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„The Twilight of French Colonialism: Compatibility vs. Consensus. International and Domestic Implications of French Colonial Engagements in Indochina, 1945-54“

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On my honour as a student of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

BARNABAS VEGH

Abstract

The main aim of this thesis is to shed light on the influence of France's colonial debacle in Indochina on the formulation of French domestic politics and on the developments of France's European policy. The common line of thinking is that domestic political developments have directed French foreign policy in the postwar period. Alternatively, this paper sets out to explore whether the Indochina debacle had a much bigger role in French postwar reconstruction and restructuring than is generally given credit for, shifting the focus of French policymakers and intellectuals away from the idea of a global empire towards a focus on France's role in post-war Europe.

The thesis comprises an introduction, four analytical chapters and a conclusion. The introductory part provides a historical overview of Indochina, while the first chapter provides an analysis of the impact of the Japanese coup of March 1945, assesses the precarious situation France found herself in after the conclusion of World War II and gives an account of the political developments leading up to the outbreak of the Indochina War. Chapter II deals with the domestic political landscape in France after the liberation, introducing the challenges de Gaulle's provisional government had to face both in Europe and in Indochina, while the second part of the chapter analyses the effect of the Indochina conflict on the constitutional debate and on the development of French policy regarding Germany's future. Chapter III analyses the circumstances of the outbreak of the war, pointing out its domestic implications. Chapter IV briefly examines the causal relationship between US aid and coal while also providing a short analysis of the nuclear question at the siege of Dien Bien Phu.

The main finding of this thesis is that the Indochina conflict had a defining influence over French policymaking in the post-war period. France's entanglement in the lengthy and costly Indochina war hindered its economic development while hurting both France's domestic political stability and its negotiating powers on the subject of European reconstruction. It is argued in this thesis that since French policymakers regarded the re-establishment of *grandeur* and imperial prestige as the most important foreign policy objective, France's European interests received less consideration. Furthermore, given that the Indochina conflict put considerable economic pressure on France that it could not bear alone, its exposure to US aid further diminished its bargaining power with regards to the future of Germany and the role of France in the new international system.

German Abstract

Die vorliegende Masterarbeit gibt einen Überblick über die Bedingungen und Auswirkungen des Indochina-Konflikts auf die französische Außen- und Innenpolitik. Besonderes Augenmerk wird auf die Frage nach den Auswirkungen der indochinesischen Kolonialpolitik auf andere Aspekte der französischen Außenpolitik gelegt. Zur Beantwortung wurde eine bilinguale Studie auf Grundlage der Verknüpfungstheorie nach Hanrieder durchgeführt. Das Hauptargument dieser Arbeit ist, dass der Indochina-Konflikt die wirtschaftliche und politische Erholung Frankreichs auf nachhaltige Weise beendet hat. Außerdem wird gezeigt, dass der Indochina-Konflikt zu innerstaatlicher Instabilität führte, und die europäischen Wiederaufbauanstrengungen behinderte. Letztendlich führte der Indochina-Konflikt zum Verlust der französischen Verhandlungsmacht gegenüber den USA. Zusammenfassend zeigen die Ergebnisse, dass der Konflikt die Entwicklung der französischen Politik stärker beeinflusst hat, als allgemein anerkannt wird.

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Table of Contents

Title.....	9
Introduction.....	10
Research Question	14
Theoretical Framework	15
Methodology	17
Chapter I – Into The Whirlwind	18
Chapter II – New Realities and Endless Bargaining	28
Chapter III – The Indochina War and The Shift in France’s European Policy	38
Chapter IV – How It All Comes Together	50
Conclusion	58
Maps	60
Bibliography	61

Title

The Twilight of French Colonialism: Compatibility vs Consensus. International and Domestic Implications of French Colonial Engagements in Indochina, 1945-54.

Introduction

Structure of the thesis

Although the issue at the centre of this research is a historical one, a thorough analysis of France's debacle in Indochina can be used to understand the conceptual linkages between external and domestic policy decisions. In a broader perspective, this research focuses on the interconnectedness of domestic and foreign policy. The thesis comprises an introduction, four analytical chapters and a conclusion.

The introduction provides the historical background for the thesis, while Chapter I provides an analysis of the impact of the Japanese coup of March 1945, assesses the precarious situation France found herself in after the conclusion of World War II and gives an account of the political developments leading up to the outbreak of the Indochina War. Chapter II focuses on the domestic political landscape in France after the liberation, introducing the challenges facing de Gaulle's provisional government both in Europe and in Indochina, while the second part of the chapter analyses the impact of the Indochina conflict on the constitutional debate and on the development of French policy regarding Germany's future. Chapter III analyses the circumstances of the outbreak of the war, pointing out its domestic implications. Chapter IV briefly examines the causal relationship between US aid and coal while also providing a short analysis of the nuclear question at the siege of Dien Bien Phu.

This research focuses on French engagements and aspirations in the Indochina region in the early postwar period, and on how the 'Indochina debacle' contributed to the dissolution of the French Empire both in a literal and in a psychological/ideological sense. The research explores the role of US foreign aid in the development and prolongation of the conflict as well as its connections to France's postwar restructuring efforts. The impact of France's colonial debacle on metropolitan France's foreign policy and domestic political climate is generally given little credit to. This research sets out to fill this gap in the literature, by providing an analysis of the consequences of the Indochina War on French foreign policy and domestic

political structure as well as attempting to determine the root causes for the Indochina debacle.

The findings and results of this research are interpreted within the framework of Hanrieder's Compatibility and Consensus theory, emphasising the importance of linkages between French foreign policy and the domestic political agenda and determining the extent to which foreign policy, has in fact exerted its influence (or even dominated) over the domestic field, rather than assuming the primacy of domestic policy.

Historical background

Before analysing the effects French foreign policy had on the domestic field, including its place in the French ideological shift from the notion of empire as the way of life to a more restricted albeit significantly better laid out focus on what we would nowadays call France's 'Europe Pivot,' attention is to be directed towards a brief introduction into pre-war French Indochina. This introductory passage includes a short historical overview as well as a limited analysis of how, from the early 1930s onwards, French Indochina started to slip out of the hands of France's colonial administration, leading to the escalation to war shortly after the Japanese were forced out of the area.

