

The First Indochina War and the Failure of the European Defense Community
1950-1954

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ABSTRACT

The First Indochina war and the Failure of the European Defense Community
1950-1954

Catherine Dufresne

Previous scholarly works pointed to the connection between the failure of the European Defence Community and the Indochina conflict, but no one has analyzed the development of this link. What were the repercussions of the Indochina-EDC link on the policies of the three French Foreign Ministers who succeeded each other between 1950 and 1954? How did international and national events influence the French Foreign Ministry in its dealings with the Indochina-EDC link? Based on evidence from the unpublished diplomatic archives of the Quai d'Orsay, this thesis sheds new light on the significance of the Indochina-EDC link.

Foreign Ministers Robert Schuman, Georges Bidault and Pierre Mendès-France had to deal with the EDC and the Indochina questions under severe international and national constraints arising from economic problems, political instability in Paris and Cold War tensions. Foreign Minister Schuman used the EDC-Indochina link to advance France's policies. The lack of progress on the EDC proposal and French setbacks in Indochina undermined the efforts of his successor, Georges Bidault. Mendès-France, Bidault's successor, had to promise to find quick solutions to both problems. This paper explains how the EDC first served France's imperial policy, but turned into a political liability that finally led to the dramatic end of France's involvement in the Indochina conflict and to the rejection of the EDC proposal by France, guaranteeing the fall of the Fourth Republic and precipitating the end of Franco-American cooperation.

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List of Acronyms

MRP	Mouvement Républicain Populaire
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
RPF	Rassemblement du Peuple Français
SFIO	Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière
USDR	Démocratique et Socialiste de la Résistance

Introduction

The First Indochina War And The Failure of the European Defense Community 1950-1954

Since the end of the Second World War, the path leading toward European integration encountered many obstacles, some emerging from domestic concerns and others arising from international issues. States involved in the process wanted to protect their interests while the Americans and the Soviets were also trying to forge the new Europe according to their own aims and ideologies. Sensing that the superpowers were eager to extend their spheres of influence, European governments used nuanced diplomacy to obtain favors from Washington and Moscow. France, humiliated by Nazi occupation, but determined to re-establish its prestige and to save its empire, played the diplomatic game wisely. The French managed to have the US finance a large part of the Indochina War while conducting the first steps of European integration their way.

When hostilities ended in Europe, many Third World colonies felt that it was time for them to claim their independence and Indochina, the pearl of the French Empire, was one of them. Not ready to let go of their prize possession, the French expeditionary forces were sent to Indochinese shores to defeat the communist-led revolution. But it was not long before the French realized that the enemy was stronger than anticipated. France requested American help, which was given reluctantly. The US had proclaimed its intention to counter European imperialism, but opposing communism was even more pressing, and Washington's European priorities also came into play.

Germany, divided and occupied, was at the epicenter of European security problems. France did not want its former enemy to be rehabilitated and rearmed. But German troops would be needed in the event of Soviet aggression to prevent an invasion of France. Germany's rearmament was necessary, but the French refused to have it done the American way and wanted their own agenda to prevail. With its army engaged in South East Asia, it was unthinkable for France to put guns back into German hands. But to delay and control Germany's remilitarization, the French had to become the champions of European integration. France introduced the Schuman plan, intended to assure a fair distribution of German and French coal and steel. This first step taken toward the integration of Germany into Western Europe pleased the Americans, but it was easier to act on the economic level than on the plane of security. New plans to organize the defense of Europe were introduced the same year that the US took the decision to recognize the Indochinese conflict. That year, 1950, became a turning point both for Europe and for South East Asia. Designed to counter US proposals to rearm Germany within the structure of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), France's Pleven plan, later known as the European Defense Community (EDC) proposal, had an impact far beyond the European stage.

Historians such as Jasmine Aimaq and William Hitchcock, who have studied the link between German rearmament and the Indochina war, have pointed out that the EDC had repercussions for Franco-American relations, but few analyses have clearly shown to what extent the EDC project influenced the course of events. Aimaq published in 1996 *For Europe or Empire? French Colonial Ambitions and the European Army Plan*, a book which traces the evolution of the EDC proposal in connection with France's

imperial designs.¹ But Aimaq does not look at the development of this link. Indeed, what were the repercussions of this link for the policies of the three French Foreign Ministers who succeeded each other between 1950 and 1954? Moreover, how did international and national events influence the Foreign Ministry in its dealing with these questions? This thesis shows how the EDC evolved from a handy diplomatic tool to a dangerous political time bomb as the situation in Indochina went from bad to worse. France's foreign ministers each responded differently to the severe constraints that influenced the EDC question and the Indochina war, constraints emerging mainly from economic problems, political instability in Paris and Cold War tensions. Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, from the *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (MRP), used the EDC-Indochina link to advance France's imperial and German policies, but stagnation in the process of ratifying the EDC and regular French setbacks in Indochina undermined the efforts of his successor, Georges Bidault, a fellow MRP leader. Bidault witnessed the fall of his party and the rise of a member of the *Parti Radical*, Pierre Mendès-France, who came to power because of his promise to find quick solutions to the Indochina and the EDC problems. This thesis goes one step further in advancing our understanding of how the French Foreign Ministry dealt with the EDC-Indochina link and the interrelated problems arising from that connection.

Scholars can easily examine the link between the EDC and the Indochinese conflict by looking at published primary sources, such as the *Foreign Relations of the United States* and *The Pentagon Papers*. But it takes a deeper analysis of archival documents to see the evolution of the link between Indochina and the EDC and to

¹ Jasmine Aimaq, *For Europe or Empire? French Colonial Ambitions and the European Army Plan* (Lund : Lund University Press, 1996).

understand the way it influenced French diplomacy and the Paris-Washington relationship. It was during a visit to the French Foreign Affairs Ministry's archives that the idea for this present thesis took form. Unpublished documents coming from the EDC and the foreign ministers' series revealed important fluctuations in the EDC-Indochina link.

The first chapter of this thesis, "The Indochinese Question and the European Defense Community: The French and the American Perspectives", covers topics that go beyond the 1950 to 1954 time span covered in the subsequent chapters. Designed to ease the reader's task, this chapter gives background information that is crucial to understanding the views of the French and the Americans about Indochina and European defense matters. Chapters II, III and IV show how, between 1950 and 1954, two leading figures of the *Mouvement Républicain Populaire*, Robert Schuman and Georges Bidault, and one member of the *Parti Radical*, Pierre Mendès-France, maneuvered in the field of diplomacy. The second chapter, "1950-1951: The Introduction of the EDC Proposal and its Impact on Franco-American Relations during the Indochina War", traces how Schuman influenced and was influenced by the course of events. During Schuman's tenure as foreign minister, the EDC was introduced and became a lever to push the US into funding the French war effort in Indochina. Schuman was devoted to European integration, but the controversial nature of the EDC divided French politicians. Chapter III, "1952-1953: Growing American Impatience", explains how the situation changed when Bidault took Schuman's place at the Quai d'Orsay. Bidault, a fervent imperialist, tried to save Indochina and refused to move on with the EDC despite US pressure. Accelerating the end of the MRP's predominance over French politics, the interminable

Indochinese conflict and the EDC inflamed public opinion and permitted in 1954 the rise of Pierre Mendès-France. The last chapter, “1954: The End of the Indochina War and the Ultimate Rejection of the EDC”, explains how within three months of Mendès-France’s coming into office at the Quai d’Orsay, the French phase of the Indochinese conflict was over and the EDC proposal was rejected by the French Assembly to the great displeasure of the United States.

Chapter I

The French and the American perspectives

On the Indochina question, France and the United States often held opposing views. For decades, the French had believed that their Empire was indivisible and essential for their prestige, but after two world wars the Americans were determined to get rid of old-style imperialism. The Americans' perception of colonial problems changed within the Cold War context, but the United States' desire for European empires to emancipate their colonies remained a predominant goal. Thus, when it came to Indochina, both Paris and Washington agreed that the Viet Minh had to be defeated, but for different reasons.

France and the United States also held divergent views on European reconstruction. When European security projects came to the negotiation table, the French desire to delay Germany's rearmament and the American hope for quick European integration clashed. To safeguard its status, France proposed the creation of the European Defense Community to prevent German rearmament within NATO, and requested American aid for Indochina. Determined to accelerate German integration into the European community, the United States accepted French demands. Paris and Washington concurred that Europe needed to get back on its feet, but each nation was motivated by different political, economic and ideological goals. To understand how the Indochina war and the EDC were associated, a close look at French and American views on imperialism in Indochina, and German rearmament and integration into Europe is important.

The Indivisibility of France and the French Empire

The Imperial Dream

Indochina, France's "balcony over the Pacific", was a perfect example of France's ideal colony. Fuelled by diversified resources and rich agrarian lands, Indochina seemed to provide Frenchmen with unlimited economic possibilities. But success stories were rarely the outcome for ordinary settlers. The colonial system benefited the people who drove it rather than middle-class colonizers or the "underdeveloped" natives. Living at the bottom of the colonial ladder was a question of survival, a harsh life described by Marguerite Duras in *Barrage Contre le Pacifique*.² The author, born in Indochina, knew that the white clothes and even whiter smiles depicted in imperial propaganda posters were far from the reality of everyday life in the Empire. But the French colonial population's disillusionment did not change the widely accepted idea that France's overseas mission benefited both the "uncivilized" Indochinese and the Republican metropolis. For the vast majority, France and the French Empire could never be separated, they were in fact seen as indivisible.

Indivisibility

Sovereignty and independence for colonized populations contradicted imperial French doctrine. The concept of indivisibility, as described by historian Jasmine Aimaq, set the limits within which overseas territories were permitted to evolve.³ The only possible way for colonized people to free themselves was to become better Frenchmen. There was no talk of self-rule or independence in the colonial administration. Like the Romans before them, the French believed that they enlightened inferior civilizations by

² Marguerite Duras, *Barrage contre le Pacifique* (Paris : Gallimard, 1990).

³ Aimaq, 78-81.

spreading their own culture, laws and language. But moving up the imperial ladder was impossible for natives. For Indochinese who studied in Paris, the final result was always a low-level position in the imperial bureaucracy. Following the Great War, a new nationalist discourse emerged in the French colonial world opposing the Empire, but Paris remained deaf to demands for more autonomy.

Nationalism

The Japanese victories in Asia during the 1940's seemed to seal the fate of old-style imperialism. No longer a great power, France, recast as the Vichy government under the thumb of Hitler's Germany, had not been able to resist the Japanese invasion of Indochina. At war's end, when Japanese forces arrested French colonial officials in March 1945, the Japanese propaganda machine had been advocating the return of Asia to the Asians for years. Even if the Indochinese refused to cooperate with the Japanese, whose never-ending requisitions had created shortages and famine, they generally accepted the idea that Europeans were no better than Asians. Indochinese nationalism was getting stronger and Ho Chi Minh's communist party, the Viet Minh, exploited popular discontent with the French and the Japanese to rise to power. When Ho proclaimed Vietnamese independence on September 2, 1945, many in France thought that it signalled an inadmissible failure for France.

The Importance of the Empire

The French were particularly eager to use their foreign possessions to reassert their power. But for many Frenchmen, the fall of Indochina represented the first step toward the destruction of the Empire. Success in Hanoi could stimulate further

revolutionary movements elsewhere in the Empire, especially in North Africa.⁴ Moreover, the United States seemed determined to put an end to French rule in Indochina. Indeed, President Roosevelt had made sure that the French army would not get back to Indochina by putting the Japanese surrender under British and Chinese supervision.⁵ As the most vocal supporter of the French Empire, General Charles de Gaulle disagreed with the exclusion of French forces from Indochina, a possession that he believed truly French. Already in 1940, De Gaulle had made clear that the greatness of France arose from its imperial power and that its colonies would furnish the backbone of the resistance.⁶

Imperial Rehabilitation

Eager to put France back on the international scene following German capitulation, De Gaulle based his policy of *grandeur* on the rehabilitation of the Empire. Having refused to recognize the Fourth Republic's Constitution because it had given too much power to the political parties, the General did not want to participate in the government, but his colonial policy remained widely accepted. For politicians emerging from the war, patriotism fused with imperialism. French sovereignty over Indochina had to be reclaimed for reasons of imperial and financial stability. Indeed, the Indochinese economy controlled by the French government and investors generated considerable profits. All the rubber plantations, mining facilities and banks were under French control;

⁴ Nationalism was rising in the French protectorates of Morocco and Tunisia, creating tensions between the French and the natives. France was worried that a communist victory in Indochina would undermine its position in its North African possessions. Furthermore, the situation was becoming alarming in Algeria, which was a French department. The nationalist struggle burst into flames in Algeria, first in 1945, then in 1954, the year that the Indochina war ended.

⁵ It was decided that the British were going to supervise the surrender of Japanese forces south of the 16th parallel, and the Chinese would take care of the northern part.

⁶ Charles De Gaulle, *Mémoires* (Paris : Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2000), 1213-1214. De Gaulle in his famous *appel à la nation* broadcast by the BBC on June 18, 1940, had claimed that France was not facing the invader alone since “[e]lle a un vaste Empire derrière elle.”

two-thirds of the rice production and every part of the shipping industry of the country benefited French interests. But with a communist regime in Vietnam, the French were certainly going to lose their privileged position.

Failed Negotiations

The failure of the negotiations between the Viet Minh and the French government led to war. Accords had been reached in March 1946 between Ho Chi Minh and French officials, but France had only agreed to recognize Viet Nam within the French Union and refused to give to the Hanoi government real power. The Viet Minh were ready to fight for the liberation of the Vietnamese people. The French, too, were ready to go to war to preserve their interests in Indochina, to prevent the division of their Empire and to prove the worth of their army. France thought that it was going to fight an inferior enemy, disorganized and unequipped, and that it was going to be a short and easy war. But by 1948, two years into the war, it was clear that the enemy was stronger and wiser than France had expected, and military operations demanded nearly three times more spending than the benefits received from Indochinese exports.⁷ It was not long before French officials understood that the Indochina war was a burden too heavy to carry for France and that American aid would be crucial.

Cold War Europe

One of the greatest tasks of the 20th century was the reconstruction of Europe after two world wars fought within 20 years. Even before the end of hostilities, growing dissension between the Soviet Union and the United States had added a sense of urgency to the colossal enterprise. Ultimately, Europe was divided in two, with occupied and

⁷ Andrew Rotter, *The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), 86.

divided Germany in the center as a symbol of ideological incompatibility. Many Cold War scholars viewed Europe as simply divided between two superpower poles, but recent scholarship has pointed out that the mutual fears of Moscow and Washington permitted other nations to take advantage of these tensions.⁸ Having everything to gain from the “Cold War game”, the French were particularly determined to use the only tool they had, diplomacy, to get back on track. The British had chosen to isolate themselves to avoid interference with their imperial policy, Italy was weak and the Benelux countries were too small to impose their will.⁹ The French knew that they were the central pillar of European reconstruction.

France understood that the US wanted to rehabilitate Germany to have a reliable European partner. Franco-American relations had never been a love story and France suffered from a chronic lack of political stability. Between 1946 and 1954, thirteen Prime Ministers tried to survive as heads of their cabinets, with stays in office ranging from 12 months to barely 5 weeks. But in this apparent chaos, two consensuses remained the basis of French diplomacy (until the nomination of Pierre Mendès-France in June 1954): the need for France to stay in Indochina and opposition to the creation of a German army.

The United States' Dilemma: Anti-imperialism versus Anti-communism

Anti-imperialism

In the mid-forties, nothing permitted an observer to believe that the United States would support a colonial war since the White House's discourse was clearly anti-

⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 114-134.

⁹ These countries were of strategic importance to European reconstruction. Indeed, Italy, Germany and the Benelux countries were the five nations associated with France in the European Coal and Steel Community and Britain was also closely associated with it.

colonial.¹⁰ Already in 1918, Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen points had inspired oppressed people in Asia and in Africa, and President Roosevelt's trusteeship program seemed to be the tangible result of America's proclaimed anti-colonialism. The President's intentions were to put European colonies, such as Indochina, under United Nation's trusteeship.

But Roosevelt's death accelerated the rejection of his anti-colonial project. It was opposed by many in Europe and in Washington. Indeed, the United States would have had to give up strategic island acquisitions in Asia gained during the war to force European powers to dissolve their empires.¹¹ Great Britain, which had always opposed the trusteeship program, was ready to reform its policies within the framework of the Commonwealth, but without international interference. On its side, France had come up with the idea of a French Union, but its colonial policy remained closed to any type of national sovereignty.

Imagining Viet Nam

Indochina was the perfect example of old-style imperialism's failure, since France's hundred years old presence had not ameliorated the population's misery. In fact, as historian Mark Philip Bradley describes in his *Imagining Viet Nam and America*, Americans had constructed an image of Viet Nam free from French rule, but under Western guidance.¹² For American political leaders, the Philippines's model served to illustrate how underdeveloped countries could benefit from a superior form of colonialism. But since the Americans had limited knowledge of the Indochina region,

¹⁰ The Second World War had shown that the European colonial system was a failure. The European powers had spread devastation to their overseas possessions and natives were now convinced that the white race was no better than they were.

¹¹ The American army was reluctant to accept the trusteeship program since it would have certainly forced the US to give away its territorial acquisitions, such as Japanese islands hosting US air bases.

¹² Mark Phillip Bradley, *Imagining Viet Nam and America: the Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 46-73.

