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China and the Geneva Conference of 1954*

Zhai Qiang

Much has been written about the role of the western powers at the Geneva Conference,¹ but discussions on the People's Republic of China's (PRC) policy toward the event remain limited.² In the last few years, many Chinese materials which shed light on Beijing's role in the settlement of the Indo-China issue in 1954 have become available. Based on these new sources, and with western documents, this article examines the PRC's preparation for and performance during the conference and discusses China's relations with the major powers at Geneva.

The PRC and the Vietminh, 1950–54

During the period between 1945 and 1949, when both Mao and Ho Chi Minh were preoccupied with their respective domestic struggles for power, contact between the Chinese and Vietnamese Communist Parties was limited and difficult, as they were physically separated by the presence of the KMT troops in southern China. This was a period when Ho was being careful not to antagonize Chiang Kai-shek for fear of being confronted with hostility from the rear. Influenced by Stalin's thinking, Ho did not expect the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to win national power in China in the near future.³

Mao's victory in October 1949 greatly encouraged Ho Chi Minh, and he visited Beijing in January 1950 to seek China's assistance. Liu Shaoqi informed him that the CCP had decided to recognize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and would ask the Soviet Union to do the same in order to enhance the DRV's international prestige. As to French reactions, Liu said that he expected Paris to postpone recognition of Beijing as a result of China's solidarity with

*I should like to thank the United States Institute of Peace for a Peace Scholar fellowship that made work on this article possible. I am also indebted to John Lewis Gaddis and William Stueck for commenting on an earlier version.

1. Robert F. Randle, *Geneva 1954: The Settlement of the Indochinese War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); James Cable, *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1986); Gary Hess, "Redefining the American position in Southeast Asia: the United States and the Geneva and Manila Conferences," in Lawrence Kaplan, Denise Artaud and Mark Rubin (eds.), *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Press, 1990), pp. 123–148; Geoffrey Warner, "From Geneva to Manila: British policy toward Indochina and SEATO, May–September 1954," *ibid.* pp. 149–167.

2. King C. Chen, *Vietnam and China, 1938–1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), ch. 6; François Joyaux, *La Chine et le Règlement du Premier Conflit d'Indochine: Geneva 1954* (Paris, Université de Paris, 1979); Kuo-kang Shao, "Zhou Enlai's diplomacy and the neutralization of Indo-China, 1954–55," *The China Quarterly*, No. 107 (September 1986), pp. 483–504.

3. William J. Duiker, *Vietnam: Nation in Revolution* (Boulder: Westview, 1983), pp. 43–44.

the Vietminh (the short form for the League for the Independence of Vietnam, founded by Ho Chi Minh in 1941). China did not fear this, Liu continued, because when it became stronger later, the French would have to recognize it. Accordingly, the Chinese government asked the Soviet ambassador to convey to the Kremlin Beijing's suggestion that the Soviet Union should recognize the DRV and invite Ho Chi Minh to visit Moscow and talk to Stalin directly. Ho made his visit in early 1950.⁴

Upon Ho's request, the Chinese government agreed to provide military and political assistance to the Vietminh. In 1950 Beijing sent three important advisers to Ho. Luo Guibo, one-time political commissar of a unit in the PLA's Second Field Army, headed a team of Chinese political advisers to assist the Vietminh on economic and administrative matters. Luo later became the first Chinese ambassador to the DRV. General Wei Guoqing, a native of Guangxi, led the Chinese Military Advisory Group (CMAG) to help Ho's border campaign. General Chen Geng was the most important of the three. He had met Ho Chi Minh in Guangzhou between 1925 and 1926 when the Vietnamese leader was engaged in anti-colonial activities in China. As representative of the CCP's Central Committee to the Vietminh, Chen entered Vietnam in late July 1950.⁵

Like its intervention in Korea, China's decision to assist the Vietminh in the early 1950s was determined by a blend of geopolitical and ideological considerations. Indo-China was one of the three fronts (the others being Korea and Taiwan) which the CCP perceived as vulnerable to foreign intervention. To eliminate the French troops in northern Vietnam would consolidate China's southern border. Furthermore, the international obligation to assist a brother communist party made the CCP unwilling to turn down the requests from Ho Chi Minh. Mao told the CMAG on 30 June 1950 that it was a "glorious internationalist task" to be advisers to the Vietminh. The Chinese people had won liberation, but the Vietnamese were still suffering under the oppression of French colonialism. Their cause of liberation deserved China's sympathy and assistance. Ho Chi Minh and many other Vietnamese had participated in China's revolutionary struggle

4. Hoang Van Hoan, *A Drop in the Ocean: Hoang Van Hoan's Revolutionary Reminiscences* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1987), pp. 255–56. According to one speculation, Ho Chi Minh possibly went to Moscow with Zhou Enlai on 21 January 1950, and he certainly travelled back to Beijing in the company of Mao and Zhou in mid-February. See R. B. Smith, "China and Southeast Asia: the revolutionary perspective, 1951," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, No. 19 (March 1988), pp. 97–110.

5. Han Nianlong, chief comp., *Dangdai Zhongguo waijiao (Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1987), p. 55; *Jiefangjun jiangling zhuan (Biographies of the Generals of the Liberation Army)* (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1986), Vol. III, p. 252; Han Huaizhi, chief comp., *Dangdai Zhongguo jundui de junshi gongzuo (Contemporary Military Affairs of the Chinese Army)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1989), Vol. I, p. 520.

in the past. Some of them had shed their blood. Now, China ought to support their fight against the French.⁶

In Vietnam, Chen directed the campaign to clear the Sino-Vietnamese border of French troops. He skilfully employed Vietminh forces in mobile warfare and defeated the French in northern Vietnam. France had to jettison a string of bases along the frontier and concede Vietminh control over the entire Viet Bac region, thus giving Ho Chi Minh easy access to his source of supplies in China. After the conclusion of the border campaign, Mao sent a telegram to Chen congratulating him on his success.⁷

Commending Chen highly on his military leadership, Ho Chi Minh said that the border campaign achieved a greater victory than he had expected, and called it “a triumph of proletarian internationalism.” Vo Nguyen Giap, commander of the Vietminh army, claimed that the campaign thwarted the French plan to close the Vietnamese border and to isolate the Vietminh; it had military as well as political and economic significance. “The victory shows Mao’s military thought was very applicable to Vietnam,” he said. Ho Chi Minh asked Chen to stay in Vietnam to direct the next military operation. But Chen received new orders from Beijing and left Vietnam in early November.⁸ (On 8 June of the following year, he was appointed deputy commander of the Chinese People’s Volunteers and in August went to Korea.)