Firstly, France's post-war Indochina policy can be characterised by her 'relationship' with the very concept of decolonisation. However inevitable decolonisation might have been, its signs showed themselves as early as the 1930s as the French colonial administration turned to the exploitation of the region's natural resources, after its people. The area that came under French rule was established as a 'colonie d'exploitation,' and was clearly used as a 'milking cow' of French economic interests, mainly as the French seemed largely uninterested in their Far Eastern colony. The fact that the area was not particularly rich, and the value of its main export commodity, rubber, plummeted further exacerbated the already unpopular colonial government's relationship with the locals.¹

¹ Kimberly J. Healey, "Andrée Viollis in Indochina: The Objective and Picturesque Truth about French Colonialism," *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 31:1 (2003) p. 26.

The main event that signalled ever growing discontent in Indochina with French rule was the Yen Bai mutiny in 1930, an uprising of Vietnamese soldiers in the colonial army. Even though its numbers were not great, nor was the movement particularly widespread, it shows that the nationalist and separatist tendencies were undoubtedly present some fifteen years before the Indochina War would eventually break out. It symbolises the significance of the issue, that Paul Reynaud, Minister of the Colonies, was the first French government official to ever set foot in Indochina in 1931 despite the fact that most of Indochina had been a French colony since 1887.²

That is to say, it would be unreasonable to assume that the French were met with newfound resistance, an opposition whose roots did not reach down to the very core of the populace. However, the mutiny did not have the desired effect. On the contrary, it severely, damaged the Vietnamese independence movement, essentially ‘giving France another fifteen years’ of colonial rule. The Department of War concluded that there was no financial support for more European troops to be stationed in Indochina before the mutiny, the uprising abruptly changed this narrative³. The newspaper *Le Petit Parisien* reported in November 1931 that the French colonial government had extinguished the fire of communism in French Indochina.⁴ With that, the French considered the issue of Indochinese independence dealt with, committing few resources and dedicating little attention to it.

Independence movements in French Indochina in general, but in Vietnam in particular were strengthened by the Japanese occupation during the Second World War. Soon upon the establishment of Vichy France, control over Indochina was ceded to the Japanese (in the midst of turmoil in France) until the end of the Pacific War. This transferral of control resulted from impulsive decisions carried out by the French colonial outpost cut off from the Quai d’Orsay and was met with resentment and anger in Paris. The extent of the impulsiveness of the colonial governor’s decision to accept the Japanese ultimatum of stopping all steel export to China and establishing a ‘Japanese Control Commission’ on the border is questionable. As Gov-

² Healey, “Andrée Viollis in Indochina,” p. 22.

³ Tobias Frederik Rettig, “French Military Policies in the Aftermath of the Yen Bai Mutiny, 1930: Old Security Dilemmas Return to the Surface,” *South East Asia Research*, 10:3 (2002), 309-331.

⁴ Healey, “Andrée Viollis in Indochina,” p. 26.

ernor Catroux was isolated from Paris, and denied assistance from Britain and the US, he had little to no room to manoeuvre.⁵ The most harm done by the Japanese to French Indochina was not its occupation, however.

By March 1945 the war was basically lost for the Japanese, as Germany was being pushed back on all fronts and the Americans were gaining the upper hand in the Pacific. As already under the control of the Axis, Vichy troops were not expelled upon Japanese entry into Indochina in 1940. In fact, the 'nominal subservience' of Indochina to Vichy France allowed for a less aggressive Japanese approach.⁶ By the time Paris was liberated in August 1944 Vichy France had already ceased to exist, albeit its colonial administration remained in place, with direct orders from de Gaulle to try and deceive the Japanese.⁷ However, due to the Provisional French Government's special envoy to Indochina, General Eugène Mordant's incapability to keep distracting and deceiving the Japanese, the French plot was rather promptly discovered. In March 1945, in fear of an uprising of the French colonial forces in light of the developments in Europe, the Japanese carried out a coup, destroying what was left of the French colonial administration in Indochina.⁸ The damage Vichy France did to the continuation of French sovereignty in Indochina was not only its inability to deceive the Japanese towards the very end of the war. Governor Catroux's replacement with Decoux who was loyal to Vichy, and embodied its ideals, was also counterintuitive. The fact that Decoux promoted local nationalist attitudes in order to "contain them within the framework of imperial loyalty" was a short-sighted and outdated policy.⁹ Even though Vichy France's fears of an eventual Japanese takeover of Indochina were well-founded, by encouraging Laotian, Cambodian and Vietnamese nationalist movements, the Vichy administration had actively albeit inadvertently contributed to the dismantling of its colonial rule over Indochina.

⁵ John E. Dreifort, "Japan's Advance into Indochina, 1940: The French Response," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1982), p. 281.

⁶ Dreifort, "Japan's Advance into Indochina," p. 285.

⁷ David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power*. University of California Press, 1995.

⁸ Arthur J. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam*. Indiana University Press, 2002.

⁹ Paul Sager, "Youth and Nationalism in Vichy Indochina," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2008), pp. 291-301.

Research Question

The common line of thinking is that domestic political developments have directed French foreign policy in the postwar period. Alternatively, this paper sets out to explore whether the Indochina debacle had a much bigger role in French postwar reconstruction and restructuring than is generally given credit for, shifting the focus of French policymakers and intellectuals away from the idea of a global empire towards a focus on France's role in post-war Europe. This presupposes an analysis of the causal linkages between domestic and international developments and between domestic and external policy.

Theoretical Framework

After careful consideration of several theoretical approaches, I have decided to settle on Wolfram F. Hanrieder's 'Compatibility and Consensus' theory which serves as the backbone of the thesis' theoretical framework. Hanrieder's theory discusses the conceptual linkage of external and internal dimensions of foreign policy, linking the two together, implying a close relationship between the two. Hanrieder understands foreign policy as a continuous process bridging the analytical barriers between the international and the domestic political system. He defines compatibility as: 'intended to assess the degrees of feasibility of various foreign policy goals in the realm of the international system'; consensus as: 'assessing the measure of agreement on the ends and means of foreign policy on the domestic political scene.'¹⁰

According to Hanrieder, aggregating the respective individual compatibilities of certain goals vis-à-vis the international system can determine the degree of complementarity among said goals. Furthermore, the respective degrees of complementarity between the international system and individual goals serve as foundation for the evaluation of the degree of complementarity among these individual goals.

