India's policy towards Vietnam from 1945 to 1960 can be divided into three broad periods: from 1945 to 1949; from 1950 to July 1954; and from July 1954 to 1960. In the first period, India strongly opposed French colonialism, and was sympathetic to the communist-dominated

nationalist movement led by Ho-Chi-Minh, but she did not carry this sympathy to the point of actually strengthening this movement materially, morally and diplomatically to the advantage of communism. During the second period, India was still showing sentimental preference for Ho-Chi-Minh, but was strictly neutral politically and diplomatically. During the third period, India progressively moved closer to the nationalists to the disadvantage of the communists.

India and Ho-Chi-Minh: moral support, no intervention

If the years 1945-1949 were eventful for Vietnam,² they were no less so for India, which was beset by all sorts of difficulties at home.³ Yet, in spite of her internal difficulties, India could not close her eyes to what went on in Vietnam.⁴ However, in 1945-46, she could do no more than express moral support for the Vietnamese struggle for freedom, and strong, but merely verbal, condemnation of French and Western policy.

When the British troops, sent to Saigon in late September 1945 to disarm the Japanese, were used by the British commander to suppress the Vietnamese nationalists under the pretext of maintaining order, there was a storm of protest in India, especially as among these troops there was a contingent of Indian soldiers from the Twentieth Indian division. The All India Congress Committee, which was meeting in Bombay at that time, passed a resolution stating that it viewed "with anxiety the attempts that are being made to maintain the political and economic subjection of Burma, Malaya, Indochina, and Indonesia".⁴ In December, the same Committee, meeting in Calcutta, passed another resolution declaring that "any support from any quarter to imperialist designs in Indonesia, Indochina, and elsewhere, is resented throughout Asia..."⁵ In March 1946, at its meeting in Bombay, it passed yet another resolution stating that "it had become urgent and necessary to end foreign domination over the countries of Asia and Africa and for foreign armies to be withdrawn from all such countries, and notably from Indonesia, Manchuria, Indochina, Iran and Egypt".⁶ In Delhi, in January 1946, Mr. Nehru declared that "we have watched British intervention there with growing anger, shame and helplessness, that Indian troops should be used for doing Britain's dirty work against our friends who are fighting the same fight as we..."⁷ In October 1946, he sent greetings to Ho-Chi-Minh. In December 1946, he made clear to France that

² For a detailed background on postwar developments in Vietnam see: Philippe Devillers, *Histoire du Vietnam de 1940 à 1952*; Bernard B. Fall, *Le Viet-Minh, 1945-1960*; Ellen J. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina* and Donald Lancaster, *The Emancipation of Indochina*.

³ See chapter 12.

⁴ *Background of India's Foreign policy*, p. 89.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁷ *New York Times*, January 1, 1946.

"Our hearts are with the people of Indochina. The attempt to crush the spirit of freedom in Indochina has deeply moved the Indian people... Though it is difficult for Indians to know the facts of the conflict, one thing is patent that foreign armed forces are trying to crush Vietnam".⁸

A.J.B. Kripalani, president of the Congress Party, warned France that fighting "worse than the last war" would break out in Indochina "unless the peoples of Asia were granted freedom."⁹ At the same time, steps were taken by the Indian government to help Vietnam. However, these steps were limited in scope.

In 1946, Ho-Chi-Minh sent a representative to Delhi to contact the Indian leaders for the purpose of winning their sympathy for the Vietnam Republican government's cause, condemning French policy in Indochina, blocking the work of the French purchasing mission in New Delhi, and preventing the repair of French planes and the refuelling of French ships. These requests were met by Mr. Nehru, but only partially.

On February 18, 1947, Mr. Nehru stated in the Legislative Assembly that the government of India shared the feeling of public opinion in India in favour of Vietnam and the freedom of the people of Indochina, and was anxious not to be a party in any way to any action which might be prejudicial to their interests. He disclosed that the government had taken steps to limit the number of French aircraft which might fly across India, and to exercise stricter control in the future. But, he added, although operational or combat-type aircraft were not allowed to fly across India, air ambulance and other requirements on their onwards passage out of India were allowed to do so.¹⁰ This ban was thus much less extensive than the ban on Dutch aircraft on their way to Indonesia.¹¹ Yet, beyond this limited support, Mr. Nehru refused to go, in spite of the strong pressure of Indian public opinion.

Indian government policy criticized

Indian public opinion was strongly in favour of coming to the help of Ho-Chi-Minh's government. Sarat Chandra Bose, a prominent member of the All India Congress Committee, urged patriotic Indians to fight side by side with the Indochinese against the French troops. The struggle of Indochina, he said, was part of the Asiatic struggle for the liberation from Western domination, and therefore, it was also India's struggle. He called on the Indians to "rush to the rescue" of the Vietnamese forces, to join as volunteers in their "thousands and tens of thousands", and to assist the heroic Indochinese.¹²

⁸ Quoted by Adloff and Thompson in *Minority Problems in South East Asia*, pp. 131-32.

⁹ *North China Daily News*, January 6, 1947.

¹⁰ *Parl. Deb.*, Legislative Assembly, 1947, vol. 1, February 18, p. 764.

¹¹ See Chapter 4, p. 99.

¹² *The Times* (London), January 4, 1947.

Indian volunteers were recruited by Congress members in Pondichery,¹³ and S.A. Dange, vice-president of the all India Trade Union Congress, called on the docker's union to boycott French ships calling at Indian ports carrying troops and arms to and from Indochina.¹⁴ At Calcutta, Indian students demonstrated against French policy. The demonstrations turned into riots. Hand bombs were thrown, and a girl student even lay down on the road to prevent cars from passing. The police had to use tear gas and open fire to disperse the demonstrators. In this riot, 19 students were wounded by bullets, 50 injured by lathi charges, and 500 arrested.¹⁵

On February 9, 1947, S.C. Bose requested Mr Nehru's help to send a volunteer expeditionary force and a medical mission to Indochina, but this was refused. The sending of a volunteer force, Mr. Nehru explained, raised international issues, and "so long as the Government of India is not at war with another country, it cannot take aggressive action against it". To this, Bose retorted that his request raised no international issue and that if the government of India, "for reasons of its own", wished to adopt a policy of non-intervention, the least it ought to do is to "allow Indian Lafayettes to proceed to Vietnam".¹⁶

In March 1947, the Indian Council of World Affairs convened an Inter-Asian Relations Conference in Delhi, in which prominent Indian leaders took part. Mr. Nehru was among them. Ho-Chi-Minh's government was invited to this conference, but at the same time, the French-sponsored governments of Cambodia, Laos and Cochinchina, were also invited. Ho-Chi-Minh's government was thus implicitly denied the right to speak for all Vietnam, although there was no doubt that, at this time, in addition to enjoying widespread support among the Vietnamese people, it was also the legal successor to the Imperial regime of Vietnam.

Ho-Chi-Minh's delegate had come to Delhi to appeal for more than verbal support from India. In a paper submitted to the National Freedom Movements Committee, he insisted that help to the freedom movements in Asia must not manifest itself "only by moral support or verbal protest, but if possible, by material aid and collective action."¹⁷ On March 27, speaking at the second plenary session of the conference, he said:

"at the moment when the very existence of my country is threatened, it is not good words which can save my country but action. We are not gathering here not just by curiosity of knowing each other... We have used enough words about Asian unity. Now let us act".¹⁸

¹³ *The Daily Mail* (London), January 10, 1947.

¹⁴ *The Straits Times*, January 12, 1947.

¹⁵ *The Times*, January 22, 1947.

¹⁶ See the exchange of correspondence between Mr. Nehru and S.C. Bose in: *The Statesman* (Calcutta), March 23, 1947.

¹⁷ Indian Council of World Affairs, *Asian Relations Conference*, "Freedom Movement in Vietnam", paper submitted by Mai-the-Chau to Group A (National Freedom Movement) mimeo., p. 18.

¹⁸ Asian Relations Organisation, *Asian Relations Conference*, p. 77.

On March 30, addressing the Indian delegation, he complained that not sufficient help was given to his country, that while he was grateful to all countries and especially to India, for their sympathy, this was not sufficient to help in their struggle for independence. He wanted the Indian delegates to approach their government to accord recognition to the government of Vietnam, to use their influence to get the United Nations Organisation to take up the Vietnamese question, and to take steps to stop French reinforcements.¹⁹

Mr. Nehru, replying for India, said that while the Indian people were in sympathy with Vietnam's struggle for freedom, he did not see how the Indian government could be expected to declare war on France. That was, he said, not the way to proceed, and by such precipitate action they were likely to lose in the long run. Any wise government would try to limit the area of conflict. It would, however, bring sufficient pressure to bear, but that could not obviously be done by a government in public meetings.²⁰

India also reacted negatively to Ho-Chi-Minh's request for recognition and for intervention on behalf of Vietnam in the United Nations. A message from Ho-Chi-Minh in October 1947 requesting Mr. Nehru to raise the Vietnam question in the United Nations, and to send a fact finding mission to Vietnam,²¹ also met with a negative response.