In late 1951 and early 1952, the CMAG proposed to the Vietminh the launching of the north-west campaign. The liberation of the north-western region of Vietnam, the proposal pointed out, would relieve the threat from the rear to the Vietminh-controlled Viet Bac while providing a broader base of support. First Ho Chi Minh, and then in April, the Vietminh Politburo approved the north-west campaign. Under the direction of Chinese advisers, the Vietminh liberated the north-western region in late 1952, which in turn served as a convenient staging area for the later siege of Dien Bien Phu.⁹

In November 1953, the French army occupied that remote valley village in order to protect northern Laos, which Vietminh troops had attacked earlier in the year. In a report to the CCP’s Central Military Commission, Wei Guoqing proposed a campaign to surround and annihilate the French at Dien Bien Phu. Approving the proposal, Beijing asked Wei to help the Vietminh leadership “make up its mind” about the campaign “as quickly as possible.” On 6 December, the Vietminh Politburo approved a plan for attacking Dien Bien Phu prepared by the Vietminh army and established the Dien Bien Phu

6. Han Huaizhi, *Contemporary Military Affairs*, p. 519.

7. *Ibid.* p. 526.

8. Mu Xin (ed.), *Ji Chen Geng jiangjun (Commemorating General Chen Geng)* (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1984), pp. 248–49; Hoang Van Hoan, *A Drop in the Ocean*, pp. 273–74.

9. Han Huaizhi, *Contemporary Military Affairs*, pp. 527–29.

Front Command with Giap as commander-in-chief and Wei as principal adviser. Ho asked the entire Vietminh party and Vietnamese people “to exert all their efforts to ensure the success of the campaign.”¹⁰

To break the French air superiority, China furnished the Vietminh with anti-aircraft guns. Four Vietminh battalions which had been undergoing training in China were sent back to Vietnam equipped with 37mm anti-aircraft guns. At Dien Bien Phu, the Chinese also applied the sniping and fortification experience they had gained in Korea. They taught the Vietminh soldiers to use snipers to disrupt French troop activity. A dozen Chinese army engineering experts who had fought in Korea were dispatched to Vietnam to assist in the construction of defence works, and China supplied large quantities of ammunition to the Vietminh for the battle. Before the launching of the final assault, the CCP Central Military Commission instructed the CMAG “not to spare artillery shells” in order to achieve “a total victory.”¹¹ On 7 May, the last French stronghold capitulated.

Although the Soviet Union recognized the DRV on 30 January 1950, there is no evidence to suggest that Stalin furnished any direct aid to the Vietminh before 1955. Ho Chi Minh attended the Soviet state banquet in honour of Mao on 16 February 1950, during which the Vietminh leader said to Stalin—“jokingly,” according to Wu Xiuquan—that the Soviet Union might sign a treaty with the DRV along the same lines as that signed with the Chinese. But Stalin did not do that.¹² According to Hoang Van Hoan, Stalin told Ho that assisting the Vietminh was primarily China’s business.¹³

Until 1954, China bore full responsibility for guiding and supporting the Vietnamese revolution. According to one Chinese account, between 1950 and 1954 China provided the Vietminh with 116,000 guns and 4,630 cannons, equipping five infantry divisions, one engineering and artillery division, one anti-aircraft regiment, and one guard regiment.¹⁴ However, although displaying solidarity with Ho Chi Minh’s cause, China publicly tried to appear moderate and cautious so as not to affect its relationship with the western powers. This was demonstrated by the diplomatic distance Beijing maintained with Vietnam in the early 1950s. Hoang Van Hoan presented his credentials to the Chinese government as the DRV’s representative on 28 April 1951, but the Chinese media did not report this until 10 October 1952. China did not dispatch an official envoy to the DRV until September 1954 when the Geneva Agreements were concluded;

10. *Ibid.* pp. 530–31.

11. *Ibid.* pp. 532–34.

12. Wu Xiuquan, *Zai waijiaobu banian de jingli (Eight-Year Experience in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs)* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1983), p. 13.

13. Hoang Van Hoan, *A Drop in the Ocean*, p. 259.

14. Han Huaizhi, *Contemporary Military Affairs*, pp. 520–22, 576.

and it was only then that Hoang Van Hoan acquired the title of ambassador.¹⁵

Zhou Enlai and the Geneva Conference

After the conclusion of the Korean War, Beijing put increasing stress on the doctrine of “peaceful coexistence”: to use diplomatic means to improve China’s international standing. Zhou Enlai first mentioned the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” – mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence – during a meeting with an Indian delegation in December 1953. Beijing contended that the Five Principles were applicable not only to Sino-Indian relations but also to international affairs in general. During the break between sessions of the Geneva Conference, Zhou Enlai visited New Delhi and Rangoon in June, and in the ensuing Sino-Indian and Sino-Burmese agreements, the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” were officially embodied.¹⁶

During the latter part of 1953 and early 1954, the communist world launched a peace initiative. On 28 September 1953, the Soviet Union sent a proposal to the United States, France and Britain, calling for a five-power conference (including China) to examine ways of reducing international tensions. About 10 days later Zhou Enlai issued a statement supporting the Soviet suggestion. On 26 November, Ho Chi Minh told the Swedish newspaper *Expression* that he was prepared to negotiate with the French on the Indo-China conflict. On 9 January 1954, Zhou made another pronouncement, declaring that the urgent international problems in Asia had developed to a stage where they must be examined and solved through consultation between the big powers that were involved.¹⁷ On 25 January, the Soviet foreign minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, proposed at the Berlin Conference that a five-power international conference be held to deal with the tensions in Asia. There was initial opposition from the United States, but Britain and France were eager to see a solution of the disputes in the region. The conference finally endorsed the plan to convene an international meeting to restore peace in Korea and Indo-China.¹⁸

Beijing attached great importance to the conference. In March, the Chinese government prepared a “preliminary paper on the estimation of and the preparation for the Geneva Conference,” which said that

15. Melvin Gurtov, *The First Vietnam Crisis: Chinese Communist Strategy and United States Involvements, 1953–1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 9; Robert S. Ross, *The Indochina Tangle: China’s Vietnam Policy, 1975–1979* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 19.

16. Han Nianlong, *Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy*, pp. 80–81.

17. *Ibid.* p. 56.