In this theoretical framework, consensus is understood as a 'standard of feasibility,' able to determine on the long run, the shape of foreign policy to be followed in order to maintain popular support. Building on Rosenau's idea of a 'penetrated system,' we arrive at the conclusion that since national systems are so penetrated by their external environment that they are 'no longer the only source of legitimacy.' Consequently, if we view the two systems (domestic and international) as interpenetrated, a distinction between domestic and foreign policy is to diminish substantially.

Furthermore, an analytical separation of internal and external dimensions of foreign policy is needed. The distinction between the two foreign policy dimensions presupposes a distinction

¹⁰ Wolfram F. Hanrieder, "Compatibility and Consensus: A Proposal for the Conceptual Linkage of External and Internal Dimensions of Foreign Policy," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (1967), pp. 971-982.

between analytical approaches as well. The different analytical environments are external-international-operational and internal-domestic-motivational. Such analytical attempts have managed to circumvent the issue of isomorphism by simply positing parallelisms between the processes of international and domestic politics.

Rosenau in 'Toward the Study of National-International Linkages' emphasises the identification and analysis of recurrent sequences of behaviour that originate on one side of the external/domestic equation and linking them to phenomena on the other side in the process of unfolding.¹¹ Moreover, in his work entitled 'Compatibility, Consensus, and an Emerging Political Science of Adaptation,' he analyses Hanrieder's contribution to the theoretical framework of linkage theory. In Rosenau's reading, compatibility is posited as a relationship between foreign policy goals and international conditions, and consensus as the "existing measure of agreement on policy projects among the relevant elements of a national system's decision-making process."¹² Rosenau argues, that Hanrieder's analysis has eliminated all distinctions relevant for the study of linkage theory but acknowledges that Hanrieder attempted to make an 'analytical accommodation to the convergence' of national and international politics, as compatibility and consensus affect every single actor on the political field.

¹¹ James N. Rosenau, "Toward the Study of National-International Linkages," *Linkage Politics: essays on the convergence of national and international systems*. New York: Free Press, 1969, pp. 44-66.

¹² James N. Rosenau, "Compatibility, Consensus and an Emerging Political Science of Adaptation," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (1967), pp. 983-988.

Methodology

The methodological approach of the research paper is an inductive approach. At the core of the inductive approach are observations, while theories are proposed towards the end of the research process as a result of observations. Inductive research looks for patterns from observation and the development of explanations (theories) for those patterns through a series of hypotheses. According to the principles of inductive research, no clear hypotheses or theories apply at the beginning of the research process, leaving the research open to any alteration in terms of the direction of the research as the researcher sees fit based on findings. The direction of the research is from detailed observations towards the bigger picture, towards generalisations and broader ideas.

The thesis is divided into an introduction, four chapters analysing the effect of the Indochina conflict on French domestic politics and on the development of France's European policy, and a conclusion. The four chapters follow a broad chronological framework, covering the period between March 1945 and April 1954. However, the main focus of the thesis is on the period between March 1945 and January 1950.

The research included primary sources (predominantly in French) scholarly articles and books. The research was conducted in a bilingual manner, in English and French while featuring some bibliographical entries in German as well.

Chapter I

Into the Whirlwind

1.1. The Japanese coup and its implications

The following approximately five month long period was characterised by uninterrupted Japanese rule. Following their successful coup the Japanese promoted the fragmentation of what was formerly known as French Indochina, establishing the Empire of Vietnam, the Kingdom of Kampuchea and the Kingdom of Luang Phrabang. The newly created states, albeit based on the traditional regional order, were under significant Japanese influence. As French diplomat and envoy to Indochina Jean Sainteny put it, the coup “wrecked a colonial enterprise that had been in existence for 80 years.”¹³ With the French colonial apparatus fundamentally demolished, the opportunity arose to prevent the French from re-establishing their dominance in the region. This ‘creed’ was remarkably popular among American policymakers, and not the least promoted by President Roosevelt who, one could go so far as to suggest loathed, de Gaulle and disapproved of his leadership. However even Roosevelt, towards the end of the war, wavered in his convictions and decided to aid the anti-Japanese efforts in Indochina, coordinated and led by the French.¹⁴

The local elite was not necessarily keen on welcoming back the French either. In fact, the Japanese defeat in the Pacific served as the perfect opportunity to declare independence before any major power would fill the void the Japanese had left behind. In some instances, like in Laos, this temporary power vacuum was also a domestic one. In Laos, Prince Phetsarath proclaimed independence by circumventing the king. He argued that France’s failure to protect Lao territorial integrity against the Japanese allowed for grounds to nullify the existing treaties with France.¹⁵ The prince in fact had greater visions than just independence. He, as the other nationalists in the region, rejected the idea of becoming part of the Indochinese Fed-

¹³ David Koh Wee Hock, “Legacies of World War II in South and East Asia,” *Institute of Southeast Asian Studies* (2007) pp. 23-35.

¹⁴ George C. Herring, “The Truman Administration and the Restoration of French Sovereignty in Indochina,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1977), pp. 97-117.

¹⁵ Søren Ivarsson and Christopher E. Goscha, “Prince Phetsarath (1890-1959): Nationalism and Royalty in the Making of Modern Laos,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2007), p. 65.

eration, and was rather pushing for the creation of a 'Greater Lao' state, autonomous within the 'Thai Federation'.¹⁶ Although his strategies were helped with Chinese presence in the region following Japan's capitulation, this did not last long. Phetsarath lacked Ho Chi Minh's charisma and political awareness, and on top of that he could not use the presence of Chinese troops as shield against the French either. Soon after the Chinese struck a deal with the French, by May 1946 the French re-established themselves in Laos¹⁷.

In Vietnam, the Japanese coup in March 1945 was certainly a defining moment. Seeing the French crumble under Japanese pressure in 1940 and then prove unable to stop the dismantling of their colonial administration added fuel to the spread of the nationalist sentiment. This analysis goes so far as to suggest that the Japanese coup in Vietnam did more harm to the re-establishment of the post-war French Empire than the incoherent and ill-advised policy decisions could. This implies a profound interconnectedness between the external and the domestic fields of policymaking where external events too, can exert a significant influence over policy considerations. As Paul Mus, historian and political advisor to General Leclerc argued, France had fatally lost face in front of the Vietnamese while remaining largely oblivious to the extent of nationalist sentiment in the colony.¹⁸ The Japanese coup, and even more so, their surrender in August 1945 created confusion as to the future of Indochina. Mus speaks of radicalisation of the nationalists in Vietnam while the returning French officers pushed for their own version of the "liberation" of Indochina.¹⁹

The notable discrepancy between how the Vietnamese and the French characterised the situation allows for an interpretation of the events within the context of linkage theory. That is, neither the foreign policy consideration of Vietnamese separatism alone, nor a domestic policy approach based on the restoration of stability could provide a substantial analysis of the development of the conflict.²⁰ The years long (even if at times only partial) absence of the French in the colony generated a political vacuum that could no longer be filled by the French

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 66-67.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁸ Agathe Larcher-Goscha, "Ambushed by History: Paul Mus and the Colonial France's "Forced Re-entry" into Vietnam (1945-1954)," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2009), p. 210.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 213.