With regard to the first point, India's position had already been stated in February when the Indian delegate to the United Nations said that he had received no instructions from his government to raise the question of Vietnam.²² He gave no explanation for the Indian government's decision. However, the *Statesman* gives us a hint as to what those reasons were. India, it wrote, might not be able to help much, as obviously the United Nations was "already overstretched" and could not take on Indochina. "Moreover, it added, though sympathies in this country are generally with Vietnam, India's own power to give effective direct aid, even to send observers without French consent is dubious."²³ On the second point, Mr. Nehru himself stated in the Constituent Assembly on March 18, 1948 that India did not feel that an official mission could be sent to Indochina at that time, as had been suggested by the All India Congress Committee.²⁵ However, a non-official mission headed by N. Pillai had been sent to Saigon on February 22.

Two other attempts were made by the Ho-Chi-Minh government in 1950 to win Indian recognition, but they also failed.²⁶ India did make a diplomatic gesture in favour of that government in October 1949,

¹⁹ Asian Relations Organisation, *Asian Relations Conference*, p. 77.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Adloff and Thompson, *Minority Problems in South East Asia*, p. 131.

²² *Le Monde*, February 10, 1947.

²³ *The Statesman*, October 14, 1947.

²⁵ *Parl. Deb.*, Constituent Assembly (Legislative), 1948, vol. 3, part 1, March 18, p. 2358.

²⁶ Bernard B. Fall, *The Viet-Minh Regime*, p. 59.

however, when she voted for its admission to the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (Ecafe). But as she did the same in favour of the State of Vietnam headed by Bao-Dai, her action turned out to be, in fact, a recognition that Ho-Chi-Minh's government represented only part of Vietnam. It is interesting to note that Burma, Thailand, and the Philippines abstained on both votes.²⁷

Mr. Nehru's refusal to recognise Ho-Chi-Minh's government undoubtedly ran counter to the feeling of Indian public opinion at that time. "Indian public opinion, wrote K.P. Karunakaran, vigorously championed the cause of Ho-Chi-Minh and asserted that only the republican government was representative of nationalist aspirations of the people".²⁸ India's consul general in Saigon also confirmed in a report to the Indian government that the revolutionary communist and nationalist forces led by Ho-Chi-Minh held 80 per cent of the countryside outside the towns. This report was the basis of an Indian memorandum to the British government, which leaked out to the press in London in November 1949.²⁹

In Parliament, Mr. Nehru's policy drew criticism. In a debate on foreign affairs in the Lok Sabha on March 17, 1950, Shri Hanumanthayia, comparing Mr. Nehru's attitude toward Vietnam and Indonesia, said:

"He was telling us that he could not intervene in the dispute that is going on in Indochina. I very much wish that he had taken up this matter also with as much zeal and earnestness as he took up the cause of Indonesia... For him to keep quiet over what is going on in Indochina is to confess abandonment of that policy.... to see that there is no vestige of colonialism left in Asia, whether under British, or under the French or under the Portuguese".³⁰

Another member, professor S.N. Mishra, drawing the same parallel, felt that India had to do something in the matter of Indochina also. He said:

"What has been done for the extirpation of colonial rule in Indochina? ... India, as one of the major members of the family of Asian nations, should call a conference just as she did in the case of Indonesia, which might consider the case of Indochina and say to the foreign powers: "Hands off from there".³¹

Mr. Nehru, no doubt, was aware of public feeling in India in favour of Ho-Chi-Minh and against Bao-Dai at this time, and he also shared

²⁷ United Nations, Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, Fifth session, *Document E/C 11/SR/62 and Corr. 1*, October 21, 1949.

²⁸ K.P. Karunakaran, *India in World Affairs, 1947-1950*, p. 106.

²⁹ *The Manchester Guardian*, November 2, 1949. *The New York Times*, November 1, 1949.

³⁰ *Parl. Deb.*, 1950, vol. 3, part 2, March 17, p. 1729.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1732.

that feeling. When he returned home from London in May 1949, he stated, during a stopover at Cairo, that his government would support the Indochinese republican government.³² In the memorandum leaked out to the press referred to above, the Indian government was reported to have made plain to the British government that it would not recognise Bao-Dai's regime.³³ Mr. Nehru was not unaware of Bao-Dai's "past record" and his dependence on France. Nor did he conceal his contempt for his regime. When Ho-Chi-Minh's representative, Pham-Ngoc-Thach, came to Delhi in April 1948, he was received by prominent Indian leaders, including Mr. R. Prasad, Mr. V. Patel, and Mr. Nehru.³⁴ When Bao-Dai's representative came to seek recognition for his government in January 1950, no arrangement was made for a meeting of him with Mr. Nehru. When Mr. Nehru was asked at a press conference in Delhi on January 6, 1950, whether the government of India had received any request for recognition from the Vietnam government, and what Bao-Dai's representative was doing in Delhi, he replied he was not sure if any formal request had been made, but that "certainly some kind of informal approaches have taken place". He repeated, however, that "our policy is not to give official recognition in Indochina to any government". Concerning Bao-Dai's representative, he stated that he did not know what the latter was doing in Delhi, and supposed that he was there in an unofficial capacity. "He does not represent anybody to us" Mr. Nehru said. "Whatever he wants to do, he added, he has come here in his private capacity and officially he is not accredited to us, nor do we recognise him in any capacity".³⁵

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Reasons for Indian neutrality

Mr. Nehru explained his refusal of recognition of either regime in Vietnam on the ground that he had to deal with an "extraordinarily complicated situation" in that area and that the situation had to be judged from the point of view of "larger considerations".³⁶ What are these "larger considerations"?

In early 1950, the Ho-Chi-Minh regime had been recognised by Communist China, the Soviet Union and the other communist countries, and that of Bao-Dai by the United States, and the other Western powers. When asked about his reaction to these recognitions, Mr. Nehru replied: "It is not for me to criticise other governments; they have to decide on what they think is right. But, we have, after very careful consideration of the situation in Indochina, come to the conclusion that we should not jump into the fray..."³⁷

³² *The Manchester Guardian*, May 7, 1949.

³³ *The New York Times*, November 1, 1949.

³⁴ *Vietnam News Service* (London, Ho-Chi-Minh's), February 20, 1948.

³⁵ *Press Conferences*, 1950, p. 22.

³⁶ *Parl. Deb.*, 1952, vol. 4, part 1, December 17, p. 1677.

³⁷ *Press Conferences*, 1950, p. 36.

In a speech in Lok Sabha on March 17, 1950, Mr. Nehru gave the following rationale for his government's policy in regard to Indochina:

"The policy we have pursued in regard to Indochina has been one of absolute non-interference. Our interference could at best be a theoretical one. I do not think that either a theoretical or any kind of interference in the affairs of a country struggling for freedom can do any good, because the countries which have been under colonial domination invariably resent foreign interference. Their nationalism cannot tolerate it; even if interference comes with the best possible motives, it is often regarded as a kind of weapon in the hands of those who are opposed to nationalism. Besides, interference exposes them to the possible slur that their nationalism is not a free, independent nationalism. That is why we have sought deliberately not to interfere with Indochina and we intend to continue this policy".³⁸

India's desire to keep out of other people's troubles was another reason invoked by Mr. Nehru. At a press conference in Delhi on May 22, 1950 he said: "Generally speaking, our outlook is to keep out of other people's troubles. We have troubles of our own. We have no desire at all to pose as guardians or want to do something elsewhere in the world".³⁹ The same argument was repeated by him at press conferences during his visits to Indonesia and Burma. In Jakarta, on June 16, he reiterated India's policy of non-recognition and added: "This is not a negative attitude but slightly a positive one, because we do not want to make it more difficult for Indochina's fight for independence".⁴⁰ Again, on June 22, he said in Rangoon that "India wanted to keep out of the internal conflicts of Indochina and thus throw whatever weight she had on the side of peace".⁴¹

Legal arguments were also invoked by Mr. Nehru, who said in Parliament in December 1952:

"Before a government is recognised, it must satisfy certain tests well-known in international law. From the information in their possession, the Government of India are not convinced that these tests are fully satisfied in regard to the states [of Indochina]..."⁴²

To a question whether the government of India recognised the state of Vietnam sponsored by the communists, Mr. Nehru replied in the negative, and explained that this was "because it is a state of civil war or rather confusion there".⁴³ On another occasion, he stated that "so long as it is not clear as to which government prevails there or what happens there" India would recognise neither Bao-Dai's nor Ho-Chi-Minh's

³⁸ *Parl. Deb.*, 1950, vol. 4, part 2, March 17, p. 1698.

³⁹ *India's Foreign Policy*, pp. 494-95.

⁴⁰ *India Record*, June 22, 1950.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, July 6, 1950.

⁴² *Parl. Deb.*, 1952, vol. 4, part 1, December 17, col. 1675-76,

⁴³ *Ibid.*

government.⁴⁴ The stress on Mr. Nehru's statements in this period was on the civil war going on in Indochina. Little was said about Ho-Chi-Minh's nationalist virtues. The strong condemnations of French colonialism, which were so frequently made in 1945-46, were also heard less often.

The Indian government's refusal to recognise Ho-Chi-Minh's government and to extend effective help to it, especially before 1950, was in sharp contrast to its attitude toward the Soekarno government, which was in a similar situation in 1946-49. Mr. Nehru had taken a series of steps in favour of the Indonesian Republican government.⁴⁵ But he did not extend the same treatment to Ho-Chi-Minh. Why this double standard?