18. For the text of the Berlin communiqué, see State Department Press Release, 19 February 1954, *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. XVI, p. 415.

China should take advantage of the differences between the United States, France and Britain over the Indo-China issue and try to reach agreements, even temporary ones. The goal, according to the document, was to avoid a fruitless conference.¹⁹ In order to coordinate Chinese–Soviet–North Vietnamese policies at Geneva as well as to overcome Beijing’s inexperience in international meetings, the Chinese government had close consultations with the governments of the Soviet Union and the DRV before the opening of the conference. In March, a Sino-Vietnamese preparatory meeting was held in Beijing. According to Shi Zhe, who was then political adviser to the Chinese delegation to the Geneva Conference, Zhou Enlai made three visits to the Soviet Union in April. During his first trip, Zhou held discussions with Khrushchev and Molotov. The Soviet foreign minister related to the Chinese his evaluation of the likely process and outcome of the conference.²⁰

After the first visit, Zhou returned to Beijing to report to the Chinese leadership on his trip. Several days later he went to Moscow again to hold further talks with Soviet officials regarding conference strategy as well as the composition of the Chinese and Soviet delegations. Molotov informed Zhou how the Soviet Union had selected its delegation, which totalled more than 120 people, including experts in various fields. As a result, the Chinese delegation also contained people with diverse areas of expertise.²¹ According to Wang Bingnan, who was secretary general of the Chinese delegation, Zhou Enlai entrusted him to select the Chinese participants and establish rules of conduct for the delegation. Together with his colleagues, Wang worked “day and night making all kinds of preparations.” Huang Hua was appointed spokesman for the Chinese delegation. In order to ensure that Huang would be able to handle different questions that were likely to arise at the conference, a mock press meeting was held to test the appropriateness of his answers.²²

On 19 April, the Chinese delegation was announced, with Zhou Enlai as chief representative and deputy foreign ministers Zhang Wentian, Wang Jiaxiang and Li Kenong as representatives. The Party leadership gave the delegation the following instructions: first, to exercise active diplomacy at Geneva in order to break the American policy of isolation and embargo towards China and to reduce world

19. Han Nianlong, *Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy*, pp. 64–65.

20. Shi Zhe participated in Zhou’s three visits to the Soviet Union. See Shi Zhe, “Rineiwa huiyi sanji” (“Random recollections of the Geneva Conference”), *Renwu* (January 1989), p. 37; Khrushchev wrote in his memoirs that before the Geneva Conference the Soviet Union, China and North Vietnam held a preparatory meeting in Moscow “to work out the position” they would take at Geneva. China was represented by Zhou Enlai, Vietnam by Ho Chi Minh and the prime minister Pham Van Dong. Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), p. 481.

21. Shi Zhe, “Random recollections,” p. 38; Zhou even included two master cooks in the Chinese delegation so that at Geneva he could hold Chinese banquets to “make friends.” See Wang Bingnan, *ZhongMei huitan jiu nian huigu (Recollections of the Nine-Year Sino-American Talks)* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1985), p. 7.

22. *Ibid.* pp. 5–7.

tensions; and secondly, to try to conclude agreements so as to set a precedent for solving international problems through big power consultations.²³

Zhou made his third visit to Moscow when he was leading the Chinese delegation on the way to Geneva. In order to familiarize the Chinese delegation with the usual proceedings of an international meeting, Molotov asked Andrei Gromyko, the deputy Soviet foreign minister, to talk to the Chinese about Soviet experiences in international gatherings. After that, the Chinese and Soviet delegations left Moscow for Geneva separately. Zhou's arrival at Geneva airport on 14 April was a media sensation.²⁴

The Korean session of the Geneva Conference did not produce any agreement largely because the contending sides had different views about the role of the United Nations in the political settlement of the dispute. The South Koreans, backed by the United States, insisted on using the international organization to supervise the post-war election in Korea. China rejected United Nations authority over collective security in Korea, stressing the international role of neutral countries. To the Chinese, the United Nations was not an impartial force because it had been used by the United States to condemn China as an "aggressor" in Korea.²⁵

It was during the Indo-China session that Zhou Enlai found more opportunities to prove himself a skilful diplomat. China's basic objective was to prevent the internationalization of the Indo-China conflict, as had happened in Korea. There were both internal and external reasons for this position. Domestically, China needed to concentrate on its plan to rehabilitate the economy, a process which had been disrupted and postponed by participation in the Korean War. According to Khrushchev, Zhou Enlai told him in Moscow before the Geneva Conference that China could not meet Ho Chi Minh's demands to send Chinese troops to Vietnam. The Chinese premier claimed: "We've already lost too many men in Korea – that war cost us dearly. We're in no condition to get involved in another war at this time."²⁶ Internationally, the Chinese leadership was apprehensive about the possibility of American intervention in Indo-China. Beijing believed that Washington, determined to torpedo the Geneva Conference, was looking for opportunities to move into

23. *Ibid.* p. 6.

24. Shi Zhe, "Random recollections," p. 38.

25. Han Nianlong, *Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy*, pp. 51–52; Ronald C. Keith, *The Diplomacy of Zhou Enlai* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989), p. 61.

26. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, p. 482; China's desire to focus on domestic reconstruction was also noted by western observers in China. The British chargé in Beijing, Humphrey Trevelyan, told the American delegation at Geneva on 14 May that "the Chinese communist regime is not interested in pushing forward externally for the time being but wishes to concentrate on internal developments." See memorandum of conversation with Trevelyan, by Edwin Martin (adviser to the U.S. delegation to the Geneva Conference), 14 May 1954, *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. XVI, p. 804.

South-east Asia.²⁷ In the course of the conference, the Chinese media repeatedly condemned “the American plot of organizing a South-east Asian military bloc” in order to “use Asians to fight Asians.” A *Shijie zhishi* editorial of 20 May contended that “the ruling clique in the United States is carrying out a policy of establishing new colonial authority in Asia” to replace the old imperial powers such as Britain, France and the Netherlands. Another editorial in the same journal two weeks later asserted that the plan to create a military organization in South-east Asia was part of America’s general policy of establishing a new colonial empire, which resembled the “Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere” advocated by Japan during the Second World War.²⁸ Furthermore, a moderate policy in Indo-China was in line with Beijing’s new diplomatic emphasis on peaceful coexistence. The Geneva Conference provided China a good opportunity to enhance its international prestige and increase influence among the neutral nations in Asia by playing the part of peacemaker. Beijing insistently claimed that it was speaking for all Asia.