France was still needed. Rare were Americans who had put their feet on Indochinese soil, except for some missionaries, curious travelers and one mission of the Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S.). Aware of this situation, the French quickly learned to use their expertise as a tool to gain what they wanted from the United States. Using the American fear of communist expansion, the French strategy was to highlight suspected alliances between Hanoi, Moscow and Beijing. Although association between the Viet Minh and the “Red” rulers could not be proven, it was obvious that Ho Chi Minh was a devoted communist who had been active in the Communist International. The Viet Minh’s certain rise to power in the absence of a strong French presence justified France’s desire to impose Western guidance on Vietnam. Temporary support of imperialism thus came to be seen in Washington as a necessary evil to counter communism. The United States’ resolve to oppose Soviet expansionism to the detriment of Indochinese nationalist claims became evident at the 1945 San Francisco Conference. Organized to lay the foundations of the United Nations, the San Francisco Conference became the theater of diplomatic confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Using this situation to their advantage, the French put forward their colonial policy and complained about the severely critical treatment of the Indochina war in the American media. It became evident to the United States that its interests in Europe and South East Asia would be better served through cooperation with France.

Asian Domino

European reconstruction was a top priority for the United States, but Asian questions were also considered important, especially the American occupation of Japan. To ensure the success of its Asian policy, including the reconstruction of Japan, US

officials had imagined Asia as an economically integrated system with common economic goals. In preliminary American plans, China was supposed to be the motor of integration and a bulwark against communism, but events shattered this vision. The rise of a communist regime in China made more imperative Japan's reconstruction. The conclusion of the Chinese Civil War with the victory of the Communists dramatically changed the balance between the "free world" and the "enslaved world". Harshly criticized for his administration's decision to abandon the Chinese Nationalists, US President Harry Truman had to stop the communist march.

Thus, 1949 not only marked the rise of Mao, but also a clear shift in American policies concerning Asia. With the fall of China, the United States' obsession with the domino theory turned Asia into a puzzle in which the "red pieces" had to be isolated to contain the contagion of communism.¹³ The Republican-dominated Congress and the American public wanted firm action. In the absence of better options, Washington officially recognized, in February 1950, Vietnam's new ruler, ex-Emperor Bao Dai, hand-picked by France. The Americans were now "officially" determined to counter the communist threat in Asia. In May, Secretary of State Dean Acheson publicly announced his government's decision to support France financially in its fight against communism in Indochina. And in June, the United States sent forces to Korea to stop the invasion of the South by communist North Korea. Washington's policy shift from anti-imperialism to

¹³ In May 1950, in an article exposing the alarming situation in Indochina, *Time* magazine emphasized that Indochina could no longer be ignored by US officials: "The US now has a new frontier and a new ally in the cold war . The place is Indo-China, a Southeast Asian jungle, mountain and delta land that includes the Republic of Viet Nam and the smaller neighboring Kingdoms of Laos and Cambodia, all parts of the French Union. (...) If Indo-China falls to Communism, so, in all probability, will all of Southeast Asia." "The New Frontier," *Time*, May 29 (1950): 1-8. <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

absolute anti-communism changed Franco-American relations and rendered even more urgent the reconstruction of Europe and the organization of European defense.

European Integration

Since World War II, it was clear for the US that European integration, mainly through political and economic associations, was the best way to prevent further cataclysms in Europe. To facilitate the process, the United States launched in 1948 the Marshall Plan, a program designed to distribute massive American aid to reconstructing European nations. France benefited hugely from the Marshall Plan. Between 1948 and 1951, the French received 2.6 billion U.S. dollars in Marshall Plan credits.¹⁴ The United States was particularly worried about France's unstable political situation and growing anti-Americanism among the population. French cooperation was essential to European reconstruction and the Americans could not allow France to fall to communism. The Berlin blockade which lasted from June 1948 to May 1949 and the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1949 only strengthened the United States' perception of the centrality of France. But the Soviet advance in Eastern Europe also rendered urgent the rearmament of West Germany.

European Security

The Americans knew that a balance needed to be achieved between France and Germany before Europe could be united under a common political entity. But it was obvious that France would not be able to sustain its role in Europe if it was still stuck in Indochina. The Indochinese financial burden was draining the French Treasury and increasing the deficit in the national budget, to the discontent of the population. Moreover, French officers were dying at such a rate in Indochina that the military schools

¹⁴ Hitchcock, 208.

were not able to graduate enough students to replace the losses. The French had to secure their position in Indochina before they could concentrate themselves on European defense and they needed American aid for both enterprises. Concerned that the French deficit would jeopardize France's military budgets, the US Department of State released in October 1950 a press communiqué on the measures that would be taken to help the French Rearmament Program within the framework of NATO.¹⁵ The announcement underlined that the US Congress had approved \$5 billions in aid for Europe for the implementation of the Mutual Defense Assistance Act¹⁶, of which France was getting the largest share. In fact, the *Pentagon Papers* editors reported that in 1950, American aid to France reached around \$10 million and peaked at \$1.063 billion in 1954, 78 percent of the cost of the war.¹⁷

Conclusion

The Indochina war represented for both Western powers involved a very different battle. The French wanted to preserve the indivisibility of their Empire, with no intention of giving independence to their South East Asian colony. The United States opposed French imperialism, but could not afford to let Indochina "fall" to communism. The imperialist expertise of France was needed to counter Viet Minh designs until an independent Indochinese government could rule without French interference.

¹⁵ Department of State Press Release, 17 October 1950, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1950* (Washington: GPO, 1977), Volume III, *Western Europe: Diplomatic Papers*, 1427.

¹⁶ Following the end of the Marshall plan program, the United States turned to military aid plans, such as the Mutual Defense Assistance Act, to make sure that Western Europe would reconstruct their military forces.

¹⁷ Mike Gravel, ed., *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of the United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam*, Vol. 1 (Boston, 1971), 77.

Paradoxically, the United States needed France in South East Asia to counter the Communists, but ultimately wanted the French out of Indochina, while France needed the United States in Indochina to consolidate its own influence over the region. Thus was created a vicious circle, comparable to the one embedded in the European reconstruction question. Indeed, the United States needed France to organize European defense against Soviet expansionism, while France needed the United States to rebuild its army to counterbalance German rearmament and pursue war in Indochina.

Chapter II

1950-1951: The Introduction of the European Defense Community Proposal and Its Impact on Franco-American Relations during the Indochina War

The year 1950 is described by many historians as marking the first step of the United States towards involvement in Viet Nam. For historian Jasmine Aimaq, 1950 marked a policy shift in Washington in favor of the French in the Indochina war, but a political turnover does not necessarily mean a change of mentalities.¹⁸ Indeed, the Americans continued to imagine a Viet Nam free from French interference while France continued to hope for the restoration of its rule. Similarly, 1950 also saw French and American interests clash over the question of German rearmament. Rendered imperative by increasing tensions between the superpowers, Germany's participation in the defense of Western Europe had to be organized, but the United States and France had their own distinctive plans in mind.

As this chapter will show, the European Defense Community proposal initially served French interests by providing Foreign Minister Schuman with leverage to push forward France's Indochinese policy in Washington while delaying German rearmament.

The German Question and the Schuman Plan: The Premises of the European Defense Community Proposal.

The Importance of Germany

From the earliest moments of the Cold War, it was clear for the United States that the defense of Western Europe would necessitate Germany's participation. Like the

¹⁸ Jasmine Aimaq, *For Europe or Empire? French Colonial Ambitions and the European Army Plan* (Lund : Lund University Press, 1996), 62-72.

British, the Americans were eager to bring home their troops stationed in Germany. But for the French, the Allied occupation of Germany was vital, especially in the event of a Soviet attack. France had to make sure that the frontier of western defense would be pushed as far east as possible and that the Germans would participate in the defense of their own territory. The French government, led by a centrist coalition, knew that West German rearmament would be needed to prevent France from becoming the battleground of an East-West confrontation. But Paris also believed that the Soviet Union was too weak to lead an offensive against Europe. From France's perspective, Asia was probably going to be Stalin's first target. Thus, West German soldiers would be needed, but not yet.

The Third Force

When Schuman became Prime Minister in 1948, his party, the *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (MRP), was part of an alliance of centrist parties that also included the *Union Démocratique et Socialiste de la Résistance* (UDSR), the Radicals and the Moderates. Known as the Third Force, these political parties had formed a coalition that opposed extremists on the Left, the French Communist Party, and on the Right, De Gaulle's *Rassemblement du Peuple Français* (RPF). Faced with pressing domestic concerns, the Third Force had to deal with the harsh economic and social conditions of France. The French population's standard of living had to be increased, but France lacked the necessary means to act promptly on the national level while maintaining its international status. Between 1939 and 1945, France's transportation system and housing had been greatly damaged and by the time the Third Force came to power, coal shortages and inflation had become part of everyday life. In 1945, France

spent 34 million francs on imports while earning only 7 million francs for its exports.¹⁹ The French trade deficit was dramatic and it was clear that a loan was indispensable. Only the United States could provide the funds.

The Marshall plan came at the right time to save France from bankruptcy, but it also put the Third Force in a delicate position. Many Frenchmen thought that American interference in French affairs threatened France's sovereignty and demeaned French nationalism. The PCF and the RPF were particularly critical of the Third Force and accused the centrist parties of selling France to the United States. Always on shaky foundations, the Third Force had no choice but to find consolidate political alliances to deal with the opposition. One of the topics on which most of the political parties (except the PCF) agreed was the need to safeguard the French Empire, and Bidault, who was Foreign Minister up to July 1948, adopted a strong pro-colonial policy. Following in De Gaulle's footsteps, Bidault acted to preserve France's foreign possessions and reacted promptly to the nationalist upsurge in Indochina, as explained in chapter I.

The Powerful French National Assembly

Bidault's successor at the Quai D'Orsay, Schuman, had his own conception of how France should conduct its diplomacy. Elected Prime Minister in July 1948, he was the first to head the Third Force coalition. His nomination had really been the fruit of the centrist alliance since in terms of the popular vote the population had voted for the Communist party in larger numbers.²⁰ The communist threat was so real for the French government that extreme caution was needed to stay in office, and, of course, to retain US support. Secretary of State Acheson had made it clear that Marshall credits would be

¹⁹ Jean-Pierre Rioux, *The Fourth Republic, 1944-1958*, Translated by Godfrey Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 19.

²⁰ Rioux, p.110.

given to democracies, and not to countries with communists tendencies. Upon receiving his mandate to rule, Schuman decided to take responsibility for the Foreign Affairs ministry and distributed the other ministerial positions so as to conciliate the allied parties.

Well aware of the fragility of his position, Schuman always had to be careful not to upset the National Assembly, which held decisive power in its hands. The Constitution of the French Fourth Republic had put the fate of France into the hands of the deputies who were elected for five years to the National Assembly. The Assembly had the final word on every French law and budget; it ultimately controlled the calling of the elections and dismissal of the Prime Minister. In other words, the Prime Minister was vulnerable, but the Assembly was well-protected by laws that rendered the Assembly's dissolution so difficult that it was an option to avoid at all cost for the government in power. Therefore, Schuman, as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, had to be cautious in handling the questions that were unleashing passions in the Assembly: German rehabilitation and the Indochinese conflict.

Foreign Minister Schuman

Schuman, who had been a citizen of the disputed region of Alsace during the two world wars, had witnessed Franco-German wars twice, but still truly believed in a united Europe. He was convinced that to prevent the return of German militarism it was imperative to adopt a more flexible approach. Schuman argued that the establishment of a strong democracy in Germany could only be achieved through the moral rehabilitation of the German people. It was necessary to “cooperate on an equal-footing with a traditional

enemy.²¹ But at the same time, Schuman was aware that the young French Fourth Republic was not ready for that kind of conciliatory policy. Within the Third Force, the Socialists and the Radicals complained that this kind of policy reminded them of Munich; they feared the kind of German nationalism that had permitted the rise of Hitler. In the opposition, the RPF claimed that France had sacrificed too much to Germany's defeat to let the Germans be rehabilitated so quickly while the PCF followed Moscow's policies by refusing to consider any solution leading to German rearmament. Schuman needed time to restore colonial order in Indochina, and time in the French Assembly, before he allowed the Germans to rearm. But unfortunately for Schuman, the Americans had their position, and their fears that the Soviet Union was considering an attack on Western Europe pushed the United States to demand quick German remilitarization.

Balancing Powers

As Schuman feared, the Germans, having understood the value of their geo-strategic position, learned to use their rare diplomatic opportunities to enhance their political status. Hoping to dissuade the NATO from allowing German rearmament, Schuman expressed his worries in front of the Atlantic Council in September 1950:

Aussi, nous souhaitons le retour de l'Allemagne au sein des nations démocratiques, mais nous devons bien constater que depuis que le Chancelier Adenauer a fait sa proposition d'une contribution de l'Allemagne à la défense européenne et depuis qu'il a eu le sentiment que cette proposition pourrait rencontrer un accueil favorable, nous constatons un raidissement dans l'attitude des Allemands, dans les négociations qui se déroulent actuellement, car ils s'imaginent que nous avons besoin d'eux maintenant.²²

For France, the new importance given to Adenauer's government was unacceptable. The French government had to find a solution to delay German remilitarization and to prevent

²¹ Rioux, 142.

²² Déclaration du Président Schuman devant le Conseil de l'Atlantique, 16 Septembre 1950, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères Français (MAE), *Secrétariat Général, CED I, 1950, 62 : Origine de la Communauté*, 6-7.

further American interference in European politics. But on the other hand, American isolationism posed an even worse scenario for the French, who needed American funds to restructure their economy and their military.

The first step to revive France's military potential was the reorganization of its industry. During his speech, Schuman had also pointed out to the North Atlantic Community members the problems faced by Europe related to the distribution of raw materials. Schuman wanted US Secretary of State Dean Acheson to admit that French rearmament efforts depended on the quantities of resources available for production. Natural resources were needed, but there were shortages and, since the end of war, one of France's main concerns had been to control the rich regions of the Ruhr and the Saar, but these measures were considered discriminatory by Germany. It was, therefore, necessary to permit an equitable distribution of coal and steel in Europe through a plan that had been proposed by France in April 1950: the Schuman plan.

Jean Monnet

The top priority for the Third Force was a durable national recovery. To achieve that goal free from political interference, a Planning Commissariat not dependent on any ministries had been formed. Headed by Jean Monnet, a renowned economist and a famous political figure of the First and the Second World War, the Planning Commissariat identified the two main economic problems faced by France: France's insufficient coal production and its chronic lack of credit. Determined to solve French deficiencies, Monnet and his associates elaborated a plan to push forward their country's development and supremacy in Europe.

Monnet was behind the elaboration of the Schuman plan. Monnet's solution was to create a European organization to monitor the production and the distribution of coal and steel, two resources that were keys to the long-term economic recovery of Western Europe. The supranational supervision of coal and steel production through contractual accords represented an act of peaceful cohabitation. German industrial cartels were to be dismantled and arms production forbidden in Germany. In a speech on the future of Europe given in October 1950, French Premier René Pleven, explained that the Schuman plan permitted realization:

*(...) simplement et rapidement la fusion d'intérêts indispensable à l'établissement d'une communauté économique, et introduit le ferment d'une communauté plus large et plus profonde entre des pays longtemps opposés par des divisions sanglantes.*²³

The Schuman Plan

The French had prescribed an economic cure to accelerate European rehabilitation. Promptly, the Americans welcomed the French initiative, which corresponded so well with Washington's integrationist vision of Europe. For the Germans the Schuman plan represented a loss of exclusive control over mining and industrial production, but it permitted Konrad Adenauer's Federal Republic of Germany to be recognized in an international body. For the Chancellor, recognition of his government was essential to be able to negotiate better settlements for his country. And France, as the strongest country of the six participating states (France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, West Germany and Italy), assured herself of a leading position in Europe.²⁴

²³ Discours de René Pleven, 23 Octobre 1950, MAE, *Secrétariat Général, CED I, 1950, 62 : Origine de la Communauté*, 9-10.

²⁴ The Benelux countries did not have the weight to impose their will and Italy and West Germany had to face their fascist past.

The French, as the instigators of the project, were thus able to proclaim themselves champions of European reconstruction.

The Schuman plan was a step towards European peace, but it was also a measure that permitted France to get access to crucial natural resources. With severe restrictions on German arms production and none on French, the treaty seemed to secure French supremacy on the continent and over her foreign possessions. When the plan was presented in 1950, the war in Indochina had been going on for four years and its drain on French military resources could not have been forgotten when the Schuman plan was drafted.

Elected Prime Minister in July 1950, René Pleven, a leading figure of the UDSR, who strongly supported the plan, had the colonial question at heart. Indeed, Pleven had presided over the 1944 Brazzaville Conference on the creation of the French Union and had been De Gaulle's Minister of the Colonies.²⁵ For Pleven's government, the Schuman plan was not only a brilliant way to undermine the German threat through contractual accords, it was also a tool to convince the Americans that France valued European integration. By taking the lead in the formation of a united Europe, France was hoping to prevent the Americans from imposing their own agenda, especially since the French knew that the Americans had the intention of rearming Germany within NATO.

European Security: From NATO to the EDC

September 1950: Plans for German Rearmament Within NATO

²⁵ The January 1944 Brazzaville Conference was presided over by General de Gaulle and took place in the French Congo. The foundations of what was to become the French Union were settled during this conference at which the French proclaimed their intentions to reorganize the French Empire.

On September 15, 1950, US Secretary of State Acheson officially announced the Truman administration's intentions to work in favor of a quick German contribution to the defense of Western Europe. Under the terms of this proposal, small German units would have been incorporated into larger units provided by other European states. These forces were going to be integrated within NATO and subjected to a central military command. There would have been no German national army or staff, and the modern equipment necessary for this project would have been contributed by the United States.

As Aimaq explains:

The proposal basically dealt not with German *rearmament*, but in fact with a German *contribution*. (...) Germany was not to be rearmed, and she would not even be allowed to construct her defense with her own resources. Material was to be provided by other NATO states. This gave the rest of Europe far more control than Germany herself over the German contribution (...).²⁶

But even if the NATO option seemed to offer a good solution to the German problem France's reactions to the US plan were hostile.