Mr. Nehru's attitude must have been affected by other considerations, which he was reluctant to emphasize in public, but which were widely discussed by public opinion in India after 1950. Among these considerations, there were the emergence of China as a powerful and aggressive state, the communist nature of Ho-Chi-Minh's regime and its close association with Communist China and the Soviet Union.

As soon as the Chinese communists had won power in China, they started asserting their leadership of the anti-colonial movement in Asia.⁴⁶ They also adopted an aggressive attitude in Tibet. Indian public opinion was fully aware of the implications for India of the emergence of a powerful and aggressive state on her borders. One Indian writer explained India's policy of co-existence as stemming from the fact that the communist victory in China for the first time provided a strong central base for international communism, and from India's "anxiety to prevent China from helping Communist partners in South and South East Asia".⁴⁷ Another Indian writer, commenting on the same event, said that the emergence of a militarily powerful China was a new strategic factor which pressed upon India the urgent need to develop her national potential in order to incline the balance of Asian competitions in the Sino-Indian "shatter zone" as India's interest may dictate.⁴⁸

The debates in the Indian Parliament in 1950 also disclosed how heavily the emergence of Communist China weighed on the minds of Indians.⁴⁹ Frequent references were made to Tibet and the Indian

⁴⁴ *Press Conferences*, 1950, p. 36.

⁴⁵ See chapter 4.

⁴⁶ In November 1949, in a speech at the World Federation of Trade Unions Congress, Liu-Shao-Chi said: "The path taken by the Chinese people in defeating imperialism and its lackeys and in founding the People's Republic of China is the path that should be taken by the people of the various colonial and semi-colonial countries in their fight for national independence and people's democracy..." and Mao-Tse-Tung said on October 23, 1951 that "China has to-day become the pillar of the World camp of peace and democracy in the East".

⁴⁷ J.C. Kundra, *Indian Foreign Policy 1947-54*, p. 58.

⁴⁸ Sharma, *The Strategic Aspects of India's Foreign Policy*, pp. 283-84.

⁴⁹ See in particular, the debates on March 17 and December 6, 1950.

border states, as well as the question of Indian security in relation to the security of South East Asia. One member (Shri F. Anthony) even stated that the borders of India lay in Tibet and Indochina.⁵⁰ Another (Shri Masani) quoted Lenin's statement that "the road from Moscow to Paris lies through Peking, Shanghai, and Calcutta", and added that "if Indochina, Thailand and Burma fall, we shall be next on the Russian menu just as surely as chicken follow fish".⁵¹

The establishment of the People's Republic of China and its presence on the Sino-Vietnamese borders considerably strengthened Ho-Chi-Minh's position. The prompt recognition extended to him by the Soviet Union and China also advertised his affiliation with the Communist bloc. His statement that Vietnam belonged to the "anti-imperialist camp" left no doubt as to his ideological position, and he no longer stressed that his regime was first and foremost nationalist. Vietnam, said the platform of the Lao-Dong (Worker's Party) in March 1950, was "an outpost of the democratic camp in South East Asia".⁵²

The communist nature of Ho-Chi-Minh's regime and its affiliation with the communist bloc did not escape the attention of Indian public opinion. On the contrary, it was extensively commented in the Indian press. Thus, *The Nation* wrote editorially: "Recognition of Dr. Ho's regime by two major countries of the world does establish his close alignment with them and creates new changes in the South East Asian set up".⁵³ Likewise, the *Hindu* said: "there is little evidence... to support the view that Ho-Chi-Minh is not a good communist and that he will necessarily place nationalism above his political creed".⁵⁴ The *Hindustan Times* stressed that India could not discriminate between Bao-Dai and Ho-Chi-Minh since both had "the backing of foreign bayonnets", and added that Ho-Chi-Minh's "political complexion" and his communist affiliation demanded "a cautious attitude".⁵⁵ The *Statesman* pointed out that because of Ho-Chi-Minh's "complete wagon hitching" on Mao-Tse-Tung's star "the erstwhile friends of the Vietminh in other lands would be also driven, if only for their own security, to reconsider very closely its claims to what it pretends." It also recalled that "Japan's career of conquest which stopped at Imphal started with their occupation of Indochinese bases".⁵⁶

The Indian press also congratulated itself on India's earlier attitude of cautiousness. *The Hindu* said that "the wisdom of India's policy of "not jumping into the fray" in Indochina is being vindicated slowly but surely".⁵⁷ The *Times of India* not only expressed the view that India's

⁵⁰ *Parl. Deb.*, 1950, vol. 3, part 2, March 17, p. 1720.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1950, vol. 5, part 2, August 4, p. 301.

⁵² *People's China*, May 1, 1950, Supplement, pp. 3-4.

⁵³ *The Nation*, February 4, 1950.

⁵⁴ *The Hindu*, March 30, 1950.

⁵⁵ *The Hindustan Times*, January 15, 1950.

⁵⁶ *The Statesman*, February 2, 1950.

⁵⁷ *The Hindu*, February 10, 1950.

attitude of "wait and see" seemed justified, but also pleaded the cause of the nationalist movement led by Bao-Dai. It wrote:

"It is now sufficiently clear that a victory by Ho-chi-Minh over the rival nationalist movement would give communism a strategic hold inside the rice-producing area of South East Asia and thus immediately threaten Burma and Siam. In these conditions of emergency, it seems unreasonably academic to reject any ally which fails to conform to a perfect nationalist pattern".⁵⁸

It should be also noted that, at this time, the Indian government contained many strongly anti-communist personalities, who were not completely dominated by Mr. Nehru, and did not hesitate to express their views publicly. They were C. Raja Gopalachari, V. Patel, Pandit Pant. The Indian ministry of external affairs's secretary-general at this time was G.B. Bajpai who, some years later, was criticised by Mr. Krishna Menon's followers for "Bajpatism" (close association with the Commonwealth). India also pursued a policy of close association with the Commonwealth at this time.⁵⁹

Mr. Nehru himself was concerned about the situation. In a conversation with Norman Cousins he admitted that the emergence of Communist China did pose a threat to South East Asia.⁶⁰ He also warned the Indian people that "the whole world is in the grip of a crisis. Some neighbouring countries are in turmoil. It is now the task of the Union Government of India and the people to keep their country safe from troubles".⁶¹ Commenting on this statement, the *Mail* wrote that "there is only one thing that troubles all India's neighbours alike, it is the advent of communist forces on their borders"; and if Pandit Nehru thought it necessary to warn his country about the dangers that threatened it, "it is not because the Communists seek peace".⁶²

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India and the Geneva Agreements

From 1950 onwards, Communist China and the United States became increasingly involved in Indochina. The war there was intensified and was in danger of leading to a general conflict. The prevention of this event happening was foremost in the mind of the Indian government, especially from 1952 onwards, after the invasion of Laos by Vietminh troops had brought the war closer to Indian borders. It was with these considerations in mind that Mr. Nehru appealed for a cease-fire in Indochina in a speech in Parliament on February 22, 1954.

Mr. Nehru's speech contained an analysis of the situation, a statement of India's motives, and a six-point proposal for the restoration peace. In

⁵⁸ *The Times of India*, February 3, 1950.

⁵⁹ See Sharma, *The Strategic Aspects of India's Foreign Policy*, chapter 7.

⁶⁰ N. Cousins, *Talks with Nehru*.

⁶¹ *The Mail* (Madras), February 14, 1950.

⁶² *Ibid.*

his eyes, the Indochinese conflict was “born of a movement of resistance to colonialism and attempts to deal with it by the traditional method of divide and rule”. Foreign intervention had made the issue more complex, but did not change its basic character. “The recognition of this aspect, he said, as well as the recognition of national sentiments for freedom and independence and safeguarding them against external pressure can alone form the basis of a settlement and of peace”.⁶³

With regard to India's interest in the matter, Mr. Nehru declared that the developments in Indochina were of “grave concern and grievous significance” to his country, and that their implications impinged on the newly-won and cherished independence of Asian countries. “The maintenance of the independence and sovereignty of Asian countries as well as the end of colonial and foreign rule are essential, he said, for the prosperity of Asian peoples and for the peace of the world”. Further, India did not seek any special role in Asia, nor did she champion narrow and sectional Asian regionalism. “We only seek to keep ourselves and others, particularly our neighbours, he affirmed, to a policy of peace and of non-alignment in world tensions and wars”.⁶⁴

The suggestions put forward by Mr. Nehru as a basis for a peace settlement in Indochina contained the following points: 1) a climate of peace and conciliation; 2) a cease-fire; 3) independence for the three states; 4) direct negotiations between the parties immediately and principally concerned; 5) non-intervention; and 6) informing the United Nations and using its good offices.⁶⁵

Although India was not a member of the Geneva Conference, she played an important part in the peace settlement in Indochina through the work of Mr. Krishna Menon at Geneva, and the influence of the Five Asian prime ministers meeting at Colombo.⁶⁶

India was also satisfied about the role she had played. Apart from the feeling of satisfaction stemming from the realisation that a great war had been averted thanks to her efforts, India also saw in the Geneva Agreements a great victory for *Panch Sheel*.⁶⁷ Indeed, in Indian minds, next to the Sino-Indian area, South East Asia was to be the second area in which India wanted to conduct her experiment in *Panch Sheel*. Here, in Mr. Nehru's eyes, was an unique chance of putting his ideas into practice, just as over thirty years before, his master Gandhi had chosen India as the ground to carry out his experiment in *Satyagraha* on a grand scale. The implementation of the Geneva Agreements would be a vindication of the soundness and the wisdom of *Panch Sheel*.