With the strategy of avoiding an extension of the Indo-China conflict and denying the United States the chance to intervene, Zhou Enlai engaged in active diplomacy, bringing into play an unexpected flexibility. His approach was to win over the majority of the participants, including France, and to isolate the United States. His job was made easier by the Vietminh victory at Dien Bien Phu, which made the French all the more eager to extract themselves from Indo-China. As Wang Bingnan recalled, when the news of Dien Bien Phu came, “we spread it to each other. We were very much encouraged and felt more confident in solving the Indo-China issue.”²⁹

In response to what China perceived as the American strategy of “using Asians to fight Asians,” Zhou employed his “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.” At the third plenary session on Indo-China on 12 May, Zhou stated:

Asian countries must mutually respect each other’s independence and sovereignty and not interfere in each other’s internal affairs; they must solve their disputes through peaceful negotiation and not through threats and military force; they must establish normal economic and cultural relations on the basis of equality and mutual benefit and disallow discrimination and limitation. Only in this way can the Asian countries avoid the neo-colonialist

27. Han Nianlong, *Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy*, p. 67; Wang Bingnan, *Recollections*, p. 11. Kuo-kang Shao has argued that a key element in Zhou Enlai’s diplomacy in Indo-China during 1954–55 was his effort to “neutralize” the area. Kuo-kang Shao, “Zhou Enlai’s diplomacy and the neutralization of Indo-China, 1954–55,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 107 (September 1986), pp. 483–504.

28. “Shixian Yazhou heping he anquan de genben daolu,” (“The basic route to the realization of peace and security in Asia”), *Shijie zhishi*, No. 10 (20 May 1954), p. 3; “Yazhou renmin de yuan wang shi juegui burong hushi de,” (“The aspiration of the Asian people cannot absolutely be ignored”), *ibid.* No. 11 (5 June 1954), p. 3.

29. Han Nianlong, *Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy*, pp. 65–66; Wang Bingnan, *Recollections*, p. 12.

exploitation of the unprecedented catastrophe of Asians fighting Asians and achieve peace and security.³⁰

King Chen has summarized Zhou's three contributions to the conclusion of the Geneva Agreements on Indo-China: first, persuading North Vietnam to withdraw its troops from Laos and Cambodia; secondly, obtaining Ho Chi Minh's consent to proceed with the general peace plan at Geneva; and thirdly, solving the issue of the composition of the international supervisory commission.³¹ Recent Chinese sources throw new light on Zhou's contributions to the conference, especially his role in persuading the North Vietnamese to accept the 17th parallel as the demarcation line.

On 16 June, Pierre Mendès-France was elected premier in France. During the election campaign he had promised that he would secure a settlement of the Indo-China dispute by 20 July or resign. According to Shi Zhe, the Chinese initially were not sure of Mendès-France's intentions regarding Indo-China, and Zhou decided to visit him. On 23 June, the two leaders met in Berne, Switzerland. From this discussion, Zhou realized that France was very tired of the Vietnam War and domestic anti-war sentiment was high. The French government was anxious to withdraw from Indo-China, but it wanted to do so "gracefully in appearance." In this way, Mendès-France hoped to consolidate his power at home.³²

According to American documents, during his talk with Mendès-France, Zhou spoke most of the time. The French side detected "a considerable advance over Zhou's previous position." By acknowledging the presence of two governments in the territory of Vietnam, the Chinese premier for the first time "recognized the valid existence of the [South] Vietnamese government." Mendès-France told Zhou that negotiations with the Vietminh had been "at a practical standstill for the past week or ten days," and that he wanted the Chinese leader to talk to the head of the Hanoi delegation in order to speed things up. Zhou agreed to intervene with the Vietminh and ask them to make progress in negotiations.³³

Zhou Enlai saw an opportunity in the French distress to reach agreement at Geneva. Shi Zhe asserts that after the meeting with the French prime minister, Zhou reported his findings on the French situation to Pham Van Dong, head of the Vietminh delegation to the Geneva Conference. He asked the Vietminh leader not to "haggle over" (*jijiao*) the 16th or 17th parallel. Giving Mendès-France a way to save face would be a small price to pay for his withdrawal of the French troops. Zhou went on, "after French withdrawal, the whole of Vietnam will be yours."³⁴ Clearly, Zhou considered the acceptance of

30. *Renmin ribao*, 14 May 1954.

31. Chen, *Vietnam and China*, p. 309.

32. Shi Zhe, "Random recollections," p. 42.

33. Dillon (U.S. ambassador to France) to State Department, 24 June 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Vol. XVI, pp. 1240-41.

34. Shi Zhe, "Random recollections," p. 43.

the 17th parallel as a temporary tactical concession on the part of the Vietminh. In his view, when the French troops were no longer in Vietnam, the Vietminh would be able to unify the country.

Zhou had meetings with Ho Chi Minh in Liuzhou, a city near the Sino-Vietnamese border from 3 to 5 July. He persuaded the Vietminh leader to accept the idea of compromising on the issue of the demarcation line in order to end the war. On 10 July, on his way back to Geneva, Zhou stopped in Moscow to confer with the Soviet leaders, who shared China's view that it was time to conclude a deal at Geneva while Mendès-France was still in office. The United States was putting pressure on the French leader, the Soviets believed; if the Vietminh insisted on Mendès-France's accepting "unacceptable" demands, the Americans would take advantage of this, the pro-war faction within France would gain the upper hand and the Mendès-France government would collapse. This would be detrimental both to the solution of the Indo-China conflict and the welfare of the DRV.³⁵

The Geneva Agreements of 1954 reflected the moderating influences of the Chinese and Soviet delegations. Vietnam was to be divided temporarily along the 17th parallel to allow the regrouping of military forces from both sides. The country was to be neutralized, and neither side was to enter a military alliance. Elections were to be held in July 1956 under the supervision of an international commission composed of Canadian, Indian and Polish representatives. The accords also made ceasefire arrangements for Laos and Cambodia. Vietminh forces were to leave Laos and Cambodia, and French forces to vacate all three.³⁶

The Vietminh accepted the solution reluctantly. As Wang Bingnan admitted, "some people in the Vietminh hoped to unify the whole of Vietnam at one stroke."³⁷ Ho Chi Minh must have realized that without Chinese and Soviet assistance, he could not have defeated the French and achieved the position he had now. He could not afford to resist the pressure of his two communist allies. On the other hand, the Vietminh leader no doubt had every reason to believe, as did Zhou Enlai and Molotov, that all Vietnam would be his in two years.