In an effort to please the French government, Washington came up with a more flexible draft for the German contribution and made several concessions to the French. This second attempt, called the Spofford proposal, was very restrictive for the Germans and assured France of uncontested military superiority. French troops would have been better equipped, allowed to have atomic, biological and chemical weapons and not subjected to severe supervision, like the Germans. But the French had another plan in mind.

Introduction of the Pleven Plan

Barely a month after the NATO proposal, Pleven presented to the NATO defense committee meeting a new concept he called "Europeanism", which largely stipulated that

²⁶ Aimaq, 183

the constitution of a European army was a European matter and should be solved by Europeans. Presented as the logical step that was to follow the Schuman plan, the Pleven plan proposed the formation of a European army under the auspices of European institutions:

Le Gouvernement français pensait que la réalisation du Plan charbon-acier permettrait aux esprits de s'habituer à l'idée d'une Communauté européenne avant que ne fût abordée la question si délicate de la défense commune. Les événements mondiaux ne lui laissant pas ce répit (...) le Gouvernement français propose de régler cette question par les mêmes méthodes et dans le même esprit (...).

La signature du Plan charbon-acier scellera très prochainement, nous l'espérons, l'accord des six pays participants. Sitôt franchie cette étape, le Gouvernement français demande que soit donné au problème de la contribution allemande, à la constitution d'une force européenne, la seule solution qu'en son esprit il comporte. Il propose la création pour la défense commune d'une armée européenne rattachée à des institutions politiques européennes.²⁷

The Pleven plan was the next step in the Monnet team's plan to solve French deficiencies. Now that France's industrial revival was secured by an abundant supply of coal and steel and that the integration of Franco-German economic interests had been sealed by the same token, it was possible to think bigger, and the creation of a European army was something big. What was to be known as the European Defense Community was designed to be a supranational European army, composed of units coming from Western European states, including Germany, and under the orders of NATO's supreme commander. But the Pleven plan was a much more difficult project to implement in comparison to the Schuman plan, which had led to the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community in April 1951, less than a year after it was proposed. The EDC proposal

²⁷Discours de René Pleven, 23 Octobre 1950, MAE, *Secrétariat Général, CED I, 1950, 62 : Origine de la Communauté*, 9-16 bis.

was about security, a problem for which the United States and European nations wanted to find a common solution, but not at any price.

Reception of the Pleven Plan

For the participating nations, the ratification of the EDC proposal meant that they would lose their national armies and that their soldiers would fight for the benefit of all. The idea of having a European army serving the common interest sounded great to many statesmen, but the other side of the ledger, the loss of sovereignty over military affairs, dampened enthusiasm. In a world that had suffered from two world wars and that was now confronted with bipolarization and decolonization, the loss of national troops seemed a hazardous adventure. For the British, who needed full authority over their armed forces to maintain the cohesion of their Commonwealth, the EDC's restrictions on the mobility of military units made the French plan unacceptable. Prime Minister Winston Churchill thought that the EDC was not a serious proposal and complained to the American Ambassador to France, David Bruce, that he wanted "a fagot of staves bound by a ring of steel and not a soft putty affair such as is now contemplated."²⁸ Smaller countries also complained about the French plan because of the inequalities that were likely to emerge from it. In the words of the Dutch Ambassador to Washington, Jan Herman van Roijen, the "proposal merely meant a strong revival of French hegemony over continental European problems and a corresponding dilution of the NATO concept."²⁹

²⁸ The Ambassador of the United States in France (Bruce) to the Secretary of State, 20 December 1951, U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, (Washington: GPO, 1977), 1951: Volume III: *Part I: European Security and the German Question*, 974.

²⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Deputy Under Secretary of State (Matthews), 31 August 1951, U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, (Washington: GPO, 1977), 1951: Volume III: *Part I: European Security and the German Question*, 873.

For Washington, the EDC proposal was first seen as a stratagem designed by Paris to delay German rearmament. The Americans were fully aware that their intentions to give back to Germany an army within NATO's structure did not please the French and accordingly, they had expected a counterproposition. Even if the Schuman plan had lessened Franco-German tensions, it did not mean that the French were ready to put guns back into their old enemies' hands. As permanent members of NATO, the French had the right to use a veto against any resolutions they did not agree with, which meant that they could easily refuse to rearm Germany. Therefore, the Americans had no choice but to consider what the French proposed if they did not want their own plans to be vetoed.

Considering the French Proposal

Offered as a perfect integrative tool designed to serve greater European interests, and not only French ones, the EDC was framed by Paris to fit American objectives in Europe. The Monnet team had understood that the Americans were fully dedicated to European integration and that their policies were meant to accelerate the process. It would have been counterproductive for Washington to oppose the creation of a European army, an organization that would have been linked to NATO anyway. Thus, the Truman administration changed its tactics and when the French announced that they were going to host a conference in Paris on the creation of a European Defense Force planned for February 1951, the US did not oppose it. The Truman Administration could have expressed its discontent, since the Paris Conference was held simultaneously with a conference that had been organized in Petersberg, near Bonn, which was on the rearmament of Germany within NATO. But even if the French were clearly showing that

they had no intention of considering the American plan, Washington did not react to their arrogance.

The United States' attitude toward the Paris Conference was influenced by the urgent need to solve the problem of European security. The creation of a single integrated force in Europe presented many advantages, as described by United States High Commissioner for Germany, John McCloy :

[the EDC] will enable Europe to provide the maximum defense with its men and resources by eliminating duplication and waste; it will overcome, by uniformity of training and equipment and unity of command and use, the weakness and confusion inherent in separate national forces in Europe; it will create an acceptance of German participation without distrust; it will be a major, and probably decisive, step toward European political federation.³⁰

Fully appreciating the possibilities offered by the EDC in the long run, Truman gave his full support to the French plan despite early suspicions, as reported by French Ambassador Hervé Alphand in August 1951:

*Les Etats-Unis donnent actuellement leur plein appui à l'initiative française. Jusqu'à une date récente, il existait encore de nombreuses hésitations dans l'esprit d'Américains importants. Ils craignaient, en effet, que l'idée d'une armée européenne n'ait été lancée par la France que pour retarder la participation allemande à la défense occidentale.*³¹

American Endorsement of the EDC

The delays that were to be caused by the EDC did not please the Americans, but since European political federation could not be expected to happen before governmental stability was reached in France, the US had decided to cope with these delays. With the war still going on in Indochina, the French public was not ready to deal with German

³⁰ Memorandum by the United States High Commissioner for Germany (McCloy), 1 Septembre 1951, U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, (Washington 1977), 1951, Volume III: *Part I: European Security and the German Question*, 875.

³¹ Rapport à Monsieur le Ministre des Affaires Étrangères sur les Négociations relatives à l'organisation d'une communauté Européenne de Défense, 14 août 1951, MAE, *Secrétariat Général, CED I, 1950, 62 : Origine de la Communauté*, 217.

remilitarization, but the fact that the Élysée had proposed the creation of the European army meant that the idea of having German soldiers defending Europe was not out of question.

As explained by US Ambassador to France David Bruce regarding his government's choice to opt for the French plan despite obvious delays in German rearmament, the Americans thought that it was "preferable to work with Schuman and his European-minded subordinate" to ease France into accepting a German NATO membership "rather than to exert high-level pressure that may find the French individually receptive enough, but unable to give way because of the hard facts of the internal political situation."³² Thus, Washington had decided to go ahead with the French plan while retaining the desire to eventually push the integration of Germany into NATO, but everybody knew that it would not happen as long as France was stuck in Indochina. Indeed, in early 1950, more than half of the French army was in Indochina and 35 percent of the French military budget was spent on this war.³³

The French government needed help to resolve the Indochina war before it could even think of presenting the EDC treaty to the French Assembly for its ratification, otherwise its rejection was seen as inevitable. Aware that the centrist coalition forming the French government was still in a hazardous position, the Americans knew that the nature of the EDC could easily bring the fall of the Third Force (and the Americans were right, as explained further on).³⁴ Indeed, many thought that the EDC was going to be

³² The Ambassador of the United States in France (Bruce) to the Secretary of State, 27 October 1951, U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, (Washington 1977), 1951: Volume III, Part I: *European Security and the German Question*, 901.

³³ Rotter, 184.

³⁴ Indeed, the Communists and the Gaullists were strongly opposed to the EDC and were waiting for a reason to discredit the Third Force. The controversial EDC project seemed to be the political weapon needed by the extreme Right and the extreme Left parties. In the advent of the fall of the Third Force, the

more beneficial to the Germans, who were going to gain an army, while the French were going to lose their national forces and the freedom to move their troops wherever they wanted, as discussed in the following chapter.

This peculiar French position brought France to an impasse, but in the early years of the EDC proposal, there was still hope that the EDC would be implemented, and this hope was used as a lever to push the Americans into sustaining their help for the continuation of the Indochina conflict.

The Indochina war or the Art of Pursuing the Fight Against All Odds

Against All Odds

From a strict military point of view, by 1950, the French venture in Indochina seemed doomed to end in the worst kind of way. The Viet Minh, revived after the rainy season, had launched in September 1950 an assault that led to a series of French defeats that only ended in February 1951. Supplied by Communist China and counting on abundant manpower, Giap's guerilla troops had forced several French retreats which were often executed in complete chaos, leaving French weapons and ammunition behind. In the town of Cao Binh alone, situated in the Tonkin region, the French army had lost 4 000 men.³⁵ All of France's hopes depended on US help, and despite major military setbacks, it was still possible to count on it.

The Korean War

The Korean war had started in June 1950. It had showed that the Americans were more than ever devoted to the defeat of communism in Asia. The conflict had started

Communists and the Gaullists, both having strong anti-American feelings, were expected to seize their chance to get to power

³⁵ Aimaq, 193-195.

after the Communist North Korean army had crossed the 38th parallel into American protected South Korea. On July 27th, the UN Security Council had adopted a resolution imposing military sanctions on North Korea. Troops coming from sixteen nations, including France, had been put under the command of General Douglas MacArthur. But despite impressive means, the earliest weeks of the United Nations' first military campaign turned to the enemy's advantage.

Soon after the Americans had reached Korean shores, the North, supplied by Mao's China, had succeeded in invading the Southern capital, Seoul, and in pushing back MacArthur's forces. It took an amphibious offensive, on September 15th, to turn the tide to the US's advantage. By the end of the month, Seoul was retaken and the Korean communist forces pushed beyond the 38th parallel. As historian Andrew Rotter puts it, the Korean war accelerated everything and, as shown further on, became intrinsically linked with Indochina in the French discourse.³⁶ In the end, American fear of communism pushed Washington to support France even if it doubted France's ability to win the war.

US Money for a French War

Pleading their inability to keep up with their responsibilities in Asia and in Europe, the French had presented the EDC with alarming background figures concerning their lack of funds to sustain their military production program because of their increasing budget deficit. Even if the Schuman plan had solved the problem of raw material distribution, money was still needed to keep the French economy from collapsing. Worried about the inflationary impact of a budget deficit on the French economy, and therefore on European well being, the US opted for a conciliatory attitude, thus letting the French proceed with the EDC proposal while increasing the amount of aid

³⁶ Rotter, 210.

for Indochina. In October 1950, the US Department of State announced that Congress had approved five billion dollars in aid for the Mutual Defense Assistance Act, the military continuation of the Marshall Plan, of which France got the largest share. Moreover, the French were going to receive an extra \$500,000 for their war effort in Indochina, and all of this without having to make any concession or compromise.³⁷ The French received much more than they gave because U.S. interests in Europe were more important than any in Indochina and the Élysée had learned to decipher US priorities and fears to their advantage.

Linking European Security and the Indochina war

With the long-term goal of facilitating European integration, Washington fully endorsed the French war in Indochina and recognized that the conflict blocked France from fulfilling its responsibilities in Europe. As a top-secret *aide mémoire* issued by the US Department of State to the French embassy in December 1950 clearly shows, US officials came to accept the need of giving substantial aid to France:

The need of the French Government for immediate assistance in its military effort, both with respect to its North Atlantic Treaty responsibilities and its military efforts in Indo-China, is accepted.

The Government of the United States had already undertaken the delivery of large quantities of military equipment both to France and to Indo-China, and programs for further deliveries are being rapidly developed.(...)

It is anticipated that these programs of aid to France and Indo-China will amount to the largest share of the total of approximately four and a half billion dollars available to the United States under existing legislation for Fiscal Year 1951 for provision of military end items both to the twelve North Atlantic Treaty powers and to the general area of China. (...) Deliveries of equipment are being expedited, and with respect to Indo-China particularly high priority has been assigned.³⁸

³⁷ Department of State Press Release, 17 October 1950, U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, (Washington : GOP, 1977), 1950: Volume III: *Western Europe: Diplomatic Papers*, 1427.

³⁸ The Department of State to the French Embassy, December 1950, U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, (Washington 1977), 1950: Volume III: *Western Europe: Diplomatic Papers*, 1446-1447.

The *aide mémoire* also pointed to the urgency of “arriving promptly at firm decisions through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (...) as to the equitable sharing of the economic and financial burden ensuing” from defense obligations.³⁹ The US’ objective in the aid program for Indochina was indeed to accelerate the rehabilitation of France. The Americans were eager to diminish the amount of aid they were giving to France, which already represented enormous sums, and, as discussed further on, was to increase exponentially in the years to come.

Truman-Pleven Meetings

In January 1951, Prime Minister Pleven flew to Washington to meet President Truman, despite earlier notices from the White House that this visit was not seen as necessary. A message from Ambassador Bruce to Secretary of State Acheson had made it clear that only a “flat statement” by the embassy that Pleven was not welcome would have dissuaded the French delegation and Washington resigned itself to the visit. On January 29th, Pleven met Truman for the first time and revealed the serious difficulties the French were facing in Indochina:

The Prime Minister (...) said that the French had been there for 100 years but that during the past five years they had been having a very difficult time. He pointed out that the French had adopted a policy of complete emancipation of the three Indochinese countries and that this policy had been adopted without any mental reservations. They had been transferring power to local Indochinese authorities as fast as they could. This transfer could have been accomplished peacefully had it not been for the communist-directed revolutionary movement, which had been fighting the French since 1946. He made it clear that this war was inspired by the men who now rule China and Russia.⁴⁰

³⁹ The Department of State to the French Embassy, December 1950, U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, (Washington 1977), 1950: Volume III: *Western Europe: Diplomatic Papers*, 1446.

⁴⁰ United States Minutes of the First Meeting Between President Truman and Prime Minister Pleven, Cabinet Room of the White House, 29 January 1951, U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, (Washington 1977), 1951: Volume IV: *Part I: Europe: Political and Economic Developments*, 305.

This portrayal of what France was doing in favor of Indochinese emancipation was what the American wanted to hear, and not what was really happening. But that reality, the fact that the French were desperately trying to tighten their grip over Indochina, only pushed Plevin to ask for 70 million dollars for the creation of a Vietnamese army. The US had encouraged the training of native troops since it seemed only logical to have Vietnamese fighting a war in Vietnam, just as it was logical to have Germans fighting a war on German territory.

The German question was at the center of the second meeting between Plevin and Truman. The French leader expressed his country's dedication to the gradual integration of Germany into Europe, but he also warned that such actions might be interpreted as an act of aggression by the Soviet Union.⁴¹ Moreover, NATO was seen as an "Anglo-Saxon show."⁴² But the weakening of the French military forces caused by the Indochina war seemed to be the most persuasive argument to justify French intransigence over German remilitarization. For the moment, Plevin pleaded, France needed help in Indochina and only subsequently, support for the implementation of the EDC proposal.

Unfortunately for Plevin, Truman was not as receptive as it was hoped when it came to dipping into the US Treasury. In general, the meetings turned out to be a disappointment for Plevin, whose cabinet fell the next February. But it was not a total failure since the French had made it clear that Indochina and Germany were inseparable questions. And even if Truman first refused to give to France what was requested, the

⁴¹ United States Minutes of the Second Meeting Between President Truman and Prime Minister Plevin, Cabinet Room of the White House, 30 January 1951, U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, (Washington 1977), 1951: Volume IV: Part I: *Europe: Political and Economic Developments*, 318.

⁴² United States Minutes of the Second Meeting Between President Truman and Prime Minister Plevin, Cabinet Room of the White House, 30 January 1951, U.S. Department of State, *FRUS*, (Washington 1977), 1951: Volume IV: Part I: *Europe: Political and Economic Developments*, 324.

French benefited from impressive amounts of American aid. In fact, General Jean De Lattre de Tassigny, who had been appointed Indochina's High Commissioner in December 1950, quickly became more than a military superstar, and had more luck with his requests for funds than his political counterparts.

De Lattre, the French MacArthur

When De Lattre arrived in Indochina, both the French and the Americans saw him as the only one capable of changing the course of events. A soldier at heart, De Lattre had fought side by side with the Americans during the Second World War. Called the French MacArthur by American media, *Time* magazine reported in September 1951 that not only had the General reestablished the morale of the French expeditionary corps, but that he had also succeeded in stopping the progress of the Viet Minh, and all that within a month of his appointment.⁴³

De Lattre admired the United States, and especially the US Army, but only for as long as the Americans stayed out of France's business. Using his popularity, De Lattre decided to go beyond his military mandate and moved into the political sphere. He went to New York in September 1951 to make sure that the French way would predominate in Indochina. To a *Time* journalist, De Lattre explained that the battle French soldiers were fighting in South East Asia was more than a self-gratifying war for France, it was indeed a crucial war, as the general said:

The war in Indo-China is not a colonial war, it is a war against Red colonialism; as in Korea, it is a war against Communist dictatorship. France has assumed the burden of the war in Indochina at a tremendous cost to her manpower and financial resources... We are fighting on a world battlefield, for liberty and for peace...⁴⁴

⁴³ "The French MacArthur," *Time*, Sep. 24, 1951.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

It is important to note that in his speech, De Lattre associated the Indochina war with the Korean conflict. Since April, UN forces in Korea had been holding positions a bit north of the 38th parallel.⁴⁵ Since then, the US had been trying to find a way to put an end to the conflict. Therefore, it was important for France to make sure that the US would not let go of Indochina in its rush to get out of Korea and that both conflicts would remain linked until the end.