²⁰ Hanrieder, "Compatibility and Consensus," pp. 971-982.

alone. Their failure to realise this proved apparent when assessing the future of Indochina, essentially pushing France to the brink of colonial war by early 1946.

1.2. France's contested claim

The French myths of grandeur, of colonisation as a 'humane mission' as de Gaulle would put it, failed to understand the different socio-political realities of a metropolitan France recovering from humiliation in Europe and a Far Eastern dominion. The idea of conforming the colonies to French values, finding their place in the Empire without taking the effort to actually define the Empire as one that harbours a "multitude of peoples of different traditions and cultures" and not just as the symbol of France's grandeur was doomed to fail.²¹ In light of these, it befalls the reader with less awe, that France never really had a cogent, coherent and well-versed colonial policy to begin with. On the other hand, failing to reassert themselves in Indochina could have potentially pushed the French towards communism. The French political situation, as unstable as it was, would have fallen into chaos had the US opposed France's claim to Indochina, warned De Gaulle.²²

The influence of the communist movement had been steadily growing during the war, reaching a level where they could eventually become a factor in post-war French politics and likely strengthen Moscow's influence in Western Europe. H.F. Matthews, the Director of the State Department's Office of European Affairs concluded that France would not entertain the thought of placing Indochina under a trusteeship of any kind.²³ Too much pressure from the US would only alienate the two countries and jeopardise the future of cooperation between the US and Western Europe. In order to prevent a communist takeover in French politics, external factors had to be taken into account. Yet, his views were not shared by his colleagues at the State Department's Asian Affairs Division. However, in order to curtail the soviet influence in post-war Western European politics, the US had to, in Assistant Secretary of State

²¹ Clarke W. Garrett, "In Search of Grandeur: France and Vietnam 1940-1946," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (1967), pp. 303-305.

²² Herring, "The Truman Administration and the Restoration of French Sovereignty in Indochina," pp. 100-101.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

James C. Dunn's words "remove sources of friction" with France and not antagonize her further by pressing for American influence (political intervention) in Indochina.²⁴

Such fears were not without merit. Already in 1945 the socialists and communists were winning numerous local elections, indicating that they would become a force to be reckoned with in French domestic politics.²⁵ A force that could easily transform into being the political majority should France fall out with the United States, especially in a matter so central to the French national pride as the integrity of her empire. As this national pride, the myth of grandeur had been damaged by the war, further demonstration of France's decreased role in the international system would only alienate her from Britain and the US. This example makes the extent of the influence of foreign policy decisions on French domestic politics perfectly clear, especially in such turbulent and uncertain times. The French claim of Indochina was no doubt weaker than it was before the war. But so was its domestic stability. Only through a coherent, profound and learned analysis of matters both domestic and foreign could sound and wise policy be made. Had Washington, or London for the matter, disregarded the importance of the interlinked nature of domestic and external policies, including the far-reaching effect of foreign policy decisions on the domestic political sphere, France would have been refused re-entry into Indochina. Furthermore, as this thesis argues, it would have pushed France into the arms of Moscow, permanently tipping the scales of French domestic politics in the favour of the communists, making all efforts for a post-war Western European reconstruction and Franco-German rapprochement but a futile endeavour.

However troubling the looming threat of a strong and influential French communist party might have been, the allies did not grant France to receive the surrender of the Japanese in Indochina and formally reassert themselves as rulers of the region. Instead, British and Indian forces took upon themselves to receive the Japanese surrender. 'Operation Masterdom,' as the Brits referred to their post-war occupation of Indochina, had to face Viet Minh guerrillas for which they were not prepared. The Viet Minh were quick to fill the power vacuum that was left there upon the surrender of the Japanese in August 1945. The 'collapse of the Euro-

²⁴ Ibid., p. 103.

²⁵ Jon Cowans, "Visions of the Postwar: The Politics of Memory and Expectation in 1940s France," *History and Memory*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1998), pp. 68-101.

pean rule' strengthened local nationalist movements throughout Southeast Asia, and the Viet Minh were in a more than able position to exploit this, seizing Hanoi as early as 19 August 1945.²⁶ As the Japanese provided little to no opposition, not long after, on 2 September Ho Chi Minh declared the independence of Vietnam. Gaining power and being able to unite is not the same thing, however. As Hughes correctly points it out, Vietnamese nationalism, upon the Japanese defeat, became a "powerful, although not a unifying, force."²⁷ This is well reflected in France's ability to reassert herself in Indochina in 1946 and not only meet resentment but also Vietnamese ready to welcome back the French.

1.3. Escalation to war

The reason for such a state of affairs is found in the region's colonial structure. The local elite in Indochina was deeply dependent on the French for both their wealth and their titles. It is no surprise therefore, that the local elite was, instead of being the driving force of the revolution and the independence movement, rather interested in the survival of French interests in Indochina.²⁸ This rendered the local administrative elite all the more willing to facilitate the return of French rule, as it was largely indispensable for their own survival too. In order to better understand the significance of Indochina for the French Empire, one is to look at the domestic scene.

It took some eighteen months after the liberation of France to adopt a new constitution that reflects the fundamental change that had occurred both in France and in the world. This constitution however was regarded as one that had missed out on a chance to bring greater reforms; in light of the fragility of the country's shared view of France, her future and her position in the world, the task at hand was not small.²⁹ The writing of a new constitution was no doubt an attempt to link French imperial foreign policy and domestic policy to forge a coherent entity capable of facing new geopolitical realities. In this fragile, turbulent and unstable

²⁶ Geraint Hughes, "A 'Post-war' War: The British Occupation of French-Indochina," *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2006), pp. 263-283.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 264-265.

²⁸ George McT. Kahin, "The Postwar Revolutions in Southeast Asia," *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1951), pp. 204-221.