To the surprise and disappointment of the three communist countries, Diem consolidated his regime in South Vietnam with the help of the United States. When the time came for the national election on reunification in accordance with the Geneva Accords, Saigon refused to participate on the ground that a free vote was impossible in North Vietnam. Furthermore, Diem claimed that his government was not bound by the Geneva Accords since it had not signed them.

According to western journalists, Zhou Enlai was very upset with this development. In August 1971, when James Reston of *The New*

35. Han Nianlong, *Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy*, pp. 66–67.

36. For a complete text of the Geneva Agreements, see Chen, *Vietnam and China*, appendix IV, pp. 375–405.

37. Wang Bingnan, *Recollections*, p. 13.

York Times asked Zhou if he was willing to mediate in the conflict between the United States and North Vietnam, the Chinese premier answered: “We don’t want to be a mediator in any way. We were very badly taken in during the first Geneva Conference.” On another occasion, Zhou told Harrison Salisbury of *The New York Times* that “never again” would he “put pressure” on Hanoi to accept an international solution of the war modelled on the Geneva Conference of 1954. He himself had been “personally responsible for urging the Vietnamese to go along with the agreement. He would not be party to any similar effort in the future.”³⁸

Sino-Soviet Relations at the Geneva Conference

The Soviet Union had its own reasons to moderate the Vietminh demands. As well as having limited interests in South-east Asia, Moscow wanted to encourage France to reject the European Defence Community (EDC). Mendès-France was a bitter opponent of the EDC and his continuation in office would reduce the likelihood of French approval of it. To the Soviet leadership, the opportunity to undermine the plan for German rearmament was clearly more important than the perpetuation of a communist war in Indo-China.³⁹ During the Geneva Conference, Eden found Molotov very willing to “get moving” on Indo-China.⁴⁰

At Geneva, the Soviet Union was eager not only to achieve a settlement in Indo-China but also to reduce tensions in China’s relations with the west, especially with the United States. The Kremlin was obviously very uneasy with the intense hostility between the United States and China. Another military conflict between Beijing and Washington like the Korean War would only divert Soviet attention and resources from its own priorities, such as domestic developments. As early as the Berlin Conference, Moscow had urged Washington to recognize the PRC. Molotov told Dulles that American policy toward China “was bankrupt” and “would never succeed in overthrowing [the] Chinese communists. They were proud people who demanded [a] rightful place.” The Soviet foreign minister expressed the hope “with apparent sincerity” that his proposal for a

38. For Zhou’s statement to Reston, see Seymour Topping, *Journey Between Two Chinas* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 152; for Zhou’s remarks to Salisbury, see Harrison E. Salisbury, *To Peking and Beyond: A Report on the New Asia* (New York: Quadrangle, 1973), pp. 225–26. In 1979, the Vietnamese government issued a White Paper on Sino-Vietnamese relations, which charged that “the Chinese leaders betrayed the revolutionary struggle of the peoples of Viet Nam, Laos and Kampuchea.” See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, *The Truth about Vietnam–China Relations over the Last Thirty Years* (Hanoi, 1979), p. 23. In his memoirs, Wang refuted the Vietnamese charge as “a vicious, untruthful attack and slander.” Wang Bingnan, *Recollections*, p. 12.

39. David J. Dallin, *Soviet Foreign Policy After Stalin* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1961), p. 153; Joseph L. Noguee and Robert H. Donaldson, *Soviet Foreign Policy since World War II* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1988 (3rd ed.)), p. 111.

40. Smith to State Department, 21 May 1954, *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. XVI, p. 875.

five-power conference “would be an acceptable opening for better relations between [the] U.S. and China.”⁴¹ At Geneva, the Soviets again urged the United States to improve relations with Beijing. During a meeting with the American representative Walter Bedell Smith on 22 May, Molotov said that China was only five years old and needed time to devote its attention and resources to its problems. When Smith claimed that there was a line beyond which compromise could not go and that the Americans would not abandon their principles in dealing with China, Molotov replied that he understood, and stressed again that “China is a very young country.”⁴² Molotov’s remarks were interesting in that they betrayed Soviet perceptions of China’s foreign policy. By describing China as “young,” Molotov must have meant that Beijing was inexperienced and rash in international politics; and that when China grew older, it would become more restrained. Therefore, the United States should be patient with China.

The Soviet foreign minister also showed familiarity with the issues in Sino-American relations. When Smith raised the question of detained American citizens and air force personnel in China, Molotov responded by mentioning Chinese students in the United States who were unable to return to China. He said that he saw no reason why a matter of this sort could not be very readily resolved. Molotov’s knowledge of Sino-American grievances may reflect the constant exchange of views and consultations between China and the Soviet Union before and during the Geneva Conference.⁴³

At Geneva, the Soviet Union not only intervened in Sino-American relations, but also facilitated the improvement of the Sino-British relationship. As Shi Zhe recalls, Zhou’s first meeting with Eden took place at the residence of the Soviet delegation. Molotov invited the Chinese and British representatives to a party at his quarters with the purpose of encouraging a Sino-British dialogue.⁴⁴ The British told the Americans later that Molotov “raised no question of substance but seemed interested rather in encouraging cordiality between his guests.”⁴⁵

While recent Chinese memoirs and official histories generally stress the unity and co-operation between the Soviet Union and China regarding the Geneva Conference, there are indications that Moscow was more moderate and cautious than Beijing. According to Shi Zhe, during a preparatory meeting in Moscow before the Geneva Confer-

41. Dulles to State Department, 30 January 1954, *ibid.* Vol. XIV, part 1, pp. 353–54.

42. Smith to State Department, 21 May 1954, *ibid.* Vol. XVI, p. 898.

43. *Ibid.* pp. 898–99; according to Shi Zhe, the Chinese, Soviet and Vietminh delegations maintained frequent consultations during the Geneva Conference. The Soviet delegation stayed in a house they owned in Geneva, and most important Sino-Soviet discussions were conducted there. Every couple of days, Zhou would go there to have talks. When the Soviet foreign minister returned Zhou’s visits, they never discussed important issues at the villa the Chinese delegation rented for fear that the building might have been bugged. Shi Zhe, “Random recollections,” p. 39.

44. *Ibid.* p. 41.