Like his compatriots at the Élysée, De Lattre hoped for increased US aid, but was reluctant to Americanize the Indochinese conflict. Only US funds and equipment were welcome, not the Americans themselves. This stubbornness frustrated the White House, but despite all the diplomatic clashes, as well as US military reports on France's ability to end the war, American aid reached impressive figures.⁴⁶ Indeed, between September 1951, the month of De Lattre's visit to the US, and February 1952, the United States delivered to the French and their Associated States 130 000 tons of equipment, including 53 million cartridges, 9 000 vehicles, 200 planes, 3 500 radios and 14 000 automatic weapons.⁴⁷

Conclusion

⁴⁵ Truman's fear of triggering other conflicts with communist powers had pushed him to say no to MacArthur's plan to move forward into China. This decision had led to the dismissal of MacArthur who had publicly deplored his government's Asian policies and sought to use the atomic bomb against China.

⁴⁶ John F. Melby, "Vietnam: 1950," *Diplomatic History*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1982): 97-109. The Melby-Erskine Mission that went to Indochina in 1950 quickly realized that the French were unable to resolve the situation and that there was no long term solution possible within this context, especially because of the absence of a Vietnamese armed forces. Indeed, it was reported that if "If Viet Nam is determined on complete independence as all evidence suggests, it probably cannot get it for a long time in the face of French opposition, but it can create (...) a continuing drain on French strength and in the end benefit only the Communists. Coincidentally, American identification with France in such an eventuality will further weaken American influence in Asia." Further information on this mission can be found in Melby's own account of his Indochinese experience.

⁴⁷ André Kaspi, "La Mission du Général De Lattre aux États-Unis (13-25 Septembre 1951)," *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1992) : 224.

Under the guidance of Schuman, French diplomacy achieved significant gains between 1950 and 1952. With the elaboration and the quick implementation of the Schuman plan, France had managed to lead the early stage of European integration. By choosing an economic measure to ease Franco-German tensions, Schuman had hit two birds with one stone; the Germans were happy to be recognized in an international organization while France's supply of coal and steel had been secured. But Schuman's vision of a European continent where Germany and France were to coexist peacefully was not shared by everybody in French politics. Vivid memories of humiliation and devastation restrained many from thinking the way Schuman did and made the advancement of the Pleven plan arduous. The Socialists were hesitant, the Radicals divided and the Communists and the Gaullists fiercely against the EDC. Schuman and the MRP had set a machine in motion that had attracted American aid, but it was now quickly falling apart.

The EDC had a double effect: it stimulated American financial support of the Indochina war and it further divided the French government, placing it under the thumb of an Assembly directed by parties sharing little in common. The EDC, that had at first been a helpful diplomatic tool, had turned into a political liability. The French population, preoccupied by national economic recovery, did not care very much about the EDC and Indochina, but the paralyzing effect of both events on French politics eventually provoked public outcry, as discussed in the following chapters.

The particularity of Schuman's approach to French diplomacy was that it focused on the need to promote German integration within the Western European nations' alliance without too much US interference. His successor at the Quai d'Orsay, Bidault,

believed in Schuman's policies, but was also fully committed to the restoration of France's hegemony over Indochina. Germany could wait until France was done with Ho Chi Minh. But even if Bidault was more dedicated than Schuman to the colonial cause, the Fourth Republic found itself caught in a phase that would last until 1954 and that could be qualified by two words: *status quo*.

Chapter III

1952-1953: Growing American Impatience

By 1952, doubts over the EDC in France and setbacks in Indochina were paralyzing the French government while on the other hand the United States was asking for pragmatism. In 1953, Republican President Dwight Eisenhower took power in Washington. The Republicans had always criticized French actions in Indochina and the new Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, wanted more than anyone else to have the EDC implemented promptly. In Paris, the return of Bidault at the Foreign Ministry brought both continuity and change to French politics. Bidault was worried about the German question and the future of the EDC, but less than his predecessor; he was completely devoted to the safeguarding of the French Union. But despite good intentions, France's lack of ministerial stability prevented Bidault from advancing his policies, to the great displeasure of the United States. Even if the MRP had controlled the Foreign Affairs ministry for almost a decade, it was impossible to find enough support in the Assembly to move forward with the EDC or to find a definitive solution to the Indochina war. The changing international context rendered the need for a European Army less pressing and it was becoming clear that France would lose Indochina, in the short or in the long term, as discussed in this chapter.

Growing Internal Opposition

Internal Opposition to the EDC

Animosity towards the EDC project intensified in France as the international community pressed the French to accelerate the implementation of the defense plan. It had been made clear that the Indochina war and the question of European security were intrinsically linked, but many on the Right and on the Left doubted the necessity of sacrificing the French army for the sake of Saigon. Indeed, were the French ready to sacrifice their national army because of their need to safeguard American help for Indochina? Moreover, the EDC had been presented as an integrative tool dedicated to the reinsertion of Germany into the community of Western European states. Were the French ready to sacrifice their army to allow the reconstitution of German units? The creation of an international European army certainly represented huge benefits for Europe as a whole, but for the opponents of the EDC it meant an unacceptable loss of sovereignty over national troops, and that prospect seemed particularly hazardous for an imperial power facing colonial rebellions.

Paradoxically, Indochina had been one of the reasons why the EDC had been proposed, and it was also one of the reasons why the French were now hesitating to implement it. Indeed, when Monnet had elaborated his European army plan, he wanted to make sure that France would have its say over German rearmament and that the process would be delayed until French troops stuck in Indochina could be brought back home. But two years after the proposal had been made, it was becoming hard to preserve the image of France as the champion of European integration. The conclusion of the Indochinese conflict remained out of reach and instead of being repatriated, more and more French troops were landing on Vietnamese shores. More than ever, France needed

full authority over its troops, and that kind of freedom would be lost under the command structure of a supranational European army.

The Gaullists and the Communists' Stance

For General de Gaulle, the most virulent opponent of the EDC, the proposal was an outrage to France's history and future. Gaullists and high military officials, such as Marshal Alphonse Juin⁴⁸, wondered if the government had already forgotten thousands of French soldiers dead in wars against Germany. The Communist Party also opposed the EDC and worried about the Soviets' reaction to such a challenge. After all, the EDC, a military alliance, could be seen as an act of aggression by Stalin. For the French extreme Left, the EDC seemed to be the end of any hope of rapprochement with Moscow. Communists and Gaullists both worried about American hegemony over European affairs. The EDC had been introduced as a tool of European integration, but in reality the European army command was going to be under the direct orders of NATO, an organization clearly dominated by the United States. It was clear that American funding would be the only way to set up the European army without threatening the precarious economic situation of the continent, and especially of France.

The End of the Third Force and the Rise of the Right

By 1952, the French government still struggled with financial problems. The Third Force, which had ruled French politics since 1947, fell apart in 1952.⁴⁹ Not able to stand up to France's economic, social, and foreign problems, the centrist parties lost their political hegemony to the Right. The 1951 election had shown that the Third Force had

⁴⁸ Marshall Juin was a war hero, he had helped the Allies reach Rome. Following the war, he occupied important positions in North Africa, such as permanent resident in Morocco. He had to retire in 1962 because he had publicly opposed General De Gaulle's Algerian policy.

⁴⁹ Throughout its existence, the Third Force's constitution remained almost unchanged. Its membership was one-third of Socialist, one-third M.R.P. and one-third Radicals and Moderates.

not been able to attract popular sympathy. On the other hand, the PCF, despite its lack of participation in ministerial affairs, had managed to gain the highest number of votes, with 26 percent of the population voting communist, while the RPF had come second with 21 percent of the votes, to the great disappointment of the MRP, which had lost many votes to the Gaullists.⁵⁰ In March 1952, the rise of Antoine Pinay, an important figure of the *Union Démocratique et Socialiste de la Résistance* (UDSR), sealed the end of the centrist coalition. Pinay's most urgent task was to stabilize France's financial position by getting rid of rampant inflation and by putting an end to the numerous strikes that were paralyzing the French workforce.

During the Second World War, France had contracted heavy debts, mainly owed to the United States, Europe's main creditor. Plagued by an endemic balance of payments problem, France constantly had to deal with abrupt devaluations of its currency, which caused dramatic inflation rising to 40 percent between 1950 and 1952.⁵¹ These problems were aggravated by the fact that France had lost earnings from investments and services that had once come from the French Empire. The volume and value of French exports had declined sharply, causing a diminution in the supply of dollars in the French Treasury. The French used to sell finished products to their colonies, receiving dollars in return that originated from the sale of the colonies' raw materials in dollar markets. Loss of benefits coming from the trade in Indochinese rubber, tin and rice was a big part of the problem. The dollar gap contributed to the increase in France's budget deficit.

To fight against inflation, Pinay introduced new government bonds indexed to gold and free of taxes. This initiative helped the French economy, but still the population

⁵⁰ Rioux, 160.

⁵¹ Hitchcock, 152.

was not satisfied with the government's management of the economy. Strikes were frequent, and often backed by the Communist party. One of the main complaints of the strikers was that the state kept increasing its military spending. Indeed, between 1950 and 1952, the government had nearly tripled its military expenditures, rising it from 463 billion francs to 1.27 trillion francs.⁵² Of these impressive numbers, one-third was dedicated to the financing of the French war effort in Indochina.

With taxation at its highest, the French government considered the possibility of lowering its military expenses, but that was not an option for the United States. For the Americans, European rearmament was crucial. Pleven, who was Minister of Finance in 1952, requested that the Americans inject money into France's defense industry to help his government in its efforts. To accentuate his demands, Pleven argued that France's fight against communism in Indochina rendered his country different, and therefore eligible for special aid.⁵³ Building on this argument, Pleven also complained that the US had refused to give France 650 million dollars in aid for Indochina. Pleven's requests were not completely fulfilled, but by the last quarter of 1952, the US had transferred to the French Treasury 600 million dollars to permit it to continue the Indochina conflict. But with the contribution of US money, American pressure to have the EDC ratified became acute.

The Signing of the EDC Treaty

By May 1952, the signature of the EDC treaty by France could not be delayed anymore. It was time to take a definitive stand for or against the project. Prior negotiations had confirmed Britain's support for the EDC (without direct membership),

⁵² Résumé fait par Bidault de la position française à cette date face à la menace soviétique, 30 janvier 1953, MAE, *Secrétariat Général, 1945-1966, 29 : Conférences 1953*, 136.

⁵³ Hitchcock, 173.

thus calming the earlier fear that France would be left alone to defend the continent, but on the eve of the official endorsement of the project by France, Foreign Minister Schuman received an urgent message from the *Conseil des Ministres*.⁵⁴ This communiqué expressed last minute worries about the signature of the treaty, especially concerning its impact on Franco-American relations. The French ministers, under strong pressure from the Gaullists, wanted the ratification to be subordinated to negotiations with the US on three points: the acquisition by France of more armaments, further financial help for Indochina from the US, and Washington's support for France's colonial mission in North Africa.⁵⁵

Despite growing concerns and opposition to the EDC, Schuman signed the treaty on May 27, 1952. Germany's international sovereignty and the existence of the EDC were officially recognized. On that day, the six governments involved in the EDC project took a step forward, but it only was a small step for France. Schuman's signature was more symbolic than anything since the EDC treaty had to be brought before the French National Assembly to be made effective, and that meant further debates and delays.

The Changing International Context

Following the recognition of the EDC by Pinay's government, Foreign Minister Schuman knew that the treaty had to be brought promptly to the French Assembly for its ratification. The MRP was, and remained until the end, the only party fully dedicated to the success of the EDC. But Pinay refused to act and argued that the treaty remained

⁵⁴ Aimaq, 21

⁵⁵ Communiqué d'extrême urgence dédié au président Schuman, 24 mai 1942, MAE, *Secrétariat Général, CED I, 63 : Télégrammes et Notes sur les Travaux de la Conférence*, 288. It is important to note that nationalist revolts in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria were mounting as the Indochinese conflict kept on raging, leaving the French uncertain about the future of their Empire. As mentioned in a previous footnote, war erupted in Algeria in 1954, the year that the Indochina war ended.

incomplete and necessitated further modifications. Scholars, such as historian Jacques Fauvet, believe that by 1952 the chances that the EDC would be ratified by the French Assembly were still high. The Gaullists and the Communists were against the project, but the Socialists and the Radicals were not yet divided over the question and would probably have voted in favor of it.⁵⁶ Opinions started to shift in 1953 as the necessity of the EDC became increasingly debatable. The end of the Korean war, the death of Stalin and the new Soviet government's requests for negotiations and disarmament rendered a possible Soviet attack on Europe less likely, and therefore diminished the need for a European army. But in May 1952, the MRP still believed that the EDC was not condemned to failure and it provoked the fall of Pinay and his government because of his refusal to move forward with the EDC. This situation inflamed internal schisms in France's political parties, as explained further on, and pushed the opponents of the EDC to organize themselves.

Stagnation over the EDC

The Empire versus the EDC

In September 1952, juriconsults (lawyers specializing in international law) appointed to advise France's deputies on the problems that could emerge from the ratification of the EDC produced a twenty-five page document entitled *Problèmes Posés par l'Institution Éventuelle dite "Communauté Européenne de Défense"*. This analysis underlined the "abdications" that France would be forced to accept in regard to the

⁵⁶ Jacques Fauvet, *La IVe République* (Paris : A. Fayard, 1959), 243.

French Union if the EDC was to be implemented.⁵⁷ Indeed, within the EDC supranational structure, the use of France's national forces beyond Europe was going to be limited by severe restrictions. First of all, France or any other member state would have had to prove that a serious crisis was currently under way in a non-European foreign country before sending troops. Expectations or unclear menaces would not have been enough to justify transfers of troops primarily dedicated to the defense of Europe. Furthermore, approval from the European forces command would have been mandatory prior to any actions, and military, economic and financial spending devoted to troop movements would have been determined by the European organization and limited to the duration of the crisis. In other words, if the French had wanted to send more soldiers to Indochina, they would have had to prove that French interests were at risk, restrict themselves to an approved number of men and comply with a budget preauthorized by the EDC, and all of this before taking any actions.

Moreover, production, importation and exportation of war material for purposes not directly linked to the European forces would have had to be agreed by two-thirds of the EDC council. In other words, *“la France ne pourrait plus produire, importer ou exporter un tank, un avion ou un camion destinés à l’Indochine ou à un territoire quelconque de l’Union Française sans l’approbation expresse de M. Adenauer ou de son représentant.”*⁵⁸ The treaty was not only threatening the *“liberté d’action de la France dans l’Union française”* but also the integrity of the French Empire.⁵⁹ Opponents of the project kept on emphasizing that if the British had rejected the EDC because it was

⁵⁷ Le Jurisconsulte sur les Problèmes Posés par l’Institution Éventuelle dite “Communauté Européenne de Défense, 27 septembre 1952, MAE, *Secrétariat Général, CED III, 67 : Notes de Base, Discours de Bidault 29 oct 53, Débat à la Chambre, nov 53, 23-25.*

⁵⁸ Ibid, 24.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 25.

incompatible with their Commonwealth policies, it certainly would not suit French requirements in regard to the French Union.

Major Political Changes

It was in this tense climate that France and the United States experienced major political changes. In January 1953, after five and a half years at the head of the Quai d'Orsay, Schuman was replaced by another member of the MRP, Georges Bidault. As Bidault wrote in his memoirs:

From 1944 to 1954, France's foreign policy was in the hands of only two men, Robert Schuman and myself. Apart from certain variations in style and judgment, we shared substantially the same views on the subject of foreign policy, and these views were not dictated either by a party or by a leader.⁶⁰

Like his predecessor, Bidault felt that the Germans should be controlled within the framework of a European Union, but Bidault also believed that France's position as a superpower could only be secured by the preservation and the development of the French Union. For the new foreign minister the indivisibility of metropolitan France and its Empire was sacred. In fact, as explained by historian Jean-Pierre Rioux, Bidault was less enthusiastic about the EDC than Schuman had been, but because of US pressure, it was impossible for Bidault to shelve the treaty since in the event of a French rejection of the EDC, chances that the Americans would rearm Germany within NATO were exceedingly high.⁶¹

In Washington, January 1953 also marked the beginning of a new political era with the inauguration of President Eisenhower, who had been elected in November 1952. In Paris, the transition to a Republican Party president in the White House worried the

⁶⁰ Georges Bidault, *Resistance: The Political Autobiography of Georges Bidault* (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1967), 175.

⁶¹ Rioux, 206.

French political elite. Under Truman, the Republican-dominated Congress had always judged French actions in Indochina severely and had criticized the absence of concessions by France in comparison with the large sums of aid contributed by the US. The new Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, made clear that the EDC and the organization of the European Union were going to be the pillars of his government's European policies. As explained later, the new rulers of the Congress and the White House continued along the path sketched by the Truman administration, but they wanted quick solutions and even quicker results.