In Indian eyes also, the success of the experiment in *Panch Sheel* in South East Asia depended on the full implementation of the Geneva

⁶³ *India's Foreign Policy*, p. 396.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ For a detailed account of the Geneva Conference, see: Devillers and Lacouture, *La Fin d'une Guerre, Indochine 1954*.

⁶⁷ See chapter 2. For the part played by India, see Mr. A. Eden's memoirs, *Full circle*, book 1, chapters 5 and 6.

Agreements. The failure of the one would also mean the failure of the other. It is therefore natural to expect that Mr. Nehru and his compatriots wanted the full implementation of the Geneva Agreements. This was to exercise a powerful influence on their attitude towards North and South Vietnam in the two years following the conclusion of the Geneva Conference.

Sympathy towards North Vietnam

Ho-Chi-Minh's government, which had secured full control over half of Vietnam, started the post-Geneva period with over-whelming advantages over the government of South Vietnam. The Vietminh enjoyed great popularity and prestige at home and abroad on account of their victory over the French at Dien-Bien-Phu. In India, there was as much admiration for Ho-Chi-Minh's Democratic Republic in 1954 as for Communist China three years earlier for its military performance against the white man in Korea.

The full implementation of the Geneva Agreements, in particular the application of the elections clause, was also expected to give the Viet-Minh full control of the remaining half of Vietnam. Ho-Chi-Minh's government, therefore, was anxious to make the Geneva Agreements a success. In this, North Vietnam's objectives coincided with those of India. Lastly, there was no obstacle to North Vietnam's espousing *Panch Sheel*, as acceptance of the "Five Principles" was the official policy of the communist bloc at this time. In this, again, North Vietnam was of one mind with India.

In the following two years, the Vietminh was to exploit their advantages to the full. In talks with Mr. Nehru, in joint communiqués with India,⁶⁸ in speeches at Bandung,⁶⁹ the Vietminh leaders made the implementation of the Geneva Agreements and Peaceful Coexistence the main themes of their declarations.

The government of South Vietnam, on the other hand, laboured under severe handicaps, which put it in a poorer light in regard to India. Its armies had fought alongside the French. It had to carry the burden of Bao-Dai for whom Indians had great contempt. The area it administered was in a state of near chaos and demoralisation as a result of defeat, of the influx of nearly a million refugees from North Vietnam, and of the unruly behaviour of the chief of staff of its army and of the politico-religious sects.⁷⁰

At Geneva, the government of South Vietnam had refused to sign the Geneva Agreements, and to recognise their validity. The policy it pursued was anti-communist, and it refused to have anything to do with

⁶⁸ See these joint statements: Hanoi, October 17, 1954; Delhi, April 10, 1955; Delhi, February 13, 1958, in *Foreign Policy of India*, pp. 129-31, 167-70, and 325-28 respectively.

⁶⁹ *Asia-Africa Speaks from Bandung*, pp. 138-47 and 210-11.

⁷⁰ See Bernard B. Fall, "The Political Religious Sects of Vietnam" *Pacific Affairs*, September 1955.

Panch Sheel. Instead, it considered itself a member of the Free World, and worked in close cooperation with the United States, against which there was great resentment in India at this time because of American military aid to Pakistan and because of the American persistence in setting up Seato in spite of Indian opposition. Thus, in Indian eyes, North Vietnam appeared as a hero full of merits and promises, South Vietnam was regarded as a condemnable and hopeless villain.

To what extent anticipation of a Vietminh victory, and acceptance of it as inevitable, had influenced India's attitude towards the North and the South Vietnam governments, it is hard to say. But there is no doubt that Mr. Nehru had a deep affection for Ho-Chi-Minh "whom he considered as the best and the most sincere of the men he knew".⁷¹ There were also reports at this time that Mr. M.J. Desai, the Indian chairman of the International Commission, had said that Ho-Chi-Minh was a symbol of nationalism in both North and South Vietnam, reports which he denied as "inaccurate",⁷² but which probably were not without foundation.

India's tendency to favour Ho-Chi-Minh's government was also discernable in the attitude of the Indian delegate in the International Commission in Vietnam. In drawing up the Commission's reports, this delegate tended to favour a stronger wording when South Vietnam was to be blamed, and a weaker one when North Vietnam was at fault. India was usually supported by the Polish delegate, but the Canadian delegate adopted an opposite attitude. In the case of the obstruction of the movement of refugees from North to South Vietnam, for example, the Indian delegate favoured a wording which put the blame on the local authorities and stressed administrative difficulties instead of blaming the North Vietnam government, while the Canadian delegate insisted on stressing the existence of a deliberate and organised plan by that government.⁷³ On the other hand, the Indian delegate was in favour of a wording charging the government of South Vietnam of "non-observance" of the Geneva Agreements, whereas the Canadian delegate stressed its non-acceptance of the Agreements, or its increasing cooperation with the Commission.⁷⁴

Hostility towards South Vietnam

India's attitude towards South Vietnam, which had been one of irritation, reached anger point when, on July 20, 1955, a demonstration against the Geneva Agreements in Saigon turned into a riot against the Commission. The hotels in which the Commission's personnel were accommodated were ransacked, and its 44 members, including its chairman, lost all their belongings. An official spokesman for the Indian ministry

⁷¹ Taya Zinkin, in *Le Monde*, November 14, 1957.

⁷² *India News*, January 22, 1955.

⁷³ British White Paper, *Interim Reports of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam*, Fourth Report. Hereinafter referred to as I.C.C. Vietnam, *Reports*.

⁷⁴ I.C.C. Vietnam, *Reports*, *Fifth Report*.

of external affairs stated on July 21 that the rioting seemed to have been deliberately organised, that no protection of the Commission was forthcoming despite a request made by it on July 13, and that the local police looked on while a hysterical mob destroyed everything the members of Commission had in their rooms, as well as other property belonging to them.⁷⁵

On July 27, 1955, Mr. Nehru stated in Parliament:

“as the administration of law and order in South Vietnam now appears to be under the control of the State of Vietnam, the Government of Vietnam were, in our view, as much responsible for giving this protection as the Commander-in-Chief of the French Union Forces”.⁷⁶

He added that a resolution had been adopted a day or two before the outbreak of violence “with concurrence of all ministries” and which mentioned, among other things, “elimination of Polish and Indian communist elements in the International Commission” as one of the objectives of the South Vietnam government. He also informed Parliament that India, as chairman of the Commission, had lodged a strong protest to the Vietnamese foreign ministry and to president Ngo-Dinh-Diem. A few day earlier, in fact, on the eve of the riot, Mr. Nehru had stated at a press conference that the South Vietnam government had to take on responsibilities and liabilities which every successor government had to do. “It would be an impossible position, he said, if every successor government denied an agreement arrived at by its predecessor”.⁷⁷

The Indian press, too, sharply criticised Mr. Ngo-Dinh-Diem, “The incident, wrote the *Indian Express*, notwithstanding Mr. Diem’s apology, is inexcusable”.⁷⁸ The *Hindustan Times* called Mr. Ngo-Dinh-Diem’s statement disclaiming responsibility for the disturbances “an amazing piece of effrontery which seeks to cover up the shameful incidents”, and said that it is “virtually a challenge to the Geneva Powers”.⁷⁹ The *Hindustan Standard* insisted that “the blame for all this must rest squarely on Mr. Diem’s government”.⁸⁰ The *Times of India* called the Saigon incident “an outrage”, and pointed out that “more than the future of Vietnam, however, is involved...”⁸¹

The incident described above had two important effects. Firstly, it demonstrated that the government of the State of Vietnam was the effective authority of South Vietnam, and the protection of the International Commission was dependent on its goodwill; secondly, it proved the depth of the feelings of this government against the Geneva Agreements and its determination not to recognise them. From now onward

⁷⁵ *India News*, July 23, 1955.

⁷⁶ *Parl. Deb.*, 1955, vol. 4, part 1, July 27, col. 3056.

⁷⁷ *India News*, July 23, 1955.

⁷⁸ *The Indian Express*, July 22, 1955.

⁷⁹ *The Hindustan Times*, July 23, 1955.

⁸⁰ *The Hindustan Standard*, July 22, 1955.

⁸¹ *The Times of India*, July 22, 1955.

India would have to accept this government and to deal with it, especially as the French High Command, which India had considered the legal party to the Geneva Agreements and responsible for its implementation in South Vietnam, was disbanded in July 1955 and its powers turned over to the South Vietnamese government.