45. Dulles to State Department, 1 May 1954, *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. XVI, p. 648.

ence, Molotov cautioned the Chinese not to entertain “unrealistic illusions” in Geneva because imperialist countries had “unshakable interests.” The proper line, the Soviet foreign minister argued, was to be flexible, striving for the best and adjusting policy to the development of the conference and the international situation as a whole.⁴⁶

The Soviets obviously did not have as high an expectation in Geneva as the Chinese, and especially the Vietminh, did. Khrushchev said in his memoirs that “we gasped with surprise and pleasure” when “we were informed of” the French proposal of the 17th parallel as the demarcation line. “We hadn’t expected anything like this,” Khrushchev continued, “the 17th parallel was the absolute maximum we would have claimed ourselves.” At Geneva, Molotov himself acknowledged to Eden that the Soviet Union had differences with its allies. He claimed that “it would be wrong to believe that [the] Soviet Union controls China.”⁴⁷

The British had an explanation for Moscow’s eagerness to conclude peace in Korea and Indo-China. According to this theory, the Soviet Union was now a “‘satisfied power,’ anxious for stability and repose, and therefore likely to be apprehensive of the activities of unsatisfied adventurers like Zhou Enlai.”⁴⁸ At Geneva, Eden said to Molotov jokingly that the Soviet Union and Britain were playing the role of “inside left and inside right” respectively. The Soviet foreign minister liked the idea very much.⁴⁹

Eden’s principal private secretary Evelyn Shuckburgh made this observation about the Soviet Union and China:

Molotov is more afraid of a world war and atomic bombs than Zhou Enlai, partly because Russia is more open to attack, partly because she is more of a satisfied power and has a lot to lose, and partly because he (Molotov) is a wiser and calmer man. One has a feeling that the Chinese are in a reckless and self-assertive mood.

Before coming to Geneva, Shuckburgh had wanted “to get close to Chou, and try to detach him from Molotov.” But as it had turned out, the British were “more in the mood to get close to Molotov, to help him control Zhou.”⁵⁰

Sino-British Rapprochement

The Geneva Conference marked an improvement in Sino-British relations. Zhou and Eden exchanged visits several times in the course of the negotiations, during which they discussed bilateral relations. At

46. Shi Zhe, “Random recollections,” pp. 37–38.

47. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, pp. 482–83; Smith to State Department, 21 May 1954, *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. XVI, p. 875.

48. Shuckburgh diary entry, 5 May 1954, Evelyn Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez: Diaries 1951–56* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), p. 193.

49. *Ibid.*

50. Shuckburgh diary entry, 9 May 1954, *ibid.* p. 198.

their 2 June meeting, the British foreign secretary raised the question of the Chinese treatment of Humphrey Trevelyan, the British chargé in Beijing. He asked that Trevelyan be given the usual diplomatic courtesies and privileges and be allowed to meet appropriate Chinese officials. The Chinese replied that they would take care of these matters.⁵¹ It was at Geneva that diplomatic relations were established between Britain and China at the level of chargé d'affaires. Beijing recognized Trevelyan's status as British chargé and agreed to send a Chinese chargé to London. Before that time, the Chinese government had only recognized Trevelyan as the "head of the British delegation for negotiations of the establishment of diplomatic relations."⁵²

Zhou and Eden's assistants also exchanged regular visits. Many of the controversial issues between the two countries, such as the treatment of British firms in China, exit permits for British businessmen and the release of British prisoners, were dealt with at this level of talks. It was agreed that a trade delegation from the China National Export and Import Corporation would visit London and that a return visit by British companies to China would follow.⁵³ These lower-level meetings, like Zhou-Eden discussions, were often characterized by relaxation and cordiality. Trevelyan informed the Americans that in general his relations with the members of the Chinese delegation had been "pleasant and friendly," and he "gets along best" with Huan Xiang, Qiao Guanhua and Gong Peng. The British diplomat also criticized American press reports that the British diplomats were laughed at in the streets of China, as being "not in accord with facts." He said that he himself had never encountered any slight or mockery by Chinese in Beijing.⁵⁴

At Geneva, Zhou Enlai also had contact with the representatives of the British Labour Party. At a meeting with Harold Wilson, former Labour president of the Board of Trade, they discussed the possibilities of developing Sino-British trade. One result of the Geneva contact was the visit to China later in the year by Clement Attlee and other leaders of the Labour Party. As Morgan Phillips, secretary of the British delegation, recalled, Zhou spent a lot of time "discussing the new constitution of China and the problem of Formosa." In order to meet the British visitors, Zhou and a number of ministers and officials

51. Smith to State Department, 2 June 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, Vol. XVI, p. 1011.

52. Humphrey Trevelyan, *Living with the Communists* (Boston: Gambit, 1971), p. 83; Eden disclosed in his memoirs that, at a dinner he held for Zhou at Geneva when he "twitted" the Chinese foreign minister with not sending a representative to London, Zhou immediately expressed a willingness to do so. The Chinese clearly left a favourable impression on his host, as Eden wrote: "Zhou is poised and firm in negotiation. He works for the fine point, even by the standard of his country." Anthony Eden, *Full Circle* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. 138.

53. Trevelyan, *Living with the Communists*, pp. 82-83. During his negotiations with the Chinese at Geneva, Trevelyan also inquired on behalf of the United States the condition of detained Americans in China. Smith to State Department, 17 May 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, Vol. XIV, part 1, pp. 417-18.

54. Martin memorandum of conversation with Trevelyan, 14 May 1954, *ibid.* Vol. XVI, pp. 803-806.

came to the British mission in Beijing for the first time. Aneurin Bevan delivered a speech to the Chinese People's Consultative Committee.⁵⁵

Writing in *Shijie zhishi* on 20 August, Ji Zhaoding, secretary general of the Chinese International Trade Promotion Committee, called for the expansion of trade between Britain and China. After noting the recent increase in Sino-British trade, the author argued that continuation of this trend would be not only beneficial to the fulfilment of China's First Five-Year Plan but also helpful to the alleviation of the British economic recession.⁵⁶ Optimism in Sino-British relations was evident in China's media. A 5 September *Shijie zhishi* article made a hopeful forecast of the future ties between London and Beijing. The author attributed the lack of progress in the Sino-British relationship since 1950 to the pressures of the American government, especially during the Korean War. The absence of normal relations had inflicted great damage on the Chinese and English people as well as the cause of world peace. During the Geneva Conference, the article continued, Sino-British relations had improved due to the efforts of the two countries' statesmen. But it was just a beginning, and there were further opportunities to develop the relationship, most notably in trade. The American economic embargo against China had undermined British overseas commerce and deepened its domestic economic difficulties. "Today," the author concluded, "it was only the United States that showed anger, fear and apprehension" about the improvement in Sino-British relations.⁵⁷ Obviously, the article here was trying to sow discord between London and Washington.