The Recognition of the Indochina war by NATO

On December 17, 1952, NATO's Security Council officially recognized the Indochina war. The United States, which knew that France would not be able to gain a major military victory in Indochina without help, had encouraged the NATO states to back France's efforts against communism. But no members really wanted to get involved directly in an obscure Asian country and the recognition of the Indochina conflict by NATO did not change anything. From the French Foreign Ministry's point of view, the NATO resolution did not represent a good reason to change France's policies or to give the Associated States their independence. Bidault did not want to internationalize the conflict, especially since it was clear that the US and the NATO states ultimately wanted France out of Indochina. The only reason why the international community supported French efforts at all was to prevent further communist expansion in Asia. The *status quo* in Indochina and over the EDC question remained despite NATO's commitment even if Bidault tried the best he could to attract sympathy for his policies within the French political sphere.

In January 1953, Bidault's team at the Quai d'Orsay prepared a document that was addressed to Prime Minister René Mayer who agreed with Bidault's policies. Prime Minister Mayer was a Radical, and the Radical Party was divided over the EDC and the Indochinese questions. Feeling that Mayer might have enough influence in his party to change the tide in his favor, Bidault explained that he saw the recognition of the Indochina war by NATO as tantamount to support for French policies:

La résolution du 17 décembre ne constitue pas seulement un témoignage de solidarité; elle comporte une promesse de soutien sans défaillance pour notre politique indochinoise de la part des gouvernements atlantiques. (...)

Il est remarquable que de tels avantages aient pu être acquis sans hypothéquer de quelque manière notre liberté d'action en Europe et en Asie. Notre pays en effet n'a pas été sollicité d'accorder une contrepartie quelconque pour le soutien promis. (...) À cet égard, la résolution de l'OTAN apparaît comme une approbation inconditionnelle de l'action de l'Union Française dans cette partie du monde. (...)⁶²

This international recognition was even described by Bidault as a new diplomatic tool for France since from now on “[c]e n'est plus la France seule mais bien l'ensemble de la communauté occidentale qui demande aux Etats-Unis une aide accrue pour l'Indochine.”⁶³ Bidault felt that under such conditions, the colonial policy put forward by the MRP deserved internal and external support. But it must not be forgotten that the Indochina war and the EDC were by now irreversibly linked and that US impatience was growing exponentially at every French refusal to present the treaty to the Assembly.

Further Protocols

Seeing that progress on the EDC question had stalled, US pressure on France became more acute. European integration, and therefore the EDC, had become the cornerstone of US European policy. But President Mayer did not want to act precipitately

⁶² Note pour le Président préparée par le MAE : État des négociations diplomatiques relatives à l'Indochine , 14 janvier 1953, MAE, *Secrétariat Général, 1945-1966*, 29 : *Conférences 1953*, 7- 22.

⁶³ Ibid, 10.

and asked for inter-party negotiations over adding new protocols to the EDC treaty. Even if Mayer and Bidault believed that the French Assembly would eventually ratify the EDC treaty, they still thought that it was not the right time to do so and that amendments were needed to make the treaty more favourable to French imperial ambitions. Such measures had already been taken to secure British association with the EDC and to make troop movements outside of Europe easier, but these assurances were not enough for Paris. Mayer argued that it was crucial to seek even closer British participation and to assure that France would retain control of its troops before bringing the EDC treaty to the French Assembly.⁶⁴

Even if Eisenhower had clearly stated in his inaugural speech that his country was devoted to the progress of European unification and to the support of free men fighting for liberty “*qu’il s’agisse du soldat français qui meurt en Indochine (...) ou du soldat américain qui donne sa vie en Corée*”, the Quai d’Orsay’s analysts doubted the President’s will.⁶⁵ The French remained persuaded that the Americans wanted to replace them in Indochina. The French wanted the Americans to appreciate their sustained efforts in Indochina by giving even more military matériel and money and by agreeing to send airpower to Indochina without interfering in French affairs or hurting the independence of Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia.

American Compromises to Obtain EDC Ratification

French and American officials met at the end of January 1953 to discuss the fact that the new American administration had to make sure that Congress would pass appropriations for France if the Free World wanted to defeat communism in Asia. Under

⁶⁴ Aimaq, 216-217.

⁶⁵ Rapport de Bonnet sur les grandes lignes du discours que prononcera Eisenhower après avoir prêté serment, 20 janvier 1953, MAE, *Secrétariat Général, 1945-1966*, 29 : *Conférences 1953*, 25-26.

the existing American legislation, France was already obtaining the maximum amount of aid permitted. It was important for supporters of the Indochina war, mainly the MRP, to have the US Congress modify the foreign aid law. Bidault presented a plan to Dulles in which the US was to pay for 50 percent of the cost of war. If his plan was accepted, the question of European security would only have benefited from it, but if the US was to refute it, Bidault warned it would be the end of the EDC:

Le budget français fournit chaque année aux États Associés du Vietnam une aide financière qui se monte à environ 400 milliards de francs. Nous demandons qu'à l'avenir une certaine proportion de cette aide, par exemple 50%, soit, au cours des trois prochaines années, à la charge des États-Unis, ce qui exige de nouvelles dispositions de la législation américaine. Les économies que nous ferions ainsi nous permettraient d'accroître nos forces en Europe, conformément au plans atlantiques. (...)
Il faut que M. Foster Dulles comprenne qu'une aide de cette ampleur et un changement fondamental de la politique des États-Unis à l'égard de l'Indochine sont une condition de la ratification et du fonctionnement réel de la Communauté européenne de Défense.⁶⁶

But the Americans were not willing to give money to France anymore without French concessions in return.

Early 1953: Nothing to Lose, Everything to Gain

The EDC: A Political Bomb

The EDC was at the center of the debate in French politics and Bidault recognized that many members of the National Assembly feared the EDC would divide the French Union from metropolitan France. It was for this reason that Mayer had proposed additional protocols to the treaty. But Bidault had reservations about the protocols since the problem with the EDC was that it seemed to have an impact on everything France was and wanted to be. The EDC was a political time bomb. The complexity of the treaty,

⁶⁶ Entretiens avec M. Foster Dulles : Indochine, 24 janvier 1953 ,MAE, *Asie, Indochine, 1944-1955*, 287: *Défense de l'Indochine. Stratégie Commune, Charte du Pacifique, janvier-février 1953*, 116-117.

which by 1953 included over 132 articles and numerous annexes, had rendered negotiations over it very difficult since only few specialists really understood the treaty.

On January 31, 1953, Jean-Jacques Servan Schreiber wrote in the pages of *Le Monde* an article entitled “L’impasse à l’armée européenne par l’Indochine”. A leftist journalist, Servan Schreiber was a supporter of the Radical party.⁶⁷ Worried about the consequences of a possible ratification of the EDC, even if modified by protocols, Servan Schreiber warned the population that France would lose its sovereignty over its army and that it would not be possible to stop the Americanization of the Indochina war. The journalist warned that the Americans were thinking about giving aid to European states, and especially France, in proportion to their national effort to rearm. In other words, if France was to put more money into its rearmament, more US dollars would come, but if the military budget was to be cut, the same thing would happen to US funding. As Servan Schreiber explained :

*Les dirigeants américains sont résolus à proportionner leur aide à l'accroissement de l'effort propre de chaque pays. Il ne s'agira plus pour eux de remplacer un sacrifice national, mais d'y suppléer pour le rendre plus efficace. Si nous augmentons par exemple notre budget militaire ils augmenteront leur aide : si nous le diminuons ils la diminueront. Tel est le mécanisme.*⁶⁸

US aid would not make lighter France’s burden, but rather push France to engage still more resources in the defense of Europe and Indochina. Moreover, the ratification of the EDC, to please the United States, would lead France to lose control over the conduct of the Indochina conflict without solving the threat of German rearmament. For Servan

⁶⁷ In 1953, Jean-Jacques Servan Schreiber founded with Françoise Giroux *L’Express*, a leftist newspaper that served as a platform for Pierre Mendès-France who wrote in its pages his opinion of the Indochina war, as reported in the fourth chapter.

⁶⁸ J.-J. Servan Schreiber, “L’impasse à l’armée européenne par l’Indochine”, *Le Monde*, 31 janvier 1953, MAE, *Asie, Indochine, 1944-1955*, 287: *Défense de l’Indochine. Stratégie Commune, Charte du Pacifique, janvier-février 1953*, 157.

Schreiber, the EDC was an illusion meant to appease public opinion and the French deputies:

*Cette illusion pourrait agir un instant comme un baume sur l'opinion et le Parlement. En fait on voit que c'est l'inverse qu'il faut ensuite en attendre : une lourde aggravation de nos engagements en Extrême-Orient et la perte de tout contrôle sur la destinée de notre malheureuse entreprise là-bas.*⁶⁹

As Servan Schreiber thought, in concert with the majority of the Radicals, Gaullists and Communists, nothing justified the ratification of the EDC and France had to take care of Indochina by itself.

The Indochina Trap

In early 1953, reports on Indochina were optimistic, despite the fact that France had already lost so much and that the number of men involved in the conflict remained impressive. As reported to the Foreign Ministry in late December 1952, over 213 000 French soldiers were involved in Indochina.⁷⁰ It was true that De Lattre had inflicted severe losses on the Viet Minh troops, but since his death, setbacks occurred daily for France. His successor, General Navarre, had set up a plan to equip and train Vietnamese battalions, but his plan was designed more to satisfy the Americans than to create reinforcements for the expeditionary corps. By December 1952, 62 984 autochtones, or natives, were counted among the French military effectives, but in reality these troops were ill-equipped and ill-trained for fear that they might rebel against French authority.⁷¹ Major cities were under French control, but outside French lines the Viet Minh ruled.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Note pour le Ministre, Indochine, 23 décembre 1952, MAE, *Cabinet du Ministre Schuman, 1948-1953, 90 : Indochine, septembre 1948- décembre 1952*, 350-351.

⁷¹ Ibid.

French public opinion railed against the “dirty war”. Already 30 000 French soldiers had perished and 1.268 billion francs had been spent, but Bidault was not ready to give up.⁷²

“A Major War ”

In Washington, doubts over the value of American aid for Indochina were increasing. After all, many still saw the conflict as colonial in nature, thus entirely French, and the Americans already had to deal with their own problems in Korea. It was imperative for the United States to centralize its efforts in Asia and Indochina was secondary to the Korean conflict where the US Army was directly involved. It was hard to justify aid to the French in Indochina while the Korean war’s outcome remained uncertain. General de Lattre and other French leaders had already proposed the idea that Indochina and Korea were inseparable, and in 1953 both conflicts merged in French rhetoric.

In March, President Mayer went to Washington to speak before the National Press Club. From the very beginning of his address, he made sure that his audience understood the nature of the Indochina war and its importance:

On a parlé, à propos de l’Indochine, de la “dirty war”, de la “colonial war”, de la “forgotten war”. (...) Je sais qu’en Corée des masses d’hommes plus importantes encore sont aux prises, néanmoins, la guerre d’Indochine est réellement une guerre importante, une “major war”.

La lutte que livrent dans les rizières et sur les plateaux Français et Vietnamiens n’assure pas seulement la protection de l’Indochine contre les entreprises de subversion interne, mais la sécurité de l’Asie du Sud Est dans son ensemble. (...) J’ai déjà dit que nos soldats qui luttent et tombent en Corée et en Indochine sont engagés aux deux extrémités d’un même front, et combattent et se sacrifient pour la même cause.⁷³

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Discours du Président René Mayer devant le National Press Club de Washington, 27 mars 1953, MAE, *Secrétariat Général, CED III, 68: Protocoles additionnels janvier, novembre 1953, Rapport avec l’Angleterre déc. 52-53, 143-146.*

The Indochina war had to be considered as a major war in Washington if France wanted to keep on receiving crucial aid from the Americans. Mayer argued that soldiers in Korea and in Indochina were dying for the same cause and that the French army's success in Indochina was essential to the defeat of communism in South East Asia. Following Mayer's message, Dulles responded by agreeing that indeed, the Indochina war was an important conflict, but recalled that after years of fighting, there was yet no sign of hope that the war would end before the end of year.

Eisenhower's Impatience

The Americans were getting impatient with France, as shown during a meeting between a French delegation, led by Ambassador Bonnet, and Eisenhower on the American presidential yacht in late March 1953. During this meeting, three "hot" subjects were discussed: Indochina, the EDC and Franco-German relations. On the Indochinese conflict, Eisenhower reiterated his government's determination by pointing out that this war was considered as an important part of the worldwide battle against communism. The President also responded to Mayer's public complaints by saying that the US administration did not see Indochina as a colonial conflict. But he continued by questioning the French delegation on France's short-term plans to put an end to the conflict. Eisenhower understood that there was a direct link between European and Indochinese affairs, the French had made it clear, but it was time to be pragmatic. Eisenhower was direct: it was crucial to set up a "*programme d'action politique et militaire susceptible dans un avenir raisonnable de produire sinon une victoire totale, du*

*moins une situation assez satisfaisante pour que le danger vietminh devienne négligeable sur le plan militaire.”*⁷⁴

It was out of the question for the US to get involved militarily in Indochina without knowing French plans and intentions. Bombarded by frequent requests that seemed to signify an ultimatum, Bonnet responded that the situation was getting better in Indochina and that Bao Dai's popularity was growing. France hoped that the conflict would reach its end within two years. Sensing that the US could not wait any longer for concessions from France, the French delegation even talked about the Associated States' upcoming independence, but without offering a precise schedule for it. But that was not enough for Eisenhower, who did not want to wait another two years before seeing the end of the war and the implementation of the EDC. Delays would not be accepted any longer. For Eisenhower, the EDC was the primary solution for the three main security problems faced by Europe: the occupation of Germany, the unification of Europe and the economic stability of the continent.⁷⁵ The United States had been funding the Indochina war for years -- it was now time for France to repay America's largesse.

The United States has Enough

In April 1953, one month after the presidential yacht meeting, the French government still had not shown any sign that it was going to compromise over Indochina or the EDC. Instead, it continued to demand significantly increased aid. US aid now accounted for 85 percent of the French war effort, but even that contribution was not

⁷⁴ Rapport de Bonnet, conversation avec le Président Eisenhower sur le yacht présidentiel, 28 mars 1953, MAE, *Secrétariat Général, CED III*, 69 : *Opinions et Réactions à l'étranger, Allemagne, Benelux, Etats-Unis*, 61.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

deemed sufficient by Paris.⁷⁶ The French attitude was particularly frustrating to Secretary of State Dulles who warned France that the US Congress was not going to tolerate this situation any longer and that under these conditions, further requests for foreign aid from France would not be accepted.⁷⁷ Paris was alarmed by such declarations, but still did not react. Then, the following June, hoping to get France moving, Congress adopted a joint resolution in which the Senate and the House recognized the will of the people of the Associated States to secure their independence and form their own government, free from French interference.⁷⁸ In that same declaration, the US Congress expressed its desire to see the French work toward this end as fast as possible. Despite that measure, the Indochina question remained unresolved in French political debates. Therefore, when the US Senate decided to decrease assistance to Indochina in July it was a shock to French officials, but not a complete surprise. Of the 400 million dollars projected in aid for Indochina, 100 million dollars was slashed.⁷⁹

Not Pulling in the Same Direction

Moving Apart

Since the beginning of the war, the French and the Americans had not been pulling in the same direction and, by 1953, tensions became even more acute. While the Americans emphasized policies favouring independence for the Associated States and implementing of the EDC, Bidault made speeches on the importance of the Empire. During a meeting between Bidault and Adenauer, the French Foreign minister explained

⁷⁶ Aimaq, 221.

⁷⁷ Report to the National Security Council by the Department of State, 5 August 1953, U.S. Department of State, *FRUS, 1952-1954* (Washington: GPO, 1982), Volume XIII, Indochina, 714-715.

⁷⁸ Aimaq, 221.

that without its foreign possessions France could only occupy an inferior position to Germany:

*D'une manière plus générale, il convient de faire comprendre à nos partenaires que la France est une et indivisible et que son effort métropolitain ne peut pas être séparé de son effort hors d'Europe. Depuis le milieu de XIXe siècle, dans le même temps où nous dépensions une grande partie de nos activités à créer la France d'outre-mer, l'Allemagne réservait toute la sienne à son développement industriel. Nous amputer dans une organisation européenne du poids que nous vaut notre puissance outre-mer, c'est nous mettre fatalement en état d'infériorité par rapport à l'Allemagne.*⁸⁰

Bidault's dedication to safeguarding the Empire was unlimited, but it was not everyone's cause. On October 28, 1953, the French National Assembly declared that it was now deemed critical to "*tout mettre en œuvre pour aboutir par la négociation à la pacification générale de l'Asie.*"⁸¹ The people had had enough of the Indochina war and they were worried about the impact of the EDC on France's future.

As the most vociferous critic of the EDC, General de Gaulle articulated these worries. At a press conference in November, the General complained about the effects of the EDC:

*Un acte de ce genre, qui déchire la France au plus profond d'elle-même, qui la prive de sa souveraineté et de son armée, qui foule aux pieds ses plus intimes traditions, qui viole ses institutions, qui sépare la défense de sa métropole et celle des territoires outre-mer, ce qui revient à perdre ceux-ci, qui lui fait livrer ses soldats à un organisme sur lequel elle ne doit avoir aucun moyen d'action et dont la cause qu'il servirait pourrait n'être pas la sienne, un acte de cette nature et de cette portée, comment a-t-il été élaboré, négocié, présenté?*⁸²

De Gaulle was not the only one to question the nature of the EDC, Bidault also had doubts. Indeed, like the General, Bidault was worried about the consequences that the

⁸⁰ Armand Bérard, discours en vu d'une réunion entre Bidault et Adenauer, 21 octobre 1953, MAE, *Secrétariat Général, CED III*, 67 : *Notes de Base, Discours de Bidault 29 oct 53, Débat à la Chambre, nov 53*, 74.