India and the postponement of the elections

Of the two fundamental parts of the Geneva Agreement on Vietnam, viz., the reunification of this country through nation wide elections by July 1956, and the maintenance of the cease-fire line and peace, the first seemed a remote possibility, but the second was still enforceable. And, after all, the reunification of Vietnam did not really concern India. India was interested in it only to the extent that the non-implementation of the elections clause might lead to a renewal of fighting and constitute a threat to peace. Moreover, if India had indicated her wish to see the French High Command stay on until the situation was clarified, she could not well insist on it without finding herself in a paradoxical situation. As the *Times of India* pointed out:

"Political observers will, no doubt, look with dismay at this ironical situation with India, an uncompromising anti-colonial country, reconciling herself to the continued presence of French colonial troops, for however short a period, all in the interest of maintaining peace in South Vietnam".⁸²

The situation was resolved to India's satisfaction, however, when the South Vietnam government, in a statement on April 6, 1956, expressed readiness to respect the line of demarcation and to cooperate with the International Commission for the maintenance of peace.⁸³ North-Vietnam, likewise, appeared anxious to see peace maintained, even though there were no elections.⁸⁴ Further, the South Vietnam government seemed to have considerably consolidated its position in its zone; politically there was no prospect of its immediate collapsing,⁸⁵ and militarily, any attack on it would likely lead to intervention by Seato.

After the July 1955 incident, India's attitude towards South Vietnam underwent perceptible change. The Indian government increasingly avoided using strong words when referring to it. It was also less insistent on pressing the argument that the Geneva Agreements were legally binding on the South Vietnam government. This was especially so after April-May 1956, when India realised that there were no prospects of the planned elections being held at the time expected, if at all. On March 30, 1956, Mr. Krishna Menon discussed the situation in Indochina

⁸² *The Times of India*, April 22, 1956.

⁸³ See below, pp. 37-38.

⁸⁴ See Ton That Thien, "The Geneva Agreements and Peace Prospects in Vietnam", *India Quarterly*, October-December 1956.

⁸⁵ See Brian Crozier, "The International Situation in Indochina", *Pacific Affairs*, December 1956, and William Henderson, "South Vietnam finds itself", *Foreign Affairs*, January 1957.

with Mr. Lester Pearson, the Canadian foreign minister, in New York. The two statesmen reviewed the situation and noted the failure of any agreement to hold elections in Vietnam.⁸⁶ The Anglo-Soviet conversations of May 1956 were unsuccessful in breaking the deadlock, but London and Moscow appeared anxious not to alter the *status quo*. India was asked to carry on in Indochina, which she accepted.⁸⁷

In his memoirs, Mr. A. Eden recorded that, at the beginning of 1954, with Malaya as his chief concern,

"I wanted to ensure an effective barrier as far to the North of that country as possible. I thought it possible that the Western powers might guarantee Laos and Cambodia and part of Vietnam. More important still, I hoped that matters might be so contrived that India, and perhaps some others eastern nations, would join in this guarantee... Many countries had an interest in this [plan for a protective pad] and, if I could once get the conception established, the position might hold for years... In this I had an ally, India. That country also had a concern in limiting the onward rush of communist forces. Although Delhi might discount the danger, the protective pad could help. India did not relish to see Burma and Thailand passing under communist control".⁸⁸

In the spring and summer of 1954, Mr. Nehru did not accept Mr. Eden's plan, as he himself thought he had found an alternative formula in *Panch Sheel*. But in July 1956, the wisdom of Mr. Eden's plan was proved. Was Mr. Nehru influenced by it? We do not know. But with the consolidation of the South Vietnam government, and the acceptance of the *status quo* by the Soviet and North Vietnam governments, the Indian government could not fail to see the advantages of that plan.

In any case, while still hoping that the elections might be "conveniently" arranged "later on",⁸⁹ Mr. Nehru rejected suggestions that diplomatic pressure be brought on the South Vietnam government to hold elections. When it was suggested in Parliament that Mr. C. Pineau, the French foreign minister, who was visiting Delhi at this time, might be asked to persuade the South Vietnam government to accept the obligations under the Geneva Agreements, Mr. Nehru replied that the relations between this government and the French government were "not of extreme cordiality" and it was therefore "hardly feasible" for him to suggest to one of them to persuade the other.⁹⁰ To another suggestion that the United States might be asked to exert its influence on South Vietnam in the same direction, Mr. Nehru replied that, so far as

⁸⁶ *India News*, April 7, 1956.

⁸⁷ See the Exchange of Correspondence between the Soviet and British Governments on this question, *British White Paper, Cmd. 9863* (1956).

⁸⁸ Sir Anthony Eden, *Full Circle*, pp. 87 and 123-24.

⁸⁹ *Parl. Deb.*, 1956, vol. 3, part 1, May 4, col. 3333.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, col. 3334.

the Geneva Agreements were concerned, the United States were "not intimately concerned" with the decisions made at Geneva.⁹¹

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Rapprochement with South Vietnam

While accepting the new situation, Mr. Nehru abstained from blaming the South Vietnam government. During his visit to the Soviet Union in December 1955, he discussed the situation in Indochina with the Soviet government. The joint-communiqué issued at the end of his talks with the Soviet leaders noted "with regret" that obstacles were being created to the implementation of the Geneva Agreements on Vietnam and Laos, and recognised that such violations were "fraught with exceptionally grave consequences" for Indochina and the whole world. But apart from an appeal to "all participants in the agreements and to the interested sides" to eliminate the difficulties hampering the effective fulfilment of these agreements, the communiqué contained no condemnation of South Vietnam.⁹²

India's attitude stemmed partly from her reappraisal of the situation and partly from the efforts deployed by the South Vietnam government to redress the situation at home and to improve its relations with the neutral countries, in particular, with India. The main concern of India was the maintenance of peace in Vietnam, the cooperation of the South Vietnam government with the International Commission, and the security of this Commission. On this score the Saigon government took steps to satisfy India.

In a declaration issued on April 6, 1956, stating its position in regard to the Geneva Agreements on the eve of the withdrawal of French troops, the government of South Vietnam reiterated its refusal to recognise the Geneva Agreements, but affirmed at the same time its intention to respect the demarcation line and pursue a policy of unification by peaceful means. It also declared that it considered the International Commission as "an agency working for peace" and that, because of this "community of objectives", it would continue to give the Commission "effective cooperation", to ensure the security of its members and to facilitate the fulfilment of its "mission of peace".⁹³ When Ngo-Dinh-Nhu, brother and political adviser to president Ngo-Dinh-Diem, visited Delhi in April 1957, he stated that South Vietnam was "pleased" with the work of the Commission, and expressed the hope that it would continue the safeguard peace in Asia.⁹⁴ This was a departure from the South Vietnam government's earlier attitude of sulking, resentment and grudge toward the Commission.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *New Times* (Moscow), December 15, 1955 Supplement.

⁹³ Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of Information. *The Problem of Re-unification of Vietnam*, pp. 37-38.

⁹⁴ *India News*, April 27, 1957.

The South Vietnam government also took steps to increase economic cooperation with India. A trade mission, headed by Nguyen-Huu-Chau, secretary of state to the presidency, was despatched to India in August 1956.⁹⁵ India was accorded the benefit of the most favoured nation clause in May 1956. She was equally granted the benefit of the minimum tariff along with only nineteen other countries. On the other hand, the South Vietnam government requested India to send an expert to Vietnam to advise it on small savings. Indian correspondents were invited to Saigon on the occasion of the first anniversary of the founding of the Vietnam Republic.

The Indian government responded positively to the South Vietnam government's gestures of goodwill. It agreed to the opening in Delhi of a consulate-general by the Republic of Vietnam, which was installed in February 1957. At the eighth session of the Colombo Plan Consultative Committee in New Zealand in 1956, the Indian delegation agreed to the holding of the following session in Saigon. The International Commission, which had overstayed in Hanoi, decided to move to South Vietnam in March 1958. In September 1957, vice-president S. Radhakrishnan paid an official visit to Saigon, at the end of which he issued a statement to the effect that he was "impressed with the concern which the Government of Vietnam has for the welfare of the people".⁹⁶ President Ngo-Dinh-Diem was invited to visit India officially in November 1957.

During his visit, president Ngo-Dinh-Diem praised the work of the International Commission and expressed appreciation for India's financial sacrifice in shouldering the burden of maintaining peace in Vietnam. No mention was made of *Panch Sheel*, and the joint communiqué issued by prime minister Nehru and president Ngo-Dinh-Diem on November 9 was silent on this point.⁹⁷ Vietnam's non-recognition of the Geneva Agreements was also reaffirmed by president Ngo-Dinh-Diem, who, however, assured his guests that his government would do everything in its power to facilitate the "high mission" assumed by India in Vietnam. At the same time, he expressed his pleasure at the "confident" relations between his government and the International Commission, and thanked India for her continuing support of Vietnam during the ninth Colombo Conference and for her technical aid.⁹⁸

India was sensitive to military pacts and to anything that threatened to disturb her experiment in *Panch Sheel*. She was intensely hostile to Seato, and also suspected Vietnam of brewing a defense pact with the

⁹⁵ See below, p. 140.

⁹⁶ Republic of Vietnam, Secretariate of State for Foreign Affairs, *Vietnam in World Affairs*, December 1957, pp. 153-54.

⁹⁷ See the Nehru-Ngo-Dinh-Diem joint-communiqué in *Foreign Policy of India*, pp. 317-19.

⁹⁸ See president Ngo-Dinh-Diem's speeches during this visit, Presidency of the Republic of Vietnam, Press office, *Toward Mutual Understanding*, vol. II.