Dulles' Snub of China

The Eisenhower administration inherited the principles of the Indo-China policy bequeathed by Truman and Acheson. The architects of the "new look" foreign policy saw Ho Chi Minh as a tool of international communism and believed that the loss of Indo-China would produce a "domino" effect throughout the rest of the region with serious damage to the political, economic and strategic interests of the United States. They were therefore resolved to prevent its fall.

In April 1954, when the French position in Indo-China began to crumble, Dulles asked the British to join a "united action," a coalition including the United States, Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand and the Associated States to guarantee the security of South-east Asia. But London objected to intervening

55. Morgan Phillips, *East Meets West* (London: Lincolns-Praeger, 1954), p. 42; Trevelyan, *Living with the Communists*, pp. 118–19.

56. Ji Zhaoding, "Kuo-zhan Zhong-Ying maoyi de juda kenengxing," ("The great opportunity in expanding Sino-British trade"), *Shijie zhishi*, No. 16 (20 August 1954), pp. 5–6.

57. Su Chao, "Zhanwang Zhong-Ying guanxi," ("Forecasting Sino-British relations") *Shijie zhishi*, No. 17 (5 September 1954), pp. 10–12.

before the Geneva Conference. Churchill and Eden did not share the American “domino” theory regarding Indo-China. They feared that outside military interference would dash any hope of a negotiated settlement at Geneva and provoke a war with China. They did not want to involve Britain in a conflict in which they had little to gain but much to lose. Furthermore, Britain’s Commonwealth allies in Asia would oppose an expansion of the war in Indo-China.⁵⁸

Dulles viewed the Geneva Conference, as Gary Hess has observed, “as a ‘holding action’ – a necessary step to assure French participation in the EDC while rebuilding their position in Indo-China.”⁵⁹ As for Chinese participation, the secretary of state refused to accept Beijing as one of the “Five Big Powers.” At the Berlin Conference early in the year, despite Dulles’ vigorous efforts to prevent it, America’s allies prevailed in inviting China to the Geneva Conference. After an agreement had been reached at Berlin to convene the Geneva Conference, Dulles claimed, “we maintain our refusal to give it [China] any position of preferment, or to contribute to the enhancement of its authority and prestige.”⁶⁰ In fact, the Berlin communiqué had included a caveat which stated that “neither the invitation to, nor the holding of” the Geneva Conference “shall be deemed to imply diplomatic recognition in any case where it has not already been accorded.”⁶¹

The Eisenhower administration was under political attack for participating in an international meeting at which Beijing, rather than Taipei, was represented. Right-wing congressmen and the China Lobby drew an analogy between Yalta and Geneva. In this connection, the experience of Arthur Dean, special ambassador to Korea and chief American delegate in the Panmunjom talks, must have alerted Eisenhower and Dulles to the strong domestic sentiment against “appeasement” of communism. In an interview published in the *Providence Journal* on 3 January 1954, Dean called for a review of American policy toward China, resurrecting the old idea that America could drive a wedge between China and the Soviet Union by improving relations with Beijing.⁶² Senator Herman Welker spoke in Congress on 14 January, charging that Dean “offers the view which has long been held by pro-Red China apologists in the State Department.” The current American policy, the senator from Idaho claimed, “is a real policy because it refuses to offer a bribe to the slave

58. For British attitudes toward Indo-China, see Geoffrey Warner, “Britain and the crisis over Dien Bien Phu, April 1954: the failure of united action,” and “From Geneva to Malina: British policy toward Indochina and SEATO, May–September, 1954,” in Kaplan, Artaud and Rubin, *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955*, pp. 55–77, 149–167.

59. Gary Hess, “Redefining the American position in Southeast Asia: the United States and the Geneva and Malina Conferences,” *ibid.* p. 126.

60. Dulles to State Department, 18 February 1954, *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. XVI, p. 17.

61. State Department Press Release, 19 February 1954, *ibid.* p. 415.

62. David A. Mayers, *Cracking the Monolith: U.S. Policy Against the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1949–1955* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), p. 130.

rulers of China,” and “because it refuses even to discuss the possibility of United Nations membership for a bloody aggressor whose policies have brought murderous ruin and destruction to millions.” Welker closed his remarks by linking Dean to such reputedly communist entities as the Institute of Pacific Affairs.⁶³

Throughout the conference, Dulles remained sensitive to indications of congressional and public criticism of the administration’s conduct at Geneva. His behaviour there must have pleased his political detractors. The secretary of state contended that he would not meet Zhou Enlai “unless our automobiles collide.” He refused to shake hands with the Chinese premier when the latter approached him at Geneva.⁶⁴ On 13 July, when Mendès-France asked Dulles to return to Geneva for the conference’s final sessions, Dulles declined, contending that “the memories of Yalta in the United States were very fresh.” “The U.S. Government,” he went on, “cannot be associated with a settlement which would be portrayed in the U.S. as a second Yalta.” The fact that the president and he had agreed to the conference “has been a political liability.”⁶⁵

The Geneva Conference provided the administration an opportunity to observe the operation of the Sino-Soviet alliance at close range. There are indications that American analysts perceived the differences between the two communist powers over Indo-China. American journalists speculated at the time that the Soviets viewed “with significant discomfiture” China’s efforts to “strike [an] independent role” at Geneva.⁶⁶ To Dulles, Moscow appeared to have taken a position more moderate than Beijing’s. The Soviets “might exert an influence on communist China to desist,” the secretary of state told French foreign minister Georges Bidault on 21 April 1954, “because they feared that the Chinese might drag them into a general war. . . .” Bidault shared this view for he also agreed that “the Soviet Union is afraid of China and the possibility that China might drag Russia into something against her will.”⁶⁷

Eden also detected Russian uneasiness about China’s independent role in Geneva. During a dinner on 20 May, Molotov said he had read in the newspapers that Britain and the United States were having differences, and that he did not believe it. Eden answered that he was right not to do so, because allies often had “to argue their respective points of view.” Molotov continued, “That is right, we have to do that

63. *Congressional Record*, 14 January 1954, pp. 250–51.

64. For Dulles’ statement, see C. L. Sulzberger, *A Long Row of Candles* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 1003; In his memoirs, Wang Bingnan denied the occurrence of Dulles’ refusal to shake hands with Zhou Enlai. Wang Bingnan, *Recollections*, pp. 21–22.