⁸¹ Préparation à la Conférence des Bermudes, 30 novembre 1953, MAE, *Secrétariat Général, 1945-1966, 56: Réunion des Ministres des Affaires Étrangères, Berlin 1954, 25 janvier au 18 février*, 75-87.

⁸² Discours du Général de Gaule, conférence de presse, 12 novembre 1953, MAE, *Secrétariat Général, CED III*, 67 : *Notes de Base, Discours de Bidault 29 oct 53, Débat à la Chambre, nov 53*, 105.

EDC would have for the French Union, however, unlike De Gaulle, he believed that further modifications to the treaty could render it compatible with France's colonial policies. Further negotiations over the treaty meant further delays, and that was not possible anymore.

Political Crisis

In May 1953, Adenauer's Germany ratified the EDC treaty, which had been greatly modified by the protocols that the Mayer Administration had proposed. This situation did not please the Gaullists who feared that Mayer would finally present the EDC to the Assembly. Therefore, De Gaulle's party, the RPF, provoked the fall of the Mayer government on May 21st. This political move plunged the Fourth Republic into another crisis, during which France remained without a government for over one month. The EDC and the Indochinese conflict divided the major political parties internally and in their inter-party relationships. Within the ranks of the Radicals, Mayer's followers were in favor of an Atlantic and European alignment, but that was not the position of Mendès-France, who vociferously condemned the EDC and the never-ending Indochinese conflict. The Socialists also had troubles finding common ground. Guy Mollet, one of the leading figures of the SFIO (*Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière*) believed in the EDC, but was confronted by Jules Moch, who used his position at the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs to plead against the European Army. With his ally from the National Defense ministry, General Koenig, Moch and other Socialists fought for the complete rejection of the EDC. The MRP, committed to defend the EDC and the French Union, stuck to its principles, but lost its parliamentary predominance and was pushed towards the opposition. The Gaullists and the Communists were gaining ground.

It took 36 days to find a solution. After many rounds of debate, during which Mendès-France was nearly elected, Joseph Laniel, an Independent, was elected Prime Minister. Less than a month after his taking office, Laniel realized that his job was not going to be an easy one: four million workers went on strike to demand better social conditions and the end of the Indochina war.

Public Discontent

Up until late 1953, the French population in general had not given too much attention to what was happening in Indochina and to the EDC question. But now that things were not getting better on the economic level, people were looking for the causes of their condition. What France wanted over all was economic growth and stability, goals which had been briefly met during Pinay's mandate. Things had been better for a short period but an endemic budget deficit brought France back to the verge of bankruptcy. The population was also unhappy with the unjust tax system, France still lacked a reserve of hard currency, inflation remained menacing and France's dependence on American capital and loans were felt as humiliations. Left in ignorance for many years, the public never really knew what the MRP dominated Foreign Ministry was planning. Information was only revealed after actions had been taken. But with broader media coverage of France's international difficulties, the French population became aware of the costs and consequences of the government's inaction. *Le Monde* and *L'Express* (co-founded by Mendès-France), which were strongly against the EDC and the continuation of the Indochina conflict, published virulent articles denouncing Bidault's policies.⁸³ With his party now sitting in opposition, Bidault could not do much in the Assembly, so he turned to diplomacy to save what he could from an ending that was by then predictable.

⁸³ Rioux, 206.

Towards Geneva

In November, Dulles met with French Ambassador Bonnet and issued a statement that was meant to alert the Laniel Administration to US impatience with France's inaction. The Secretary of State explained that if France failed to ratify the EDC treaty, American public opinion would demand the retreat of the US Army from the European continent. Dulles also emphasized that an American isolationist policy would certainly lead to the "*ruine des plans et des efforts destinés à assurer la défense de l'Occident.*"⁸⁴ This outcome was what France had been trying to avoid since the beginning of the Indochina war. That kind of talk coming from the US Secretary of State not only alarmed the French, it forced them to start thinking about a way out.

Because of their unfavorable military position, the French knew that it would be impossible to engage in bilateral talks with the Viet Minh or directly with China. The Asian department of the French Foreign Ministry believed that it was imperative to have multilateral negotiations, and the upcoming conference organized for the settling of the Korean conflict seemed the most appropriate venue. But the Americans were not ready to deal with Indochina, at least not before an important French victory in battle permitted France to negotiate from a position of strength. From Bidault's perspective, if the US wanted to put an end to the Korean conflict, France had the right to do the same with Indochina.

The Berlin Conference served as a platform for Bidault. The quadripartite meeting was supposed to lead to an East-West *détente*, but it ended up being a French show. In the end, most of the talks were directed towards Indochina and away from the German

⁸⁴ Rapport discussion avec Mr. Foster Dulles, 5 novembre 1953, MAE, *Secrétariat Général, CED III*, 69 : *Opinions et Réactions à l'étranger, Allemagne, Benelux, Etats-Unis*, 76.

question and European security matters. European problems seemed to be sidelined. The Berlin Conference confirmed that nothing would be settled in Europe as long as France was stuck in South East Asia. The United States did not agree with this turn of events, but once again, the Americans felt that they could not let France down. Indeed, it had been decided that a communist Chinese delegation would be admitted to the Geneva Conference, thus rendering the cooperation of France important to the Allied mobilization against the communist bloc.

Conclusion

Just as it had been the case seven years earlier at the U.N.'s San Francisco Conference, the Americans had no choice but to deal with France to counterbalance the communist powers. Throughout 1952 and 1953, tensions had mounted between France and the United States and political changes in both countries had further increased the level of suspicion. During Schuman's mandate at the Quai d'Orsay, security cooperation had moved forward. The ECSC had permitted the introduction of the Germans into the Western European community and the EDC proposal had finally been adopted by the United States. In Indochina, General de Lattre had managed to bring hope back to the expeditionary corps and had even won some victories on the battlefield. But the French political parties disparate aims and ideologies restrained France from pursuing the policies the MRP had set in motion.

When Bidault came back to the Quai d'Orsay, he was determined to set the tone in Indochina. But the death of De Lattre and constant failures to defeat the enemy had brought the morale of the French army to its lowest level. The MRP had started to lose its

predominance over French politics to the benefit of the Gaullists and the Radicals. With the death of Stalin and the lessening of international tensions, the ratification of the EDC lost its significance. Bidault found himself incapable of progressing, and like most French politicians holding power during these tumultuous years he decided to gain time by putting aside controversial issues. For him it was the EDC which had to be sidelined. The population was unsatisfied with the government and wanted results. It was clear that the realities of French politics made the creation of a majority in the Assembly impossible. It seemed that nobody was capable of solving major problems.

Starting to sense that it was time to negotiate over Indochina before it was too late, Bidault managed to have the Indochina war put on the Geneva Conference agenda despite US reluctance to do so. The Americans knew that the French could not yet negotiate from a position of strength. France's military position was shaky and the enemy knew that the French people wanted a quick settlement of the war. Therefore, when the Viet Minh launched an offensive against the French post at Dien Bien Phu, what looked like a minor battle became the most important development of all, the event that led to the rise of Mendès-France, to the negotiated end of the war and to the French rejection of the EDC, as the next chapter will explain.

Chapter IV

1954 :

The End of the Indochina war and the Ultimate Rejection of the EDC

The year 1954 was marked by the end the Indochina war, France's rejection of the EDC proposal and the termination of the uneasy Franco-American partnership. Once the Geneva conference opened in April 1954, the pace of events accelerated. The French defeat at Dien Bien Phu precipitated the fall of the Laniel government and permitted the rise of Pierre Mendès-France. The new Prime Minister and Foreign Minister had promised to find a quick solution to the Indochinese conflict, and that is what happened. The Geneva Accords were signed a few days after Mendès-France's investiture and he then moved forward to address the other source of crisis that had been plaguing French political life: the EDC. A little more than a month after the Geneva conference, the EDC was rejected by the French Assembly. Feeling betrayed after years of almost unconditional support for France, the Americans put into action plans that had been made in 1950 to rearm Germany. Liberated from constraints linked to European matters, the US also revised its Indochinese policy without having to go through French channels anymore.

As explained in this chapter, the Indochina war and the EDC followed paths that led to abrupt endings that brought down the Fourth Republic and ended close Franco-American cooperation.

Bidault at the Geneva Conference and the Dien Bien Phu Disaster

Agonizing Reappraisal

By 1954, the United States was far from enthusiastic about France's situation in South East Asia. France had managed to get the Indochinese question put on the Geneva Conference agenda despite the fact that the US had made it clear the it would not be possible to negotiate from an advantageous position without a decisive military victory on the battlefield. But now it was too late to turn back and it seemed as if the French government, divided by internal rivalries, had given up before making a final effort to turn the war to its advantage. The US Department of State was aware that the French were in a bad position and that there was an evident lack of will to definitively stop the march of the Viet Minh. The Navarre Plan had been a failure, the Vietnamese national army was not ready, and there was still no talk of giving the Associated States their independence.⁸⁵

Faced with continuous French demands for military actions by air and by sea, the US had refused to get involved militarily in another Asian conflict against communist China. Instead, the Americans had made efforts to form a coalition for "united action" in Indochina, but it had been a failure.⁸⁶ Britain, other Asian allies and even the French themselves had rebuffed the American scheme. France wanted quick results and was determined not to internationalize the conflict and not to lose control. But the Americans had had more than enough of this self-centered way of seeing things. The French had demanded US dollars as frenetically as they had kept the Americans out of their business. From France's perspective, the Indochina war was France's affair as much as the question of German rearmament was a problem that could only be solved by the French.

⁸⁵ Aimaq, 220-221.

⁸⁶ Gravel, 95.

By making the EDC the only viable option concerning Germany's military integration, France had managed to influence one of Washington's top concerns in Europe. As 1953 gave way to 1954, France's renegeing over the EDC ratification infuriated the Eisenhower administration, and especially Secretary of State Dulles. In December 1953, Dulles warned that if the EDC was not ratified by France, all of Europe would suffer from it.⁸⁷ In a speech made in front of the NATO Council, Dulles threatened France with an "agonizing reappraisal."⁸⁸ Two days after Dulles' menacing message, the US Information Service in Indochina warned that "*non seulement la continuation de l'aide américaine en Europe, mais encore la poursuite de l'aide en Indochine dépendaient de l'acceptation par la France de la Communauté Européenne de défense.*"⁸⁹

In early January 1954, debates in the French Parliament continued to turn around the ratification of the EDC as opposition to the treaty continued to grow in the ranks of the PCF, the RPF, the Radicals and the Socialists.⁹⁰ These opponents of the European army would bring Mendès-France to power, as explained later. But for the moment, France wanted a closer association between Great Britain and the EDC, and guarantees that British and American forces would be maintained on the continent. In sum, the *status quo* prevailed on the EDC question while the most important battle of the Indochina war slowly revealed itself.

⁸⁷ Brian R. Duchin, "The 'Agonizing Reappraisal': Eisenhower, Dulles and the European Defense Community," *Diplomatic History*, vol. 16 (Spring 1992): 201-221.

⁸⁸ The US delegation at the North Atlantic Council meeting to the Department of State, 15 December 1953, U.S. Department of State, FRUS, 1952-1954 (Washington: GPO, 1976), Volume V, *Western European Security*, 459-463.

⁸⁹ Rapport de Dejean depuis Saigon, 17 décembre 1953, MAE, *Asie, Indochine, 1944-1955*, 297 : *Aide militaire américaine, novembre 1953, mars 1954*, 10.

⁹⁰ Conditions à la ratification du traité de Paris, 4 janvier 1954, MAE, *Secrétariat Général, CED IV, 1954*, 70 : *Dossier Général, 1^{er} janvier- 18 juin 1954*, 5-6.

Dien Bien Phu

As explained before, the Americans wanted France to win an important battle and that momentous possibility appeared in March 1954 when the French post at Dien Bien Phu was attacked by the Viet Minh forces commanded by General Giap. In November, the French had reinforced their troops in this region to stop the Viet Minh from moving into Northern Laos and to secure the Mekong valley. Supplies for the French camp came from Hanoi and from the Laotian capital, Luang Prabang, but General Giap's offensive cut both supply lines. Thus, the French became dependant on air drops of material and food and soon understood that the Viet Minh was ready for a battle that would last long. Being under constant artillery bombardment from Chinese-donated howitzers, the French retreated into their bunkers and waited.

On April 1st, barely two weeks after the beginning of hostilities, General Navarre let Paris know that the French army was in a critical situation. An American aerial intervention was not only requested, it was vital. There was no way that the Dien Bien Phu soldiers would be able to survive Giap's offensive without US help. The Americans discussed the French demand, but finally, US General Arthur W. Radford informed French General Paul Ely on April 12th that no American planes would intervene in Indochina.⁹¹ The French President at the time, Laniel, warned that the possibility of his country's ratification of the EDC would certainly be nullified by a French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, but the US did not change its mind.⁹² For the time being, the Americans had had their fill in Korea, and had no intention of getting caught in Indochina. The American

⁹¹ From Radford to Ely, 12 April 1954, U.S. Department of State, FRUS, 1952-1954 (Washington: GPO, 1982), Volume XIII, *Indochina*, 1317-1318.

⁹² Memorandum of conversation by the counselor, 23 April 1954, U.S. Department of State, FRUS, 1952-1954 (Washington: GPO, 1982), Volume XIII, *Indochina*, 137.

answer might have been different if France had compromised over the ratification of the EDC, but by April 1954, France found the US government anxious about the outcome of the upcoming Geneva conference and determined not to be associated with French actions and policies.

The Opening of the Geneva Conference

When the Geneva Conference opened on April 26th, the French had been defending their position in Dien Bien Phu for over one month. Delegates representing the United States, Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, South Korea and the Viet Minh were all present at Geneva.⁹³ From the earliest moments of the conference, it was clear that the communist bloc had the advantage of sharing a common vision while the Allies had difficulty not showing their internal divisions. It was clear that the French and the Americans did not share the same objectives and that France was in a hurry. The American Defense Department team which edited the *Pentagon Papers* in the 1970's called this lack of consensus a tactic of "disassociation":

On the one hand, the Americans wanted to use their influence to ensure that the French would not sell out Western interests for the sake of a quick settlement; on the other, they were determined not to become so involved in the bargaining process as to link the Administration to the final terms.⁹⁴

Refusing to become associated with an outcome that was expected to be unfavorable to them, the Americans stayed backstage while Bidault struggled to save what he could.

As reported by a Swiss newspaper, the *National Zeitung*, in early May, France's position was as risky in Geneva as it was at Dien Bien Phu. French politics were stopping

⁹³ To understand the events leading to the Viet Nam war and to other South East Asian conflicts, it is important to notice that Bao Dai's government was not represented at the Geneva Conference, and neither were Laos or Cambodia. The future of the Associated States was drafted by the superpowers who were taking their own interests into considerations and not the native peoples' hopes and ambitions.

⁹⁴ Gravel, 113.

French leaders from ordering a final offensive in Indochina. The fear that a highly probable military defeat would seal France's fate in Geneva blocked everything. As described by the *National Zeitung*, Bidault's did not have many negotiating assets and his position was "effrayante":

*Personne ne voudrait être à sa place, même pas une autre personnalité française. Il subit les graves conséquences de la situation dans laquelle se trouve son pays et qui est celle d'une grande puissance dont la politique étrangère n'est pas en rapport avec ses moyens. (...) Le Gouvernement français l'adjure de ne pas abandonner l'Union française et lui exprime sa confiance. Mais le gouvernement n'est pas le Parlement tiraillé par différentes tendances. Les uns sont opposés au partage de l'Indochine, les autres voudraient "qu'on en finisse enfin."*⁹⁵

Under these conditions, not only were the Geneva negotiations held before the Allies had reached a consensus, no consensus existed either between the different French political factions.

Secret Talks

It was hard for the Laniel government to secure support and to conduct negotiations in the manner it wished. As Bidault recalled, to be in the position of negotiator at Geneva was intolerable: "I was constantly stabbed in the back, criticized in the name of patriotism by the Right, in the name of pacifism on the Left and of Communist solidarity on the extreme Left."⁹⁶ Opponents of the EDC were not making Bidault's task any easier. Indeed, while Bidault was trying to convince the US that ratification was coming, Moch and Koenig were condemning the treaty in the Assembly.

⁹⁵ Rapport sur un article paru dans le *National Zeitung*, journal suisse, sur la position de la France, 4 mai 1954, MAE, *Cabinet du Ministre, G. Bidault, 1953-1954*, 28 : *Conférence de Genève (2 avril- 14 mai) Généralités*, 126-127.

⁹⁶ Bidault, 201.

Moreover, on March 31, Marshal Juin denounced the EDC. He was later reprimanded for his public outcry, but the Marshal's notoriety had already undermined Bidault's efforts.⁹⁷

But what could be seen by observers was not the only thing that was going on at the Geneva Conference. Indeed, the French delegation had been conducting secret talks with the Vietnamese representatives. Since the Americans were going to disassociate themselves from any solution that seemed to be contrary to their interests, it was better for the French to talk with their Vietnamese counterparts in private. And indeed, what was talked about was not what the US would have wanted to hear. Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Viet Nam demanded the partition of Viet Nam, an option that was far from what the Americans had hoped for. The Korean war had already been concluded by a renewal of the partition at the 38th parallel, the same frontier that had been violated by North Korea three years before the armistice. The Korean war had ended where it had started, and the US did not want the same thing to happen in Indochina. But for the Laniel Administration, the Vietnamese proposition came too late. Indeed, 72 hours after the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam had presented its plan, Laniel and his team had to resign. On May 7th, Dien Bien Phu had fallen and with it the government that had led France to negotiate with the enemy without consulting the military or the leaders of the Associated States. The Laniel government had hoped for a miracle, but ended up living a nightmare.