United States, South Korea, and Formosa.⁹⁹ These fears were put to rest by president Ngo-Dinh-Diem when he stated that Vietnam was not member of Seato,¹⁰⁰ that "Vietnam accepts neither foreign military bases, nor foreign troops on its territory" and that it was not considering adherence to any military alliance.¹⁰¹

The Indian response to the South Vietnam's president was a warm one. "President Diem has had, wrote the Delhi correspondent of the (London) *Times*, a consistently favourable press during his visit here, which is a normally reliable index of his reception in Government circles also".¹⁰² Despite the fact that India and South Vietnam looked at the world through different sets of Asian eyes, wrote the correspondent of the *New York Times*, "the Indian Government took care to make the welcome for the South Vietnamese leader as warm as possible". President Diem's own record, this paper added, had won him some admiration in Delhi, and whereas this did not mean that there was any more agreement between the two countries, "Mr. Ngo's welcome will be a respectful one".¹⁰³ Taya Zinkin, Delhi correspondent of *Le Monde*, wrote:

"Of the visits of statesmen in India, that of Mr. Ngo-Dinh-Diem has been one of the most remarkable and the most successful... Today, the Indians, including Mr. Nehru, have discovered that one could be anti-communist and pro-West without being a puppet. In Diem the Indians have discovered a nationalist and independent patriot".¹⁰⁴

The impressions of foreign correspondents were confirmed by the Indian press. In an editorial entitled "courageous visitor" the *Statesman* said that "Mr. Diem is undoubtedly among the more remarkable leaders thrown up by war and ferment in postwar Asia". After recalling the various achievements to Mr. Diem's credit, it said that these achievements constituted "a remarkable display of personal courage and dedication".¹⁰⁵ The *Hindustan Times* described Mr. Ngo-Dinh-Diem as "one of the heroes" of Asia,¹⁰⁶ and the *Hindu* noted that president Diem's statement that he was not joining Seato and was thus not committing himself permanently to the power bloc system "will be warmly welcomed in this country which is anxious to see Indochina function as a fully independent State with its own democratic system."¹⁰⁷ The *Eastern Economist*, for its part, wrote:

⁹⁹ *The Indian Express*, for example, wrote on June 2, 1956, that "there has been also a disturbing development in a rumoured agreement among South Korea, Formosa and South Vietnam".

¹⁰⁰ Address at Indian Council of World Affairs.

¹⁰¹ Press Communiqué, Delhi, November 9, 1957, *Vietnam in World Affairs*, December 1957, p. 175.

¹⁰² *The Times* (London), November 11, 1957.

¹⁰³ *The New York Times*, November 5, 1957.

¹⁰⁴ *Le Monde*, November 14, 1957.

¹⁰⁵ *The Statesman*, November 4, 1957.

¹⁰⁶ *The Hindustan Times*, November 4, 1957.

¹⁰⁷ *The Hindu*, November 8, 1957.

"There are few heads of Asian states that have been able, in so short a time, to create a sense of sincerity and personal independence... In four days of simple speaking we now know that the picture of Ngo-Dinh-Diem as a creature of foreign powers is false to the extreme. Here, if ever, was a representative of an Asian people, proud, passionate and convincing; a man in and of Asia's own heart".¹⁰⁸

On the government level, there was also evidence of the Indian government's appreciation of the efforts of the South Vietnam government to improve the economic, social and political situation in Vietnam. The joint-communiqué issued by MM. Nehru and Ngo-Dinh-Diem stated that the South Vietnam president saw "the interest displayed by the people in India in the problems and welfare of the Vietnamese people".¹⁰⁹ On reaching home, president Ngo-Dinh-Diem also issued a communiqué in which he declared that he had "the comforting conviction" that Indian official circles were "perfectly aware" of the progress achieved by the Vietnam government in the economic, social as well as in the consolidation of democracy in Vietnam.¹¹⁰

India, then, had "a change of heart". In this change, economic and strategic considerations played a part. As has been noted, in August 1956, a South Vietnamese mission came to Delhi to explore possibilities of expanding trade between India and Vietnam. As a result, trade between the two countries increased considerably. India's exports to Vietnam jumped from Rs. 3,373,000 in 1956-57 to Rs. 9,649,000 in 1957, and again to Rs. 17,131,000 in 1958. Overall Indian exports to Indochina also increased from Rs. 1,275,000 in 1954-56 to 18,726,000 in 1957 and Rs. 23,830,000 in 1958 (See table XII).

TABLE XII

India's Exports to Indochina, 1954-1959
(Rupees)

	1959	1958	1957	1956-57	1955-56	1954-55
Vietnam	9,755,000	17,131,000	9,649,000	3,373,000	4,255,000	1,275,000
Laos	245,000	7,000	310,000	282,000	420,000	
Cambodia	10,889,000	6,692,000	8,767,000	5,866,000	6,490,000	
Indochina	20,200,395	23,830,000	18,726,000	9,521,000	11,170,000	1,275,000

Source: Government of India, Central Statistical Organisation, *Statistical Abstracts, 1958-59*, p. 755.

This increase was due to the efforts of India and Vietnam, but also to the restoration of peace and order, and economic expansion in Vietnam which had also their repercussion in Laos and Cambodia. It was

¹⁰⁸ *The Eastern Economist*, November 8, 1957.

¹⁰⁹ *Foreign Policy of India*, p. 319.

¹¹⁰ *Toward Mutual Understanding*, vol. II, p. 32.

thus obvious that India had a great interest in seeing that these conditions were maintained. The influence of the stability and progress of Vietnam on India's trade became obvious with the fall of Indian exports to Vietnam from Rs. 17,131,000 in 1958 to Rs. 9,755,000 in 1959, year in which increased Vietminh subversive activities in South Vietnam began to affect economic conditions there again.

While India's economic position in South Vietnam was improved, Indian interests in North Vietnam were adversely affected. In 1954, there were some 2,500 Indians in all Indochina. Of these, about 500 lived in North Vietnam. By April 1955, only 150 of them had remained North of the 17th. parallel, while the others preferred to move to South Vietnam. Some 60 Indian firms in North Vietnam had been compelled to close down, because business conditions there were reported "difficult". S. Ali Khan, parliamentary secretary to the Indian ministry of external affairs, stated in Parliament on April 15, 1955 that, although there was no pressure, "conditions were such that they [these firms] had closed their shops for the whole set up has changed".¹¹¹

In India's change of heart towards South Vietnam, strategic considerations also played a part. Although Indian officials were silent about this aspect of India's policy — and this is in keeping with her "peaceful approach" — the general picture of Asia at the time, and certain comments of the Indian press in 1957 and later¹¹² allow the conclusion that Vietnam's strategic importance to India was not neglected by the Indian government. Three years earlier, in 1954, Indian and Chinese soldiers faced one another for the first time on the Sino-Indian border. From 1956 onwards, border incidents became more frequent and more serious, and by 1959 a border conflict had fully developed. It is not surprising therefore that the *Eastern Economist* should have written at the time of Mr. Ngo-Dinh-Diem's visit to Delhi that it would be "military wisdom" for India "to consider the 17th. parallel in Vietnam as our strategic defence limit in South East Asia..."¹¹³

In March 1959, president Rajendra Prasad paid an official visit to Vietnam. During his sojourn there, he praised president Ngo-Dinh-Diem "who in his life exemplifies the energy and the building enthusiasm of the people to be free and to grow and prosper according to their genius",¹¹⁴ and complimented the Vietnamese people for being "fortunate in her leadership who realise the importance of development and reconstruction at home and friendly cooperation with neighbouring countries".¹¹⁵

In the years immediately following the Geneva Conference and the adherence of Communist China and North Vietnam to *Panch Sheel*, the

¹¹¹ *Parl. Deb.*, 1955, vol. 2, part 1, April 15, col. 2296-97. It should be noted in this connection that Indians in South Vietnam played an important role in the country's import trade. Of 858 licensed importers in 1959, 67 were Indians.

¹¹³ *The Eastern Economist*, November 8, 1954.

¹¹⁴ *Vietnam in World Affairs*, September 1959, p. 17.

¹¹⁵ *India News*, March 21, 1959.

dangers of a communist forward move in South East Asia receded into the background. But with the outbreak of the Hungarian revolt in 1956, the incursions of Chinese troops into Indian territory from 1954 onwards, with the intensified sinisation and communisation of Tibet in 1956,¹¹⁶ with the help given to the Pathet Lao by North Vietnam, Indian attention was more drawn to the problem of the security of South East Asia as part of the security of India.

Seen against this background, president R. Prasad's utterances in South Vietnam during his visit there are not without significance, for it was then that the virtues of South Vietnam as a "protecting pad" against the onrush of communism, and the necessity to have a strong and friendly Vietnam, became apparent to India. President R. Prasad praised Mr. Diem's leadership in 1959, wrote Krishnalal Shridharani of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, because by this time India had become aware of the progress in South Vietnam, and also because India had become appreciative why some people and countries distrusted Communism completely. Shridharani added that India was more mature "after the jolt in Tibet and the jitters in Kerala", and as a result, a vista opened up for collaboration between India and the Republic of Vietnam. Even two years earlier, in April 1955, *Thought* had written editorially:

"the one fact of supreme significance and with no mean reason for hope in Indochina is that, thanks to American initiative, there is in South Vietnam today an independent government under a man whose credentials and integrity are comparable to those of the tallest in the nationalist movements of India, Burma and Indonesia".¹¹⁷

Estrangement from North Vietnam

While South Vietnam and India, starting from an initial situation of mutual suspicion, mistrust and grudge, had slowly moved towards each other, an opposite development took place in India's relations with North Vietnam. Starting from an initial situation of mutual understanding, community of views, interests and objectives, they moved farther and farther away from each other until, by 1959, a situation of latent tension and mistrust was evident between them.