65. Johnson memorandum of conversation, 13 July 1954, *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. XVI, p. 1352.

66. Johnson to State Department, 2 June 1954, *ibid.* p. 1251.

67. Godley (first secretary of Embassy in France) to State Department, 21 April 1954, *ibid.* Vol. XIII, p. 1334.

amongst ourselves, too... China is very much her own master in these matters.”⁶⁸

On 26 June, Senator William Knowland sent Dulles some intelligence information from Beijing regarding tensions in Sino-Soviet relations. According to this source, when American military intervention in Indo-China “seemed to be a reality,” Beijing asked Zhou to secure a Soviet commitment if the United States attacked China. After consultations with Moscow, Molotov replied that both the Soviet Union and China “are not adequately prepared for war on a large scale,” and that Moscow would retaliate immediately if “the United States attacks China with atomic or hydrogen bombs.” In the event of a conventional assault, the Soviet Union “will aid China with all the available weapons, industrial products, materials and technical skills. It is to the advantage of China that Soviet Russia should temporarily stand aside.” Beijing’s reaction, the document asserted, “is mild resentment.” The Chinese thought that “the Russian comrades are somewhat selfish.”⁶⁹

Knowland’s intelligence material must have reinforced Dulles’ conviction that high pressure on China represented the best strategy to promote divisions in the Sino-Soviet relationship. Viewed in this context, Dulles’ refusal to acknowledge China’s “big power” status and his cold-shouldering of Zhou Enlai at Geneva assume meanings that go beyond the surface appearances. His hostility towards China not only represented a keen sensitivity to domestic sentiments but also underlined a calculated intention to drive a wedge between Beijing and Moscow.⁷⁰

Despite Dulles’ antagonism toward China, the Geneva Conference did result in one limited contact between China and the United States: Sino-American negotiations over American prisoners in China and Chinese students in the United States. At Geneva, the United States asked Trevelyan to approach China on the issue of detained American citizens in China. Seeing this as an opportunity to open a channel of contact with the United States, Zhou Enlai responded that China would not discuss the issue with anyone but high-level American officials because, since both China and the United States had representatives in Geneva, there was no reason to use intermediaries. At a special press conference on 26 May, Huang Hua, spokesman of the Chinese delegation, announced that China was prepared to discuss with the United States the question of American prisoners in China. Huang also criticized the American government for preventing Chinese students in America from returning to

68. Eden, *Full Circle*, p. 136.

69. Dulles to Knowland, 30 June 1954, Dulles Papers, Box 79, “China, 1954” folder, Mudd Library, Princeton University.

70. For detailed treatments of Dulles’ “wedge” strategy, see John L. Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 147–194; Mayers, *Cracking the Monolith*; Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: the United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948–1972* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

China.⁷¹ Securing the release of Americans proved more important than political isolation and the American government agreed to negotiate with the Chinese. To minimize domestic reactions, Dulles instructed Bedell Smith to make a statement at Geneva stressing that these talks should not be construed as the opening step toward diplomatic recognition of China.⁷²

Between 5 and 21 June, four official meetings were held at Geneva with China represented by Wang Bingnan and the United States by U. Alexis Johnson. Although the two sides did exchange information about people to be repatriated, Beijing failed to obtain any response to suggestions of wider discussions and substantial changes in Sino-American relations. While these negotiations did not produce any agreement, they did pave the way for the Sino-American ambassadorial talks starting in August 1955.⁷³

Summary

The Geneva Conference of 1954 represented an important event in the development of China's foreign policy. For the first time, Beijing's diplomacy became the focus of attention in an international meeting. Despite American opposition and delaying tactics, the conference was a diplomatic triumph for China. It greatly enhanced Beijing's international status. China's leaders clearly perceived their role in global rather than in regional terms. Their pride and confidence were best expressed by the *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*) editorial of 22 July 1954:

For the first time as one of the Big Powers, the People's Republic of China joined the other major powers in negotiations on vital international problems and made a contribution of its own that won the acclaim of wide sections of world opinion. The international status of the People's Republic of China as one of the big world powers has gained universal recognition. Its international prestige has been greatly enhanced. The Chinese people take the greatest joy and pride in the efforts and achievements of their delegation at Geneva.⁷⁴

Alone among the great powers, Beijing identified itself as a member of the Afro-Asian camp of newly independent nations. The Chinese leadership perceived China as the champion of the Afro-Asian cause against the oppression and exploitation of the west. It was within this context that China had played the major part in fashioning a new set of principles for world politics—the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.” This emphasis on Afro-Asian solidarity would culminate in the Bandung Conference of 1955.

71. Wang Bingnan, *Recollections*, pp. 23–24; U. Alexis Johnson, *The Right Hand of Power* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1984), pp. 233–34.

72. Hagerty diary, 3 June 1954, *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. XIV, p. 442.

73. For documentation on these negotiations, see *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. XIV, part 1, pp. 414–15, 416–421, 427, 434–443, 462–480, 501–505.

74. *Renmin ribao*, 22 July 1954.

Zhou Enlai played an important role in the Geneva Conference. He excelled in playing British and French realism off against the rigidity and inflexibility of American Cold War policies. His diplomacy epitomized the "United Front" strategy which has been a distinct feature of the PRC's foreign policy: to unite with all possible forces to isolate China's most dangerous enemy. Zhou's performance at Geneva suggests that he was a shrewd practitioner of diplomacy of the possible.

While Moscow appeared more moderate than Beijing over Indo-China, the two countries shared a common desire to end the war in the region. On the whole, their relations during the period were marked by close consultations and co-operation. They together exerted restraining influences on the Vietminh. In this instance, their national self-interests surpassed ideological obligations to support the struggle of a fellow communist party.

Sino-British relations improved during the Geneva Conference with the establishment of diplomatic relations at the level of *chargé d'affaires* and the increase of trade. To Beijing, however, there were still major obstacles preventing the complete normalization of relations between China and the United Kingdom. China's leaders still complained about London's continuing support of the KMT representative in the United Nations.

To Washington, the Geneva Accords represented a major advance of communism in Indo-China. The United States did not sign the accords. In the wake of the Geneva Conference, the Eisenhower administration took a series of measures to contain the further expansion of communism in the area. It increased its aid to the Saigon regime, thus replacing France as the major western intervenor in Vietnam. It also promoted the creation of the South-east Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) as a means to bolster the non-communist countries in the region.