Pierre Mendès-France and the End of the Indochina war

Mendès-France's Promise

⁹⁷ Rioux, 212.

The resignation of Laniel permitted the rise of a political figure who broke with the MRP's policies. Pierre Mendès-France, a leading member of the Radical party, was inaugurated as Prime Minister because of his promise to find a solution to the Indochina war within thirty days of his investiture. 419 deputies had voted for him. In sum, most of the Socialists, half of the Radicals, the UDSR and the Gaullists had voted for Mendès-France. The MRP had refused to vote, and even if the Communists supported him, Mendès-France had refused to count their votes. Mendès-France wanted to remain free from PCF pressure at Geneva while negotiating with Moscow and Beijing.⁹⁸

A pragmatist, Mendès-France had written in 1953 an article published in the French magazine *L'Express* in which he pleaded for peace in Indochina. During the Geneva Conference, Mendès-France had also accused the Laniel administration of "playing poker and asking for American intervention risking a world war."⁹⁹ Having his own views on how France should conduct its foreign policies, Prime Minister Mendès-France took Bidault's place as the head of the Quai d'Orsay and thus became the third Foreign Minister to take office since the beginning of the Indochina war. Clearly showing what he was heading for, Mendès-France went to Geneva and contacted the person whom he thought could help him most to find a rapid solution: the Soviet Foreign Minister, Viatcheslav Molotov.

Soviet Influence

As Bidault recalled in his memoirs, Molotov, had already made it clear at the Berlin Conference that the EDC would make the reunification of Germany impossible

⁹⁸ Rioux, 225.

⁹⁹ Arthur J. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans : Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and Viet Nam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 243.

and would be a threat to French security.¹⁰⁰ The same discourse was used at Geneva. Molotov also said that for his government, the outcomes of the Geneva negotiations would have a definitive influence on the long-term relationship between East and West. The link between Indochina and the EDC had been made by France at first to serve French colonial policy, but at this point, it became a handy tool for the Soviet Union. Molotov felt that in their hurry to get out of Indochina, the French would be open to compromise over the EDC, and that in any case, they had shown their hesitations by not ratifying it.¹⁰¹

In the person of Mendès-France, Molotov had found a counterpart who had never tried to hide his opposition to the EDC and who preferred to work to lessen tensions with Moscow. Upon his arrival at Geneva, Mendès-France had written a telegram to Molotov expressing his desire to organize a meeting with the Soviet delegation soon. He had also insisted on his desire to develop a personal relationship with Molotov.¹⁰² Mendès-France certainly wanted to discuss what Molotov meant when he had said a few days earlier that if a peace settlement was reached in Indochina, the Soviet Union would propose solutions that would render the implementation of the EDC unnecessary:

*À cet égard, le cessez-le-feu ou l'accord sur les modalités d'un armistice, pourrait être considéré du côté soviétique comme un premier résultat concret susceptible d'amener l'Occident à modifier son attitude générale envers l'U.R.S.S., et de donner ainsi la possibilité à l'Union soviétique de proposer à nouveau son projet relatif à la sécurité mondiale, et d'empêcher définitivement la mise en application de la C.E.D.*¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Bidault, 190.

¹⁰¹ Gravel, 168.

¹⁰² Télégramme de Mendès-France à Molotov, 7 juin 1954, MAE, *Cabinet du Ministre, P. Mendès-France, 1954-1955, 1, Conférence de Genève, 26 mai-29 juin 1954*, 056.

¹⁰³ La position de la Délégation soviétique à GENÈVE après le voyage de MOLOTOV, 4 juin 1954, MAE, *Cabinet du Ministre, P. Mendès-France, 1954-1955, 1, Conférence de Genève, 26 mai-29 juin 1954*, 040.

Molotov had declared that the Soviet Union wanted to propose a new plan to preserve worldwide security, but in reality, what the Soviets were really seeking was to impose further delays on German reunification.¹⁰⁴ By the same token, the Soviets would have been even more than pleased to discredit NATO and hopefully force its dismantlement.¹⁰⁵

Worries at the White House

Observers surveying Geneva from the US viewed with suspicion what was going on between the Soviet Union and France. The Americans understood that the EDC now hung “in perilous balance.”¹⁰⁶ Seeking to prevent an unwelcome Franco-Soviet rapprochement, Eisenhower wrote a letter to Mendès-France in June reminding him that the US wanted to keep good relations with France within an alliance based on mutual confidence and friendship.¹⁰⁷ Eisenhower underlined that his administration was preoccupied by the EDC and by Indochina. Commenting on the possible consequences of this letter, the French Ambassador to the US, Bonnet, wrote to his government that there was not much to worry about. The military union of European countries was so important to Washington that it was forcing US leaders to deal with France cautiously:

*Le Président EISENHOWER, le Secrétaire d'État, le Congrès ont fait connaître à maintes reprises l'importance qu'ils attachent à la réalisation de ce projet. Ils estiment que, devant la puissance grandissante des Soviétiques, l'équilibre européen ne peut être rétabli que par le développement d'une union occidentale. Ils ont, en conséquence, fait de ce plan une pièce maîtresse de la politique américaine qui, s'il n'est pas réalisé, devra à leur avis être profondément modifiée. De là vient leur insistance, bien qu'il soit – et ils ne l'ignorent pas – maladroit de paraître exercer des pressions sur la France.*¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Communiqué de la délégation française à Berlin, 16 février 1954, MAE, *Secrétariat Général, 1945-1966*, 56, *Réunion des Ministres des Affaires Étrangères, 25 janvier au 18 février 1954*, 349.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Memorandum by the Special Adviser to the United States delegation, to the Secretary of State, 29 April 1954, U.S. Department of State, FRUS, 1952-1954 (Washington: GPO, 1981), Volume XVI, *The Geneva Conference: Korea and Indochina*, 618.

¹⁰⁷ Lettre de Eisenhower rapportée par Bonnet, 19 juin 1954, MAE, *Cabinet du Ministre P. Mendès-France, 1954-1955*, 2 : *Position Vietnam, mai-juillet 1954*, 93.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 94.

The French still felt that they had enough leverage on the US to follow their own political agenda without molding it to suit American aims. Moreover, as underlined by Bonnet, the US had no intention of getting involved in Indochina outside of joint action with France and Great Britain. In other words, at this point, the French had nothing to lose since the Americans would not sanction them for fear that the EDC would not be ratified and since the US Army would not get involved in Indochina. “Why care about complying with US aims?,” they asked themselves. With this kind of reasoning, Mendès-France continued along the path of his predecessors and proceeded with his secret negotiations.

The Geneva Accords

From the earliest moment of receiving his mandate, Mendès-France not only contacted Molotov, but also the Democratic Republic of Vietnam’s delegation. Pham Van Dong, Ho Chi Minh’s emissary, and Mendès-France started to negotiate the day Mendès-France took office, on July 19th. Dulles was aware of these unofficial talks, and, as he said to Bonnet, his government did not appreciate the fact that the USSR seemed to know as much as he did and that everything of importance seemed to be discussed clandestinely.¹⁰⁹ Dulles made further warnings to Mendès-France:

Mr. Dulles had pointed out that the U.S. public was getting a trifle short-tempered on the EDC topic and that if Mendes was not careful, the U.S. Congress might terminate aid to NATO which would be detrimental to the military effort of all Europe, especially France.¹¹⁰

But these threats had been made before, and nothing had resulted yet. For Mendès-France, the quickest solution could come from the communist bloc. Indeed, Mendès-

¹⁰⁹ Discussions entre Dulles et Bonnet, 4 juillet 1954, MAE, *Cabinet du Ministre P. Mendès-France, 1954-1955*, 3 : *Vietnam*, 80.

¹¹⁰ Gravel, 558.

France was well aware that the Chinese, who were funding much of Ho Chi Minh's war efforts, were also eager to put an end to the costly Indochinese conflict.

Plans to divide Viet Nam were put back on the table by Pham Van Dong. The clock was ticking for Mendès-France who had promised to terminate the war within thirty days of his appointment. The communists presented their partition proposition as a win-win, or rather a lose-lose, settlement. The Geneva Accords were thus signed in a hurry during the night between the 20th and the 21st of July 1954. The next day, an armistice was implemented, putting an end to a war that had lasted eight long years. Dividing Viet Nam along the 17th parallel, the Geneva Accords permitted the Viet Minh to keep control over Northern Vietnam. On the other hand, Southern Viet Nam would remain under Western influence, but the French army would slowly retreat from Viet Nam. It was also decided that elections on the reunification of the country would be held before 1956 in both parts of Vietnam.

Infuriated by France's betrayal, the Americans refused to ratify the accords and did not recognize the communist government of North Vietnam. Also feeling that France had not respected its interests and had not taken into account its own sacrifice, the new South Vietnamese government refuted the Geneva agreement. After all, it was as if the problem had only been temporarily postponed since hostilities would certainly restart as the 1956 deadline approached. As the *Pentagon Papers* editors point out, for the five superpowers present at the Geneva Conference "their objectives only secondarily took into account the expectations of the Vietnamese, north and south."¹¹¹

China and the Soviet Union ended up being the biggest winners of the Geneva Conference. Despite frequent clashes between Moscow and Beijing, the foreign

¹¹¹ Gravel, 165.

ministries of both countries managed to run the Geneva show to their advantage. They succeeded in negotiating the end of the Korean and the Indochinese conflicts in ways that permitted communist leaders in Korea and in Viet Nam to maintain power over the northern parts of the disputed territories.¹¹² But above all, the leaders of the communist bloc had shown to the rest of the world that they could cooperate while on the other hand, the Americans, the French and the British had not been able to work together. The Western alliance had been a disaster. With their policy of “disassociation”, the Americans had discredited any efforts to solve the crisis in the long-run, the French had refused to bend to any kind of compromise to facilitate their relations with the US, and the British had stayed away from “trouble” as much as they could. In sum, in the words of the historian Daniel Patrick O’Connor Greene:

Since 1950, Indochina had been a diplomatic and strategic crossroads where the requirements of containment in Asia usually gave way to the imperatives of European reconstruction and security. (...) The paralysis at the center of French politics under the Fourth Republic, however, had repeatedly postponed a decision on the EDC. (...) Washington had to tailor its policy objectives and aid program for Indochina to the exigencies of the French war, for fear that its ally’s domestic politics and repeated frustrations in SEA might, as Dulles put it, “carry the EDC down the drain.”¹¹³

And, as Dulles had feared, it was not long after the Geneva Conference that the EDC met its final destiny.

The Ultimate Rejection of the European Defense Community

“Marchandage Planétaire”

The details of what was said during the secret Franco-Soviet meetings at Geneva are probably going to remain unknown for some time, but enough sources are available to

¹¹² Korea was divided following the 38th parallel, and Viet Nam following the 17th parallel.

¹¹³ Daniel Patrick O’Connor Greene, “John Foster Dulles and the End of the Franco-American Entente in Indochina,” *Diplomatic History*, vol. 16, no. 4 (1992): 570.

know that all that has been revealed is not everything. These unofficial discussions, of which no trace has been found yet in the Soviet or the French archives, have been called by scholars the “*marchandage planétaire*.”¹¹⁴ It is indeed highly probable that Molotov and Mendès-France made a deal in which the Soviets agreed to compromise over the Indochinese question by dividing Viet Nam in exchange for a French rejection of the EDC treaty.

As the French High Commissioner for Germany, André François-Poncet, pointed out two days following the signature of the Geneva Accords, the Germans were worried about the consequences of the end of the Indochina war for their rearmament problems. The Adenauer administration knew that the EDC would certainly be rejected by the French:

*Beaucoup restent convaincus que M. Molotov a reçu du Président du Conseil Français des assurances, touchant la réunion prochaine d’une nouvelle conférence qui serait consacrée aux problèmes de l’Europe, particulièrement au problème allemand, et qui remettrait sur le tapis le projet de pacte de sécurité collective (...).*¹¹⁵

Adenauer was worried that if the EDC was abandoned, the Soviets would propose their own plan for European security and that the French would seek to get an arrangement that would be to Germany’s disadvantage.

Countering Rumours

¹¹⁴ The author looked for such evidence in the Quai d’Orsay’s archives and also discussed this topic with a Paris-IV Sorbonne research associate, Émilie Robin-Hivert, who is working with Professor G.H. Soutou on a doctoral thesis about Soviet policies at the beginning of the Cold War concerning European reconstruction. Robin-Hivert is also responsible for RICHIE’s (*Réseau International de Jeunes Chercheurs en Histoire de l’Intégration Européenne*) workshop on Cold War and European integration. Robin-Hivert searched extensively in the Quai d’Orsay’s archives and also the archives in Moscow and only found clues that indeed a “*marchandage planétaire*” was concluded between Molotov and Mendès-France. It seems that no official manuscripts remain.

¹¹⁵ De BONN par François-Poncet sur la réaction allemande, 23 juillet 1954, MAE, *Cabinet du Ministre P. Mendès-France, 1954-1955, 7: Conférence de Genève (avril-juillet 1954) télégrammes, accords et déclarations*, 120.

Feeling that rumours were getting out of hand in the diplomatic world, Mendès-France wrote to Bonnet on July 25th asking him to reassure the Americans on the content of his previous discussions with Molotov.¹¹⁶ After emphasizing that this document was highly confidential, the French Prime Minister explained to his Ambassador that during his first meeting with Molotov, on July 10th, the Russian foreign minister had not only proposed to move forward with peacemaking in Asia, but also with security concerns in Europe. Molotov had wanted to discuss problems related to Germany and to the EDC as soon as the negotiations over Indochina ended. Mendès-France continued by pointing out that “*cette chronologie excluait le marchandage planétaire,*” that discussions on European security only began after the Geneva Accords, on July 21st, and that overall the results had been disappointing.¹¹⁷ Mendès-France concluded that there was no point in making so much noise about some kind of Franco-Soviet secret pact since there had been none. Mendès-France gave the same explanation to the Germans while asking them to stop making allusions in the press to a “*marchandage planétaire*” that had never happened.¹¹⁸

From France’s point of view, as explained by the French representative to the United Nations, Jean Chauvel, if there was somebody to blame for the results of the Geneva Conference, it was the United States.¹¹⁹ Indeed, the American position had remained negative all through the conference. Under the military pressure resulting from events on the battlefield, France did not have any choice but to negotiate with the enemy.

¹¹⁶ Mendès-France à Bonnet à propos de discussions tenues avec MOLOTOV, 25 juillet 1954, MAE, *Cabinet du Ministre P. Mendès-France, 1954-1955, 7: Conférence de Genève (avril-juillet 1954) télégrammes, accords et déclarations*, 113.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 119.

¹¹⁹ Observations de Monsieur Chauvel sur la Conférence de Genève, 27 juillet 1954, MAE, *Cabinet du Ministre P. Mendès-France, 1954-1955, 7: Conférence de Genève (avril-juillet 1954) télégrammes, accords et déclarations*, 147-148.

But it had been hard to deal with the communist powers while the Allies had barely been able to maintain a representative delegation on the spot. Mr. Dulles had left the conference when he had felt that things were not going his way and France had to beg to have an American official return for the final phase of the negotiations. But the US had refused to be associated with the settlement since it conceded too much to the Communists. The French always insisted that “*marchandage planétaire*” or not, they did not have the support that they should have had from the US, leaving them no choice but to do what was necessary for them to preserve their interests.

Carrying the EDC “Down the Drain”

As the French government was getting ready to present the EDC to the Assembly, the Americans, and especially Dulles, started to think about other avenues to solve the European security imbroglio. Indeed, the chances that the EDC would pass were thin. On August 28th, Mendès-France had spoken on national radio about the EDC and had not given any sign that he was in favour of it. On the contrary, he had just said that the EDC had created a crisis that divided the French people. He also pointed out that it had been suggested to him that he quit the Premiership, but he had refused since he believed firmly that it was time to resolve this turmoil and to give France’s allies the answer they had been awaiting for the last four years:

C’est une grave épreuve que nous affrontons maintenant et moi, tout le premier.

Un journal a écrit que je me trouvais un centre d’une véritable tempête.

J’en ai bien souvent l’impression, en effet.

La question de l’Indochine, la question de la Tunisie étaient difficiles mais j’ai pu les traiter avec le sentiment que dans leur ensemble le pays et le Parlement me faisaient confiance, une confiance que je crois avoir méritée.

Le problème de la C.E.D., je l’aborde dans des conditions bien différentes, puisqu’il divise profondément les Français, entre eux, et le Parlement. (...)

Certains me conseillent maintenant de me retirer. Je n’hésiterais pas à la faire si l’union et l’entente pouvaient en sortir. Mais au contraire, ce serait superposer une crise de plus

à la crise de la C.E.D. et provoquer encore un de ces ajournements qui nous ont déjà déconsidérés si largement.

Mon devoir est donc de rester, pour permettre au Parlement de se prononcer et de donner à nos alliés et à nos partenaires la réponse qu'ils attendent depuis si longtemps.¹²⁰

Two days after Mendès-France's radio speech, the EDC proposal was finally brought to the French Assembly for ratification. When the time came to proceed, Mendès-France addressed the Assembly and, as Aimaq observes, did not say a single word in favor of the acceptance of the treaty, and by so doing "facilitated its burial".¹²¹ The Gaullists were stronger than they had been before in the Assembly and opposed the EDC, as they had always done. The MRP, responsible for the elaboration of the plan and for its endorsement, was weaker and divided by internal dissent. Indeed, Bidault refused to vote for the EDC because he felt that France had been betraying its Vietnamese allies by letting the Viet Minh gain half the country through the Geneva Accords. Nobody was surprised by the results of the vote. With the Gaullists, the Communists, half of the Socialists and Radicals and a third of the independent deputies opposing the EDC proposal it failed by a vote of 319 against and 264 in favor of the proposal. With the final decision taken to reject the EDC, France not only forced European nations to reconsider their defense plans, but also provoked the US to rethink its whole vision of Europe. Eisenhower and Dulles were foiled.