As pointed out earlier, immediately after Geneva, India's position was very close to that of North Vietnam in regard to the implementation of the Geneva Agreements, *Panch Sheel*, and the general approach to the problems of colonialism and imperialism. North Vietnam was looked upon by India not only as the victor in the Indochina conflict, but also

¹¹⁶ See below, p. 291. On Chinese policy in Tibet, see: H.E. Richardson, *Tibet and its History*, chapters 12 and 13; on Chinese incursions into India in 1956, see Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, *White Paper* (Sino-Indian Relations), No. 1.

¹¹⁷ *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, as quoted in Republic of Vietnam Ministry of Information, *Some Recent International Press Opinion on Vietnam, May-October 1959*, p. 18, and *Thought on China*, p. 16.

as the principal party which really mattered and with which India should deal in regard to the implementation of the Geneva Agreements. On the other hand, in Indian eyes, South Vietnam hardly existed, as India considered the French High Command rather than the South Vietnam government as the main party to the Geneva Agreement in South Vietnam.

Not only had North Vietnam several initial military, political and psychological advantages over South Vietnam, but it also made a determined effort to capture India's goodwill and support. When India's vice-president S. Radhakrishnan visited North Vietnam in September 1957 he was received with enthusiasm.¹¹⁸ In November 1957, when India was acutely short of food, North Vietnam signed a trade agreement under which it was to supply India with 7,000 tons of rice,¹¹⁹ although it was also short of this commodity at that time.

The advances of North Vietnam were well received by India. The state visit to India of Ho-Chi-Minh in February 1958 was an occasion for India to express her warm feelings towards North Vietnam, and especially towards Ho-Chi-Minh. But, with regard to the problem of elections and reunification, Indian opinion had definitely changed its position. At the time of the visit of Mr. Ngo-Dinh-Diem to Delhi, Taya Zinkin of *Le Monde* had written:

"The latter [Ho-Chi-Minh] will himself visit Delhi shortly, apparently at his request, to try to undo what Mr. Diem had done. The visit of the leader of North Vietnam is urgent indeed, for the Indians begin to say and to write that the reunification of Vietnam is not as simple a question as they thought, and that there is a real moral problem, and they begin to admit that Mr. Diem and his party represent the people of the South as much as Ho represents those of the North".¹²⁰

Taya Zinkin's appraisal of the situation was confirmed during Ho-Chi-Minh's visit by the Indian press. *The Hindustan Times*, for example, in an editorial on February 5, 1958, after recalling South Vietnam's refusal to hold elections, said:

"It is of course obvious that the Delhi talks cannot force the issue when even Russia has not been prepared to provoke an open conflict with the United States that backs up South Vietnam intransigence. But if the South Vietnam Government, nevertheless, would have the Supervision Commission continue to remain there as an insurance for peace, Mr. Ho-Chi-Minh is faced with the problem of deciding whether the North Vietnam Government would have it so when there seems to be no immediate prospect of general elections".¹²¹

¹¹⁸ *India News*, September 21, 1957.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, December 21, 1957.

¹²⁰ Taya Zinkin, "La Visite du Président Ngo-Dinh-Diem à New-Delhi a réconcilié Mr. Nehru avec le Sud Vietnam". *Le Monde*, November 14, 1957.

¹²¹ *The Hindustan Times*, February 5, 1958.

Indian opinion also saw the problem of Vietnam no longer in terms of nationalism versus colonialism, but in terms of freedom versus communism. *The Mail*, recalling that Ho-Chi-Minh was "the father of the Communist State of North Vietnam" and that he was the founder the Communist Party of Vietnam, said editorially:

"The fact is that democracy in Indochina living as it is in the shadow of Communist China is a precarious growth. The worldwide battle between freedom and communism is being fought in Indochina no less tenaciously than in the Germanies or the Middle East".¹²²

There were many obstacles to a lasting understanding and to close cooperation between India and North Vietnam. First of all, there were ideological differences. Ho-Chi-Minh and his government were communists, and they neither cared nor could make a secret of it. In an interview with H.C. Taussig of the *Eastern World* in 1957, Ho-Chi-Minh said he was a communist and believed in communism.¹²³ The Indian view, which had prevailed before 1950 and which had been expounded by K.P. Karunakaran, was that "Ho-Chi-Minh's government, though dominated by the Communist Party, was a coalition including representatives of various political and religious parties..." and that "there was no evidence to show that they had begun to implement any communist program within the country".¹²⁴ By 1956, this view was contradicted by the facts. The communist character of Ho-Chi-Minh's government and its extremism, which struck at peasants and intellectuals alike, was dramatically demonstrated by the outbreak in North Vietnam of peasant uprisings in several areas at the time of the Hungarian revolt, and by a rebellion of intellectuals in December 1956. The Indian government was no doubt aware of these developments, as India was the chairman of the International Commission, and as the Commission found itself approached by the rebel peasants in November 1956.

Another obstacle to lasting good relations between India and North Vietnam was the increasing awareness in India of communist expansionist designs in South East Asia. The attitude of the Vietminh towards Laos and Cambodia had always greatly preoccupied the Indian government and public opinion.¹²⁵ In October 1959, at the time when, under the cover of the Pathet Lao, the Vietminh was seeking to extend its control in Laos, M. K. Haldar of *Thought*, wrote: "From what is currently happening in Laos, it should be clear that the regime in the North wants to extend the Sino-Soviet system to the Republic of Vietnam as well as to any other independent country".¹²⁶

A special correspondent of the *Hindustan Times*, returning from a visit to Vietnam in October 1960, pointed out that "North Vietnam's

¹²² *The Mail* (Madras), February 6, 1958.

¹²³ *Eastern World*, February 2, 1957.

¹²⁴ K.P. Karunakaran, *India in World Affairs, 1947-1950*, p. 107.

¹²⁵ See chapter 7.

¹²⁶ *Thought*, October 31, 1959.

publicly announced intention to extend the range of the "outpost of socialism" put South Vietnam in the direct firing line, and bewailed that if only the French had been alive to the Vietnamese urge for freedom in time "there might have been neither the present aggressive "outpost of socialism" in South East Asia, nor the weakness of belatedly befriended Vietnamese nationalism."¹²⁷ Still another Indian correspondent, Krishnalal Shridharani of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, returning from a visit to Vietnam in 1959, suggested that, in the quest for common security against Communist China, if "concerted action against a direct common danger was taken by Asian countries, the Republic of Vietnam would wholeheartedly support any such move on India's part".¹²⁸ India and South Vietnam were thus placed on the same side of the fence, with North Vietnam and Communist China on the other side. This was made still more obvious by North Vietnam's alignment on Communist China in 1959, at the time of the "liberation" of Tibet by Communist Chinese troops, while the Chinese action was condemned by South Vietnam.

India's changed attitude in the I.C.C.

India's new attitude toward North Vietnam became apparent in the action of the Indian member of the International Commission. Whereas in the years 1954-57 the Indian delegate on the Commission had tended to favour North Vietnam at the expense of South Vietnam, his attitude from 1957 onwards became more and more neutral. Condemnnations were meted out equally to both parties, and charges of violations of the Geneva Agreements were replaced by such harmless phrases as "compliance is awaited", "a reply is awaited", when reference was made to the recommendations of the Commission for the cessation of the infringement of the Geneva Agreements provisions.¹²⁹ In 1959, however, the Commission, especially the Indian member, was to adopt a new attitude which was to arouse bitter protest from the North Vietnam government.

For a number of years, especially after 1956, the government of South Vietnam had complained to the Commission about North Vietnam's subversive activities in South Vietnam. Until 1959, no action had been taken by the Commission. But in 1959, the Commission referred to this problem in its tenth report, against the objection of the Polish delegate, who did not find it proper to refer to complaints submitted by the government of the Republic of Vietnam on the "so-called subversive activities...." Such complaints, he said, were "beyond the scope of the Geneva Agreement".¹³⁰

In 1960, the Commission decided again, and again with the Polish delegate dissenting, to refer the South Vietnamese complaints to its legal committee. In regard to the dissenting opinion of the Polish delegate,

¹²⁷ *The Hindustan Times*, October 28, 1960.

¹²⁸ *The Amrita Bazar-Patrika*, December 21, 1959.

¹²⁹ See I.C.C. Vietnam, *Sixth, Seven and Eighth Reports*.