²⁹ Cowans, "Visions of the Postwar," pp. 77-79.

domestic political situation, a direct contest on Frances claim of Indochina from the United States would have proven catastrophic. Restoring French rule in Indochina was no easy task, however. The British, tasked with receiving the surrender of the Japanese in Indochina and restoring order, were met with hostility from the Viet Minh. This led to the surreal situation where, not having enough British and Indian troops to restore order, they had to rely on the “ostensibly defeated” Japanese to fulfill their obligations.³⁰ Major-General Gracey (commander of the 20th Indian Infantry Division), upon the events of 2 September, concluded that in order to restore the rule of law and to facilitate the execution of the tasks of occupation, French rule was necessary to be restored.³¹ Therefore, even though the British initially wanted no political involvement in Indochina, ended up actively assisting the restoration of French rule.

Despite the French and British cooperation, the United States could have still made it extremely difficult for France to secure Indochina, had it opposed the initiative with the same vehemence as during the war. Largely due to a dispute between the US and France over the establishment of a new government in Poland, President Truman had decided to grant France a ‘free hand’ in Indochina in an effort to repair and improve relations.³²

By autumn 1945 hostilities between the French and the Viet Minh were inevitable. This was especially the case upon the change in British policy by 1 October that included its support for the restoration of French Authority in Indochina.³³ The subsequent Franco-Vietnamese negotiations would not yield any substantial result, making it all the more clear that the conflict was about to shift into a military one. Furthermore, the inability of Roosevelt and Chiang Kai Shek to advance their own agenda on Indochina played into France’s favour. The State Department argued that the US, contrary to President Roosevelt’s own assessment (and feelings, especially towards General de Gaulle), was in need of a strong and independent France as a “bulwark against the spread of anti-democratic movements in Europe.”³⁴ In other words, this meant that the issue of sovereignty in Indochina, along with the request for a French

³⁰ Hughes, “A ‘Post-war’ War,” pp. 268-269.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

³² Herring, “The Truman Administration and the Restoration of French Sovereignty in Indochina,” pp. 103-105.

³³ Hughes, “A ‘Post-war’ War,” pp. 271-273.

³⁴ Xiaoyuan Liu, “China and the Issue of Postwar Indochina in the Second World War,” *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (1999), pp. 445-482.

commitment to certain reforms in Indochina, was relegated to second-tier status. Proving once again, how precarious and deeply interconnected external and domestic policy was in post-war France. In this particular case, the primacy of the restoration of *grandeur* had far-reaching consequences for France's future bargaining power in Europe. As the American interest lied in ensuring that France remain friendly and open to cooperate in Europe, concessions had to be made elsewhere.

The reason for Britain's alignment in the restoration of French rule in Indochina was not out of a sense of 'co-colonial' solidarity. The weakening (and potential destruction) of the French Empire would have had grave consequences for Britain too. The British, weakened and devastated by the war themselves, could not have fended off an extensive list of challengers for independence within their own empire. Even if the British would, in different circumstances, have entertained the possibility of maintaining their occupation of Indochina in an effort to try and replace the French there, by late 1945 their empire was strategically over-stretched and their economy significantly weakened.³⁵

Furthermore, France's position in Indochina was strengthened by China's assessment of its priorities and its security policy. As Chiang defined his number one priority as improving relations with Washington, in an attempt to balance Moscow's growing influence in North-eastern China, the days of any meaningful attempt to gain influence in post-war Indochina was no longer feasible. Consequently, Chiang was ready to accept and support any American initiative on the future of Indochina, including the reestablishment of French authority.³⁶ Interestingly, pushing for the independence of the people of Indochina was no longer on the table. With the strongest stakeholders out of the picture (US giving in to French demands, China supporting any US initiative and Japan defeated), British support for the reestablishment of French Indochina was the only thing needed for France's re-entry. As international opposition was finally out of the way, following the Potsdam conference (July 1945) that partitioned the whole of Indochina into a northern and a southern part, the French were quick to return to the south. General Leclerc, with considerable British assistance, ousted the regime from Saigon (23 September) and rid Southern Indochina from Viet Minh opposition

³⁵ Hughes, "A 'Post-war' War," pp. 273-274.

³⁶ Liu, "China and the Issue of Postwar Indochina in the Second World War," pp. 468-471.

by the turn of the year.³⁷ Re-establishing French rule on the north was not so simple a task, largely due to the presence of Chinese troops in the region.

War at this point was only avoidable had Ho Chi Minh decided to cede his demands of Vietnamese independence. The reason for France's total inflexibility in granting certain concessions to the Vietnamese lied not in her colonial policy in Indochina but in the perceived interest in the preservation of her empire. The fear that political independence that Ho Chi Minh pushed for would lead to the loss of all French interests in the region and serve as an example for the other members of the empire was too great to ignore.³⁸ Therefore, insistence upon maintaining French sovereignty in Indochina was not only a matter of national pride but also of the perseverance of the empire itself. Even though Léon Blum, the new French leader and a veteran socialist, was eager to ensure that peace in the region prevailed, the nationalists' support for war was far too strong to ignore, not to mention the unwillingness of the colonial administration loyal to General de Gaulle's ideas to promote peace.³⁹ Paris's inability to essentially control its own colonial administration in Saigon contributed to the outbreak of the hostilities in a meaningful way. As much as Blum might have wanted to avoid war at all cost, following the bloody encounters at Haiphong and Hanoi he no longer had control over the situation. Essentially, the French-Vietnamese war broke out on 19 December 1946 against Paris' will and largely due to the provocations of the French colonial administration in Saigon.

1.4. Conclusions

Clearly, discontent in Indochina towards French rule has its origins in the pre-war colonial structure. The French colonial framework, the 'colonie d'exploitation' did little to cater to the needs of the colonial population. However, it is equally important to point out that French pre-war colonial behaviour cannot be held responsible for the series of events following the

³⁷ Stein Tønnesson, "The Longest Wars: Indochina 1945-75," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1985), pp. 9-29.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-16.

conclusion of the second world war that saw the deterioration of relations between metropolitan France and her colony, pushing the conflict to the brink of war by late 1946.