The End of the Franco-American Entente

Nobody can say without doubt that there was a secret alliance between Moscow and Paris, but it is evident that the Soviets managed to benefit from Franco-American

¹²⁰ Allocution radiodiffusée de Mendès-France, 28 août 1954, MAE, *Cabinet du Ministre, P. Mendès-France, 1954-1955*, 8 : Archives, 022-023.

¹²¹ Aimaq, 228.

tensions. As the *Pentagon Papers* editors underline, when Molotov agreed to conclude a cease-fire in Indochina, he certainly had the EDC on his mind:

Throughout 1953 and into 1954, Soviet propaganda was dominated by comments on the EDC and the danger of a rearmed Germany. It was certainly in Soviet interests to pressure the Viet Minh for concessions to the French, since removal of the French command from Indochina would restore French force levels on the Continent and thereby probably offset their need for an EDC.¹²²

Without having to make any concessions themselves, the Soviet had played the diplomatic game cleverly enough to postpone German rearmament and to force the West into rethinking its security strategies. French withdrawal from Indochina and the rejection of the EDC sealed the breakup between France and the United States.

Up to 1954, the French and the Americans had tried unsuccessfully to coordinate their national interests, their domestic policies and their ideological beliefs with their Indochina policies. Tensions between Eisenhower and Mendès-France were high and some in the American media even said that the French Prime Minister represented a threat to international security.¹²³ It took an official Mendès-France visit to the United States in November 1954 to reverse this idea. The Mendès-France Administration had already been in office for six months and that was a record in itself for a French government. Despite the abrupt end of Franco-American cooperation at Geneva, the US started to regard developments in France more favorably. Perhaps stability was possible in France after all.

¹²² Gravel, 168.

¹²³ Bonnet sur la couverture médiatique du voyage de Mr. et Madame MF aux ÉU, 23 novembre 1954, MAE, *Cabinet du Ministre, P. Mendès-France, 1954-1955*, 8 : *Archives*, 156.

Mendès-France's pragmatism gave hope that the French would reform their economy and their politics enough to become powerful allies.¹²⁴ But it did not turn out that way. Many politicians, especially the MRP and the UDSR, did not like the way Mendès-France had concluded the Indochina conflict. The MRP even called him the "*bradeur de l'Empire*" (the discounter of the Empire), insinuating that he was selling the French Empire to get out of trouble and it did not forgive him for the rejection of the EDC. But what really brought Mendès-France down was the Algerian revolution that erupted in February 1955. Mendès-France did not have enough support to resolve the crisis. His government fell on February 6th, and thus continued the Fourth Republic's ministerial waltz up to its dissolution in 1958.

Conclusion

In sum, by 1954, even though a lot of money and energy had been spent on the Indochina war and the European Defense Community plan, neither the French nor the Americans ended up gaining what they had sought. France had to surrender on Indochina, thus accelerating the ultimate dismantlement of the French Empire, to the great regret of the MRP, which had lost its predominance in French politics. Unlike Schuman and Bidault before him, when Mendès-France arrived at the Quai d'Orsay, he had a clear mission, and a deadline. Mendès-France had promised to end the war and to bring the Assembly out of its vegetative state, and he did so. Unfortunately for Mendès-France, the rejection of the EDC precipitated the end of the Franco-American entente and eventually became one of the causes of his fall.

¹²⁴ Bonnet sur la couverture médiatique du voyage de Mr. et Madame MF aux ÉU, 23 novembre 1954, MAE, *Cabinet du Ministre, P. Mendès-France, 1954-1955*, 8 : *Archives*, 156.

The United States, after having paid up to 85 percent of the cost of the French war effort in Indochina, abruptly realized that it had been investing in this conflict in vain and ended up subsidizing West German remilitarization single-handedly. Not dependant on France's uneasy cooperation anymore, the Americans moved forward with the German question. On May 5th, 1955, Adenauer's Federal Republic of Germany was recognized by the North Atlantic Community and then integrated into NATO, just as the US had proposed five years earlier.¹²⁵ The Allied occupation ended and the West German army, the *Bundeswehr*, limited to 495 000 soldiers, was put under the authority of NATO's commander in chief. The resolution of the German problem and the Franco-American breakup also had a liberating effect on US policy in Vietnam. Even if Paris threatened to withdraw its troops from Indochina, the Americans knew that it would not happen immediately since France still had investments there that needed protection. But the overall situation was not encouraging. Tensions between North and South Viet Nam kept on escalating as the 1956 election year approached. In the end, as the French had foreseen, the Americans took France's place in Vietnam, but the US did not profit from it. On the contrary, the United States became involved in a deadly war that lasted until 1975, a war that more and more historians now regard as a hopeless Thirty Years war.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Gaddis, 134-135.

¹²⁶ Stein Tonnesson, "The Longest War: Indochina 1945-75," *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 22, no. 1 (March 1985): 9-29.

Conclusion

Between 1950 and 1954, the Indochina war and the European Defense Community shared a common fate. Meant to secure France's international position, the war against the Viet Minh and the proposal for a European army were at the epicenter of Franco-American relations. As Aimaq summarized the matter in the last chapter of her book:

Our conclusion is that the Pleven Plan served primarily to remove from Washington the decision for German rearmament, in order to construct leverage in French hands, to be used in the colonial context. (...) This was the essence of the Pleven Plan. Its diplomatic genius lay precisely in the question of timing – it allowed Paris the privilege of deciding the “when and where” of one of Washington's top global priorities.¹²⁷

Scholarly works, such as Aimaq's, proved that both events cannot be understood fully if looked at separately, but no scholar has yet explained how this association evolved.

What were the repercussions of the Indochina-EDC link on the policies of the three French Foreign Ministers that succeeded each other between 1950 and 1954? How did international and national events influence the Foreign Ministry in its treatment of these questions? This thesis had shed new light on the Indochina-EDC link. This paper explains that the EDC first served France's imperial policy, but then turned into a political liability that finally led to the dramatic end of the Indochina conflict and to the rejection of the EDC proposal by France, guaranteeing the fall of the Fourth Republic and precipitating the end of Franco-American cooperation.

Foreign Ministers Robert Schuman, Georges Bidault and Pierre Mendès-France had to deal with the EDC and the Indochina questions in relation to severe international and national constraints, mainly emerging from economic problems, political instability

¹²⁷ Aimaq, 233.

in Paris and Cold War tensions. Foreign Minister Schuman used the EDC-Indochina link to advance France's policies, but stagnation over the EDC proposal and French setbacks in Indochina undermined the efforts of his successor, Georges Bidault, who witnessed the rise of Mendès-France who had promised to find quick solutions to both problems. This thesis goes one step deeper into explaining how the French Foreign Ministry dealt with the EDC proposal and the Indochina war.

As discussed in the second chapter, Schuman truly believed in European unity and advocated a more conciliatory policy towards the young German democracy. As Foreign Minister, Schuman introduced measures to set forward European integration and managed to use the EDC as an effective diplomatic weapon that was propelled by the momentum of the Schuman plan. At first, the Truman Administration had been suspicious of France's intentions with regard to the Pleven plan. Secretary of State Acheson knew that it was meant to undermine American plans to rearm Germany within NATO, but East-West tensions were so high that any plans to secure European defense, and France's cooperation, had to be considered.

The fear of seeing France step into the communist camp was real. The French Communist Party enjoyed an enormous popularity among the electorate. The Third Force, the coalition of centrist parties ruling the government, was struggling to stay in power. The Constitution of the Fourth Republic had put all decisive powers into the hands of the French National Assembly, but France's political parties had very different aims and refused to merge to form a strong majority. The parties of the Third Force (MRP, Radicals, UDSR and Moderates) had found common ground, but it was out of necessity and not really by choice. The task facing the Third Force was enormous.

France's economic and social problems resulting from the Second World War demanded gigantic means. A revolutionary wave had started to sweep through the French Empire, especially in Asia and in North Africa. With the Soviet Union looking in the direction of France and with no other quick solutions but the ones offered by Schuman, Truman decided to back the EDC proposal. But by the same token, the Quai d'Orsay, following the MRP's colonial policies, pushed the United States into supporting financially the Indochina war, despite the fact that every American military report had declared it a lost cause.

The link between the EDC and the Indochina war was soon established by the Quai d'Orsay. Even if Schuman wanted France to cooperate on an equal-footing with Germany, he knew that his country was not ready to do so and was aware that with the French army was stuck in Indochina, France did not have the means to assure its military supremacy on the continent in competition with a revived Germany. Time was needed to ensure a positive outcome for France in Indochina, but huge sums of money were needed and they would have to come from the United States. The eruption of the Korean war permitted France to stimulate further the US financial contribution to the Indochina war, which was presented as a battle against communism led by France for the benefit of all. Thus, France continued to fight against all odds by promising to move on with the EDC as soon as the Indochina war could be settled. But France's accrued dependence on American help displeased many, especially in the RPF and the PCF camps. Internal dissent was also starting to cripple the Third Force. Divisions over the MRP-led Quai d'Orsay's policies also appeared in the ranks of the Socialists and the Radicals. Despite an encouraging start, Schuman's integrationist schemes were stopped by the fear that

controversial policies might shatter the fragile political order of the French Assembly. By maintaining the *status quo*, France condemned the EDC and imposed stagnation upon its Indochinese policy.

Between 1952 and 1953, the EDC proposal became a cause of great rivalries within French political circles as internal and external opposition to the project grew, as explained in chapter III. The PCF and the RPF remained the principal opponents of the EDC and the Third Force failed to achieve a consensus over the question. In fact, the Third Force could not sustain pressure from the Right and fell apart, leaving the MRP in a difficult position. Despite the unpopularity of the EDC, Foreign Minister Schuman signed the treaty in the name of France in May 1952, but the treaty remained far from implementation since it had to be ratified by the French Assembly. Nobody knew what would happen to the EDC if it was to be presented to the Assembly, and nobody knew either if the government in place would survive in the event of a rejection of the treaty. Time became the only ally of the pro-EDC politicians and delays succeeded one another as they hoped that the opposition would calm down. Unfortunately, opting for a “time will fix everything” strategy was not what Washington had been hoping for and impatience in the White House grew.

For many in the United States, the Democrats had not been able to prevent the escalation of the Cold War and had not been able to prevent the communist takeover of China, the most populous country in the world. When election time came, the Americans chose a Republican war hero, Dwight Eisenhower, to lead their country, but Congress remained in the hands of the Democrats. President Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, were eager to see France move forward with the EDC and in

Indochina, but it was hard to find a solution that would be accepted by Congress and by the international community. When the United States initiated the recognition of the Indochina war by NATO, the member states remained reluctant to get involved in French problems. Moreover, France's Foreign Affairs department, back under the leadership of Bidault, did not see why the American initiative should have changed its colonial policies. Foreign Minister Bidault was fully devoted to the safeguarding of the French Union and believed that the EDC had chances of being ratified by France, but only after a French victory in Indochina and only after protocols rendering the treaty better adapted to French needs were added.

The opponents of the EDC in France mainly worried about the effect of such a treaty on France's control over its army, especially in a decolonizing world. Was it a good idea to surrender the disposition of France's national army at French will to permit the mobilization of German troops? For his part, Bidault had more doubts than Schuman on the positive virtues of the EDC, since he was so concerned about the future of France's foreign possessions. But he knew that a total rejection of the EDC was too risky since the United States was certainly going to react quickly afterwards by permitting German rearmament within NATO. Therefore, Bidault had to base his policies on two related aims: the first one was to make sure that the United States would continue to help France in Indochina, and the second one was to wait long enough to see changes in the Assembly that would permit the ratification of the EDC. With the MRP now in the opposition and confronted with the rise of the RPF and the Radicals, Bidault was running out of time.

By 1953, the MRP had nothing to lose and everything to gain. Secretary of State Dulles had claimed more than once that his country considered the EDC to be the cornerstone of its European policy and that it was France's turn to make compromises. Dulles was in a dangerous situation: his government did not want to let go of Indochina, especially since the Korean war had ended with partition, an outcome that permitted a communist regime to stay in power in the North, but Dulles was also pressed by Congress which was determined to see France end the costly Indochina war and grant independence to the Associated States. But with another political crisis revealing itself in Paris, both Dulles and Bidault started to think about finding a way out.

Worried about the possible presentation of the EDC to the Assembly, the RPF had provoked the fall of the Mayer government. Finding a successor to Mayer took 36 days and ended up discrediting the Fourth Republic in the eyes of the French population, which was still suffering from economic hardship. Public discontent rose as increased media attention was given to the Indochina war and the EDC. Knowing that the United States had planned to organize a conference in Geneva to settle the Korean question, Bidault mustered all of his efforts to have Indochina placed on the Geneva agenda. Bidault knew that the United States was not in favor of discussing the Indochinese conflict, at least not until France's military position got better, but it was time to find a solution to France's problems if Bidault and the MRP wanted to save what they had been working for since 1946.

Chapter IV traced how the Indochina war and the EDC met abrupt endings. After Bidault succeeded in adding Indochina to the Geneva calendar, the United States' eagerness to see the EDC ratified by France grew to point that Dulles threatened France

with an “agonizing reappraisal” if the Assembly failed to implement it. The Geneva Conference was about to open and the beginning of the Viet Minh siege of the French fortress of Dien Bien Phu had put France in a very uncomfortable position. Victory in this battle was hard to imagine without US aid, but the Americans did not want to get involved directly without the creation of a coalition, and they had not been able to form one. Therefore, the French surrender in Dien Bien Phu in early May 1954 was not only a military catastrophe, it was also a diplomatic one since France now had to negotiate from a loser’s position and the defeat pushed the Eisenhower administration to adopt a tactic of disassociation at Geneva. There were rumors that secret talks were going on between the French and the Communist delegations on the partition of Viet Nam. Fears that the French were seeking peace at any price pushed Dulles to stay away from a solution that might have enhanced the prestige of the communist forces present at Geneva.

American fears of seeing France adopt a defeatist attitude grew with the fall of the Laniel government. It had not been able to prevent the Dien Bien Phu fiasco and it permitted the rise to power of a controversial Radical figure, Mendès-France. The new Prime Minister, who also took the Foreign Minister’s office, had been elected after promising to end the Indochina war and to introduce a plan for France’s economic recovery within a month of his investiture. Moreover, Mendès-France had promised that the Assembly would vote on the EDC issue before fall. All of these declarations aroused optimism in France (it had been a while since a politician had showed pragmatism at this level), but the Americans were more than worried about the actions that might be taken by this newcomer.

As soon as Mendès-France got to Geneva, he contacted Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov to pursue the negotiations started previously by Bidault for the division of Viet Nam. Most of the talks between Mendès-France and Moscow's delegation were conducted secretly to the great displeasure of Dulles who complained that he knew less than the Soviets did. Washington's worries were not only related to what was going to happen in Asia if the Western alliance was to permit the establishment of a communist government in Hanoi. Indeed, everything led Dulles and Eisenhower to believe that France would soon reject the EDC. The recent Franco-Soviet rapprochement displeased Washington especially since Molotov had repeatedly claimed that his government would not tolerate German rearmament. American suspicion that the Indochina war would be ended in secrecy proved to be true when France and the Viet Minh signed accords in the night between the 20th and the 21st of July 1954. The Geneva Accords divided Viet Nam following the 17th parallel and permitted the Viet Minh to rule the Northern part of the country. Moreover, the Geneva Accords indirectly sealed the end of good relations between the French and the Americans, who refused to recognize them.

Rumors that the Geneva Accords were the fruits of a secret pact between Mendès-France and Molotov inflamed Franco-American relations. What has been called a "*marchandage planétaire*" stipulated that Molotov had pressured the Chinese and the Vietnamese to find a quick solution to the Indochina war in exchange for Mendès-France's promise that the EDC would not be ratified by the French Assembly, but no proof that such a deal was made has yet been found. Mendès-France countered these rumors publicly, but he did nothing to promote the EDC's ratification before it was subjected to the deputies' vote. Less than a month after Geneva, France refused to

implement the EDC when the Gaullists, the Communists, half of the Radicals and half of the Socialists voted against it. Sealing the fate of the EDC with a rejection definitively undermined all that the MRP had worked for during Schuman and Bidault's mandates at the Quai d'Orsay. France lost Indochina, marking the beginning of the end for the French Union, and Germany rearmed within NATO. The failure of the Fourth Republic also permitted the return of General de Gaulle to the political arena, a scenario that both the French centrist parties and the United States had tried to avoid. In 1958, the Fourth Republic was dismantled by De Gaulle, who had refused to recognize its Constitution because it had given too much power to the political parties.¹²⁸

Over the four years that have been the subject of this thesis, the Indochina war and the EDC remained at the epicenter of Franco-American relations. But these interrelated events also had an influence on the evolution of other countries' policies. The impact of the Indochina-EDC link on German and Soviet diplomacy should be the subject of a deeper analysis in the future. In Bonn, Adenauer used France's procrastination over the European army plan and its colonial policy to push the United States into making Germany its principal European ally. The Soviet Union also took into consideration what was going on between Paris and Washington to forge its own European and Asian policies. Further research should also be conducted on the "*marchandage planétaire*", which remains a mystery, as nothing has yet been found in the archives about this secret pact. But this does not mean that documents or testimonies are not waiting to reveal themselves.

¹²⁸ Maurice Larkin, *France Since the Popular Front : Government and People 1936-1996* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 223-241.

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