¹³⁰ See I.C.C., Vietnam, *Tenth Report*, pp. 13 and 26.

the Indian delegate, together with his Canadian colleague, held the view that

"though subversion is not mentioned in the Geneva Agreements, the Commission cannot divest itself of its responsibilities and duties to ascertain and to investigate any complaint concerning acts alleged to be abetted by one party against the other which may be detrimental to the peace and security in Vietnam..."¹³¹

Another matter to which the Commission's attention was called was the alleged association of South Vietnam with Seato. When, in 1957 and 1958, the People's Army of Vietnam High Command complained of the presence of representatives of South Vietnam at a conference and at military and naval manoeuvres of Seato, the Commission only reported that the matter was "under consideration".¹³² Further complaints were received by the Commission in 1960, and the latter again made the same reply.¹³³ The Commission's lukewarmth in taking action in this matter coincided with Mr. Nehru's relative silence on Seato from the time of President Diem's visit to Delhi onward. Indeed, in 1959, Mr. Nehru, in reply to criticism in Parliament about this silence, said that Seato did not function much.¹³⁴

Another subject of complaint of North Vietnam to the Commission was the question of the increase of American military personnel in South Vietnam. In 1960, the South Vietnamese government informed the Commission that it had made approaches to the American government with a view to raising the number of American instructors from 342 to 635. It was also pointed out by the Saigon government that this number was still well below the total of 888 American and French instructors present in Vietnam at the end of the Geneva Conference.

The Commission "noted" the contents of the South Vietnam government's letter and said it understood that additional American military instructors would not be introduced "except in conformity with the procedure stipulated in article 16 (f) and (g) of the Geneva Agreements".¹³⁵ The Commission's answer implied that the South Vietnam government

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, *Eleventh Report*, p. 14.

¹³² *Ibid.*, *Tenth Report*, p. 18.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, *Eleventh Report*, p. 17.

¹³⁴ See chapter 11, p. 325.

¹³⁵ I.C.C. Vietnam, *Eleventh Report*, p. 18 Paragraphs (f) and (g) of Article 16 are worded as follows: Paragraph (f): "Each party shall notify the Joint Commission and the International Commission at least two days in advance of any arrivals or departures of units, groups of personnel and individual personnel in or from Vietnam. Reports on the arrivals or departures of units, groups of personnel and individual personnel in or from Vietnam shall be submitted daily to the Joint Commission and the International Commission. All the above-mentioned notifications and reports shall indicate the places and dates of arrival or departure and the number of persons arriving or departing; Paragraph (g): "The International Commission, through its Inspection Teams, shall supervise and inspect the rotation of units and groups of personnel and the arrival and departure of individual personnel as authorized above, at the points of entry enumerated in Article 20 below".

was entitled to increase the number of American instructors, provided that this number did not exceed the total standing at the time of the armistice, and provided that the introduction of those instructors be done according to the procedure laid down by the Geneva Agreements.

The Polish delegate naturally dissented from the Commission's decision, while general Vo-Nguyen-Giap, Commander-in-Chief of the People's Army of Vietnam, in a letter to the Commission, emphasized "the seriousness of the position", and alleged that the Republic of Vietnam had "requested the Commission to let the United States of America introduce United States armaments and military personnel in South Vietnam" to replace the French expeditionary Corps which had invaded Vietnam.¹³⁶ This was denied by the Commission.¹³⁷

The North Vietnam government was however not satisfied by this reply. It appealed to the Co-chairmen, requesting them to issue instructions to the Commission "to reconsider and repeal the decision authorizing American military personnel from entering South Vietnam in replacement of French military personnel". To this, the Commission replied, the Polish delegate dissenting, that the decision taken by the Commission was fully within its competence, and repeated that "while any communication may be addressed to the Co-chairmen by any Party, it found no provision in the Agreement for an appeal by the Parties to the Co-chairmen against its decision".

Lastly, the Commission took up another matter which was to arouse bitter protests and violent denunciations by North Vietnam. In 1959, the subversive activities of North Vietnam south of the 17th. parallel were intensified. The scale and number of assassinations of officials and sympathisers of the South Vietnam government, of attacks on South Vietnamese troops, of sabotage of South Vietnam's economic and social development programmes, reached such a point that the government of South Vietnam found it necessary to pass a law, called "Law Number 10-1959", to protect its officials, troops as well as the civilian population. North Vietnam's agents found guilty of murder, crimes, arsons, kidnapping, and acts of sabotage and terrorism were liable of death and hard labour sentences, and were to be tried by military tribunals.

The North Vietnam government naturally complained to the Commission, alleging that Law 10-59 was a violation of the Geneva Agreements (Article 14 (c)). The Commission, however, decided that the Law did not contain any provision specifically designed to discriminate against, or subject to reprisals, persons or organisations on account of their activities during the hostilities, and therefore, that law "does not attract Article 14 (c) or any other Article of the Geneva Agreement".¹³⁸ The Polish delegate naturally dissented from the opinion of the Commission.

The North Vietnam government was not satisfied and requested the Commission to reconsider its decision. At the same time, it launched a

¹³⁶ I.C.C., Vietnam, *Eleventh Report*, p. 18.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

large-scale propaganda campaign against this decision,¹³⁹ and appealed to the Co-chairmen over the head of the Commission. This obliged the Commission to point out again to the High Command of the Vietnam People's Army that "in arriving at the decision, the Commission had carefully considered the provisions of the Geneva Agreements and the decision made was fully within the Commission's competence", and that it found "no provision in the Agreement for an appeal to the Co-chairmen against the decision of the Commission".¹⁴⁰

The North Vietnam government naturally protested that the decision of the International Commission, "reached by the Indian and Canadian delegates despite the protest of the Polish delegate", was an "unjust decision".¹⁴¹ In a letter to the Commission, the High Command of the Vietnam People's Army protested that the conclusion of the Commission was "erroneous", and that it "deeply regretted" the attitude of the Commission "which had previously endeavoured to contribute to the implementation of the Geneva Agreements". It also added that it was

"clearly evident that such decisions provide favourable conditions for the U.S. imperialists to intensify their interference in South Vietnam, thus further endangering the security of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as well as peace in Indochina and South East Asia".¹⁴²

India's attitude naturally pleased the government of South Vietnam greatly. Its radio gave wide publicity to the fact that, in the view of the International Commission, Law 10-59 did not contradict the Geneva Agreements. South Vietnam's secretariate of foreign affairs, in its Report for 1960, wrote happily that "recently, the International Commission decided to dismiss denunciations of the Vietcong concerning Law Number 10 and the increase in military personnel of the US military Advisory Group".¹⁴³ Indeed the state of the relations of North and South Vietnam with the Commission in 1959-60 was a reversal of that which prevailed five years earlier. Whereas in 1954-55 it was North Vietnam which applauded and approved of the Commission's attitude, and South Vietnam which frowned and sulked, in 1960 it was South Vietnam which approved and applauded, and North Vietnam which sulked and frowned. By 1960 India found herself, whether deliberately or not, on the side of the nationalist government of South Vietnam against the Communist government of North Vietnam.

Indian policy and nationalism in Vietnam

In 1960, the struggle between the nationalists and the communists in Vietnam seemed deadlocked. Neither side seemed assured of victory. Yet, one thing was obvious. For the nationalists of Vietnam, starting

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 11.

¹⁴¹ *Hsinhua*, July 8, 1960.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, July 8, 1960.

¹⁴³ Republic of Vietnam, *Record of Six Year's Achievements, 1954-1960*, p. 432.

as they did in 1945 with severe handicaps, and with little prospect of standing successfully against the communists, this deadlock was in itself a great achievement. To this achievement, India had contributed a part which, although not decisive, was important.¹⁴⁴

Mr. Nehru's cautiousness before 1954, his stubborn refusal to yield to popular pressure in favour of Ho-Chi-Minh's government, had contributed to deny this government India's material and diplomatic support and aid, and the moral, political and international prestige, as well as Asian concerted action and United Nations intervention, which would have helped it achieve an early and complete victory, and bring all Vietnam under communism. The Vietnamese non-communist nationalists would have been faced with no other alternative in their struggle for independence than to throw in their lot with the communists — and be utilised and then discarded and liquidated after communist victory, as in Eastern Europe —, instead of holding out until the emergence of a strong nationalist leader capable of putting up a determined fight, keeping at least half of the country out of communist hands, providing a possible point of attraction and a reason for hope for those under communist rule in North Vietnam, and at the same time, barring the way to a further communist advance into South East Asia.

The Communists themselves were perhaps not blind to the damage done to their cause by Mr. Nehru. When the latter, in spite of a plea by Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, refused to recognise Bao-Dai at the Colombo Conference in February 1950, *the Nation*, a pro-communist paper, interpreted this refusal as only a policy of "wait and see". In an editorial entitled "Indochina and the two camps" on March 26, 1950, it wrote:

"It was impossible on the part of Pandit Nehru to openly recognise such a reactionary regime as that of Bao-Dai's. But his policy of "wait and see" is significant. An intelligent public would naturally interpret the Indian Premier's gesture somewhat in the following fashion. Reluctant to openly recognise, Nehru has thus taken resort to a policy of "wait and see". Thus India today plays a passive role which is bound to be active when the difference in ideologies reaches its highest point".¹⁴⁵

Two years earlier, in 1948, another Indian newspaper had complained:

"for the past two and a half years a nation of 22 millions has been fighting alone. No other country has raised a finger to arrive at a just settlement. Vietnam, the Cinderella of South East Asia, is fighting unhonoured, unwept and unsung".¹⁴⁶

As far as the Indian government was concerned, that Cinderella had red complexion. Had this not been the case, India might have adopted the same attitude towards Vietnam as towards Indonesia.

¹⁴⁴ See chapter 11.

¹⁴⁵ *The Nation*, March 2, 1950.

¹⁴⁶ *The Mail* (Madras), May 23, 1948.