The first chapter of this thesis, through the analysis of the period between March 1945 and December 1946, critically evaluates the sequence of events that determined the fate of France's colonial possession in Indochina. The Japanese coup in March 1945 served as the catalysator of the conflict that escalated into a colonial war 19 December 1946. The Japanese coup brought with it the dismantling of the French colonial administration that had already been fundamentally weakened and stripped of its reputation, undoing some eighty years' worth of colonial enterprise.⁴⁰

These turn of events had a profound impact on France's domestic politics as well as on her European policy. For a France led by de Gaulle, the restoration of *grandeur* and imperial prestige was of paramount importance. Therefore, French policy towards Indochina was not open to grant concessions to the Indochinese until at least the resignation of de Gaulle in January 1946. However, as the following chapters will elaborate on it, the Gaullist spirit lived on in French Indochina, turning out to be a large factor in the outbreak of hostilities and the series of provocation leading up to the Viet Minh attack on Hanoi on 19 December 1946.

By late 1946 it became apparent that the standpoints of the French policymakers and Ho Chi Minh, who was calling for political and economic independence rendered it impossible to yield a peaceful solution that was acceptable to both parties. Still, the French attempts to grant autonomy within the framework of the French Union to some degree clearly illustrates the reforming influence colonial developments exerted over French policymaking.

Moreover, losing Indochina without putting up a fight would have had grave implications for France's already fragile political stability. De Gaulle and other policymakers warned of the looming communist threat, positing that France's return to Indochina is of vital national interest not only for the French but also for the Americans and indirectly, for the sake of post-war European reconstruction.⁴¹ However, France's re-entry into Indochina meant an econom-

⁴⁰ Koh Wee Hock, "Legacies of World War II in South and East Asia," pp. 23-35.

⁴¹ Garrett, "In Search of Grandeur: France and Vietnam 1940-1946," pp. 303-305.

ic burden far too heavy to bear in the weakened state France found herself after the liberation. Thus, in order to be able to pursue her imperial ambitions France had to rely on US aid, and inadvertently, concede some of her hardliner policy considerations with regards to the future of an independent German state.

Chapter II

New Realities and Endless Bargaining

This chapter is divided into two main sections. Chapter II deals with the domestic political landscape in France after the liberation, introducing the challenges de Gaulle's provisional government had to face both in Europe and in Indochina, while the second part of the chapter analyses the effect of the Indochina conflict on the constitutional debate and on the development of French policy regarding Germany's future.

2.1. Liberation and Transition (de Gaulle and the Provisional Government)

The role of communism as the new 'player' on the field has to be analysed. It had gained momentum with the ascent of the Soviet Union and largely profited from the discrediting of the old élite compromised by the Vichy regime.⁴² By 1946 it came to threaten the status quo in Western Europe by exerting its rapidly growing influence in French domestic politics, not the least supported and oftentimes vigorously promoted by the French intellectual society. The real threat in communism can only be realised through the fusion of external and domestic policy considerations. If the French let communism spread throughout Indochina, it could spread to other parts of the empire, and eventually dominate French politics and policymaking. As Hanrieder argues, only through a coherent, profound and learned analysis of matters both domestic and foreign could sound and wise policy be made.⁴³

As it was the source of the most profound humiliation, Germany had become the primary target of France's attention during the final months of the war. It was only through Germany that France could have any hopes to restore its lost *grandeur*, the recovery of which would then be the answer to France's problems and reaffirm her position among the great powers.⁴⁴

⁴² Charles A. Micaud, "French Intellectuals and Communism," *Social Research*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1954), pp. 286-296.

⁴³ Hanrieder, "Compatibility and Consensus," pp. 971-982.

⁴⁴ William I. Hitchcock. *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe, 1944-1954*. University of North Carolina Press, 1998, pp. 41-42.

However, it quickly became apparent that this romantic illusion of De Gaulle conflicts quite heavily with American interests. The US needed expanding markets to boost its economy greatly reliant on exports and crippling Germany for the sake of the restoration of some sort of distant notion of French pride did not appear to be a sensible trade-off. France's harsh stance on the future of Germany was less and less maintainable and by January 1946 it was no longer realistic, especially due to the severely deteriorated US-Soviet relations.⁴⁵ The room for manoeuvre in the German question was in contrast with the gains France made in Indochina. As the geopolitical situation evolved in favour of France with regards to Indochina, it could not simultaneously grant such favourable concessions on the other core issue fundamentally linked to the myth of grandeur and to a strong notion of French pride: the German question.

At the very core of all the challenges post-war France had to face, there was the fundamentally divided domestic public opinion. The failures of the Third Republic, the disillusionment it generated among the public led to people not only on the right but also on the left 'half-welcome,' as Tony Judt puts it, its destruction.⁴⁶ This idea of any sort of 'violent retreat from mediocrity,' to an extent, showed resemblance to de Gaulle's interpretation of the interests of France and his assessment of France's place in the new world order⁴⁷. De Gaulle's famous quote tells an awful lot about his ambitions for France, as well as about his relentless idealism in its pursuit. De Gaulle's credo of "all of my life, I have had a certain idea of France," exhibits his stance vis-à-vis the Germans and reinforces that for de Gaulle, the interests of France trump all else including good relations with her allies.⁴⁸ Admittedly, his idea of France was inspired not exclusively by sheer reason but also by emotion and sentiment. For him, France's high standing in the world was of utmost importance and pushing for an ever greater French role in the post-war world order the means through which it could be achieved.⁴⁹ It follows, that from the restoration of a form of historical *grandeur* de Gaulle so adamantly pursued, would stem greatness, stability and unity, concepts that seemed far from reach dur-

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 42.

⁴⁶ Tony Judt, "We Have Discovered History" : Defeat, Resistance, and the Intellectuals in France," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 64, Supplement: Resistance Against the Third Reich (1992), pp. S147-S172.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. S149-S150.

⁴⁸ Reed Davis, "A Once and Future Greatness: Raymond Aron, Charles de Gaulle and the Politics of Grandeur," *The International History Review*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2011), pp. 27-41.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

ing the war. Influence in Germany, diplomatic leverage with the US and great power status would all be achieved if prestige and pride were restored.⁵⁰

As much as the US needed France to see eye to eye with her on the issue of reincorporating Germany into the Western European system, a change of the guards in Paris did not yield the desired outcome. De Gaulle's resignation in early 1946 did not result in a change of policy. Georges Bidault would not diverge from de Gaulle's ideas in a fundamental way. Instead, he remained vigorous in insisting that France's cooperation in the planning of a new post-war European political and economic order depended on France's "satisfaction on an array of issues concerning the future of Germany."⁵¹

There is little use of an analysis of post-war France that does not incorporate an assessment of the role and importance of de Gaulle. De Gaulle saw clearly, how divided and fragmented French public opinion was, and how fundamentally this was reflected in the parliament. The ambitions he cherished for France, in his reading, warranted unity and were only possible with the restoration of *grandeur*. Already during the war but more prominently after the liberation of France did he see himself "as the rallying point for national unity."⁵² As Fenby, among others, asserts correctly, de Gaulle's ambition for France far exceeded her capacities, both politically and economically.⁵³ However, for such ambitions to find fertile ground some sort of structural change was in order. National reconstruction, however desired or undesired it might have been, could not happen without an overhaul of key political institutions; for de Gaulle, a new constitution with reinforced executive powers was the way to go.⁵⁴ As the issue of regaining and retaining legitimacy and strength in colonial Indochina shows, political stability and domestic support are of paramount importance in a nation's quest for providing an answer to political challenges and challengers. In de Gaulle's messianic approach to France's role in the world as the beacon of light one can see that the myth of *grandeur*, although deeply rooted in the desire to bring domestic unity, was in fact undoubtedly connected to the

⁵⁰ Hitchcock, *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe, 1944-1954*. pp. 41-43.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

⁵² Jonathan Fenby, 'France cannot be France without grandeur,' *Financial Times*, London (UK), 6 June 2018. [accessed on 4 April 2020]. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2070627700?accountid=146310>.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Jon Cowans, "Political Culture and Cultural Politics: The Reconstruction of French Radio after the Second World War," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1996), pp. 145-170.

preservation of the empire, a source of pride and strength. The very idea that ‘patriotic ardour’ stemming from the strength of the French Empire, could “heal the deep social divisions that so often plagued France” was not without its innate dangers, however.⁵⁵ The unwillingness to give concessions to Ho Chi Minh in 1945-46, the rogue actions of the colonial administration in Saigon and the irrationality of the pursuit of the War of Indochina for eight long years illustrate perfectly how far reaching of an effect can a ‘myth’ have if duly incorporated into political decision-making.

As the incident with France’s two small islands off the coast of Canada shows, de Gaulle would go so far as to jeopardise France’s relationship with the US in the name of the quest for restoring *grandeur*. Whatever the cost was, de Gaulle chose to pursue the path of grandeur, risking the total alienation of France’s most important ally, the United States.⁵⁶ He did so as early as December 1941 when the war was far from being won for the allies, exhibiting a rather reckless attitude than cold-blooded rationale. In concert with this attitude, the main program of de Gaulle’s first presidency could be summarised by the crippling of Germany while increasing French influence and tilting the balance in France’s favour in any kind of post-war settlement on the future of Western Europe.⁵⁷ De Gaulle, reckless as it may seem, was prepared to pay any price for realising his ambitions for France. Even if his and France’s international reputation took a massive hit he would still push on, antagonizing his allies “wherever a shred of French pride was at stake.”⁵⁸

Arguably, determining the fate of Indochina was a particularly sensitive issue for the French. Roosevelt’s abhorrence of the French colonial rule in Indochina as the prime example of European exploitative colonialism no doubt drove a wedge between the two nations. Even though post-war geopolitical events facilitated the return of the French colonial administration to Indochina (with the political and even to some extent military assistance of the British), de Gaulle’s fixation on French grandeur did little to no good for maintaining good relations with the US. This thesis argues, that although de Gaulle (and the subsequent Bidault-

⁵⁵ Davis, “A Once and Future Greatness,” p. 28.

⁵⁶ Theodore J. Lowi and Martin A. Schain, “Conditional Surrender: Charles de Gaulle and American Opinion,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1992), pp. 498-506.

⁵⁷ Hitchcock, *France Restored*, pp. 43-44.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

administration) managed to force their re-entry into Indochina, they failed to gain the far more valuable and important concessions in Germany the French so desired. Evidently, the sentimental idea of restoring imperial prestige through reclaiming Indochina proved too strong of a temptation for de Gaulle to be able to give up on.⁵⁹ Certainly, the rather unrealistic nature of de Gaulle's visions for unchallenged French leadership in Western Europe played a large role in his failure to achieve the 'dismemberment' of Germany. However, de Gaulle's character, unfavourable American opinion and non-aligned economic interests made French dominance over Germany, be it political or economic, largely unattainable.

2.2. The new constitution, resignation and endless bargaining

The domestic political situation, as turbulent as it had been during the era of *résistance*, did not become less challenging following the liberation. De Gaulle's idea of unity behind his leadership and authority knew and accepted no compromise. This is manifest in the way he treated those particularly in the south of France that were associated with the resistance. His resentment of especially local FFI Resistance fighters and other forces of the resistance independent of him, such as the Spanish *guerrilleros* and the local communists in the south went beyond the question of national unity. For de Gaulle, consistency in his obsession with the restoration of state authority stemmed to a remarkable extent, from permitting no challenges to his own authority, therefore equating his legitimacy with that of the state.⁶⁰ As stubborn as de Gaulle might have been on the matters of the restoration of French pride and the dismemberment of Germany, his idea of post-war reconstruction and national unity was not centered around the concept of a nation-wide purge of Vichy collaborators. De Gaulle, unlike many harsher critiques of 'collaborators' of Vichy, believed that in order to be able to rebuild the nation he needed to draw on "individuals whose record had not been unblemished."⁶¹ As the head of the provisional government, de Gaulle had the power to commute death sentences to life imprisonment. The following data illustrates perfectly, that for de Gaulle, national unity and the maintenance of social cohesion were far more important concepts than satisfying the

⁵⁹ Martin Thomas, "Free France, the British Government and the Future of French Indo-China, 1940-45," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1997), pp. 137-160.

⁶⁰ Julian Jackson, *A Certain Idea of France: The Life of Charles de Gaulle*. Allen Lane (2018).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 658-661.

urge to punish all that could be labeled a collaborator. Out of the 1554 death sentences he commuted 998, pardoning all women and minors.⁶² This enlightened approach stems from an understanding of the interconnectedness of external and domestic affairs.

For de Gaulle, the unqualified indication of the “popular rejection of the pre-war political system” was the popular vote in favour of the writing of a new constitution.⁶³ The new constitution had to, above all, take some sort of advantage of Germany’s defeat in order to reconstruct the French identity. The prestige and pride that was lost during the war and the damage Vichy France had done to the colonial empire had to be amended. The problem of the loss of authority and moral prestige in the colonial territories was not only a domestic issue; it affected France’s standing in the world and in the most challenging region, in Indochina alike.⁶⁴ A well-thought out and well-defined constitution therefore could serve as the essential tool to restore stability and reaffirm French legitimacy in the colonies.

The need for a new constitution, for de Gaulle, also stemmed from a sense of the ‘natural order of things,’ elevating the politics of grandeur to a status where it becomes the source of human liberty.⁶⁵ As to how this politics of grandeur, a concept only vaguely defined by de Gaulle, would find common ground with the demands and desires of the colonial peoples was no simple question. As the constitution of 1875 was rejected as the basis of the new text, French institutions were once again in need of a structural reconstruction.⁶⁶ The new constitution, despite in its earlier (rejected) draft exhibited some form of unformed thinking, especially in relation to the colonies, brought forth the idea of the French Union. Article 67 of the 1946 Constitution creates a “federal citizenship” encompassing both the people of Metropolitan France and of the colonies.⁶⁷ This federal citizenship did not mean equal rights for Metropolitan French and people of the colonies alike and the ‘option’ to gain independence was also missing from the final text. Within the framework of the French Union, Indochina was granted to “face her demographic situation,” indicating some form of administrative autono-

⁶² Ibid., pp. 666-668.

⁶³ Cowans, “Political Culture and Cultural Politics,” p. 149.

⁶⁴ James E. Genova, “Constructing Identity in Post-War France: Citizenship, Nationality, and the Lamine Guèye Law, 1946-53,” *The International History Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2004), pp. 56-79.

⁶⁵ Reed, “A Once and Future Greatness,” pp. 29-30.

⁶⁶ André Géraud and Pertinax, “The New French Constitution,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1947), pp. 433-450.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 447-449.

my, as the text reads.⁶⁸ Even though this was an officially more liberal and less exploitative interpretation of French colonial rule it did not manage to address the fundamental necessities of the Viet Minh who gained a sizeable support among the local population by September 1946 and largely thought to be in a position to demand concessions. The failure of the French to understand the shift in the political dynamic in Indochina, combined with Paris' refusal to consider granting any kinds of concessions to Ho Chi Minh contributed to a large extent to pushing the conflict to the brink of colonial war by December 1946. Essentially, the failure to recognise the strength of the Vietnamese independence movement can be traced back to the failure to understand the conflict in the context of the interconnected nature of domestic and external policies. That is to say, to understand that the socio-political developments in Indochina no longer allowed for a rigid and conservative imperial policy.

The fundamentally confrontational approach under de Gaulle's administration prohibited constructive dialogue above all on the issue of the future of Germany, its occupation and its (from the French point of view) menacing industry. However, with de Gaulle's resignation in January 1946 there was room for an alternative approach. From an economic perspective, as André Philip⁶⁹ pointed it out, German economic recovery was in fact in the interest of France. The dismemberment of the German industry altogether would have left the French economy in a significantly worse state as it struggled to raise steel production. Philip argued that control over German economic recovery was more beneficial for France (both in economic and political sense) as it could advance its own interests in certain sectors where French control was sustainable.⁷⁰ This aligned well with the socialist push for a more cooperative role for France in the ACC.

As mentioned previously, France was not in a position to dictate the fate of Germany for a handful of reasons. These reasons included the structure of the quadripartite occupation to the allies' economic interests, independent of France's wartime legacy. As the dismemberment of Germany would have hurt the US economically, France had no choice but to mitigate its demands, especially since France itself relied heavily on US aid. As Jean Monnet calculated,

⁶⁸ "The French Union," *Civilisations*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1951), Institut de Sociologie de l'Université de Bruxelles, pp. 109-132.

⁶⁹ Socialist minister of national economy after the resignation of de Gaulle in January 1946.

⁷⁰ Hitchcock, *France Restored*, pp. 54-56.

France would see a trade deficit of around three billion dollars between 1946 and 1949.⁷¹ With de Gaulle's resignation, popular opinion began to turn in favour of cooperation with the Anglo-Saxons on the future of Germany.⁷² The shift in French domestic political thinking had an awful lot to do with the economics of reconstruction and other economic issues such as steel production. As Jean Chauvel⁷³ admitted, French policymakers had not considered the full economic impact of Germany's dismemberment.⁷⁴

Monnet's visions regarding the future of Europe was quite different from that of de Gaulle. For Monnet, Europe's future was to be based on a strong and inclusive institutional structure, the idea that would become the center pillar of the Schuman Plan.⁷⁵ French economic reconstruction had always been in the centre of policymakers' focus in France. The fact that one of the first major decisions of the provisional French government was to create the Ministry of the Economy (Ministère de l'Économie) led by Mendès France underlines this awareness.⁷⁶ However, it was only after the resignation of de Gaulle in January 1946 that French policy started to acknowledge that France's economic interests did not necessarily lie in the dismemberment of Germany and the harsh limitations on its economic output. It was clear, that France could not effectively pursue its opposition to any American proposal for the future of the German state any longer. De Gaulle's resignation, to a large extent, was his assessment of the capabilities and the role of France in the new world order. As he saw no way for an economically exhausted France that was denied participation in the Yalta and Potsdam conferences, to achieve swift economic recovery it so desperately needed without falling into the sphere of American influence he decided to step down.⁷⁷ The socio-political developments in Indochina, and the insistence on the importance of restoring grandeur and prestige through keeping the empire intact rendered France significantly more reliant on American assistance. Even though as the geopolitical climate developed in favour of France on the Indochina-

⁷¹ Irwin M. Wall and Philippe-Etienne Raviart, "Les accords blum-byrnes, la modernisation de la France et la guerre froide," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, No. 13 (1987), pp. 45-62.

⁷² Hitchcock, *France Restored*, p. 42.

⁷³ Secretary general of the Quai d'Orsay

⁷⁴ Hitchcock, *France Restored*, p.52.

⁷⁵ J. B. Duroselle, "General de Gaulle's Europe and Jean Monnet's Europe," *The World Today*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1966), pp. 1-13.

⁷⁶ Irwin M. Wall and Philippe-Etienne Raviart, "Jean Monnet, les États-Unis et le plan français," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*. No. 30 (1991), pp. 3-21.

⁷⁷ André Fontaine, "What is French Policy?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (1966), pp. 58-76.

issue, it must be acknowledged that most of the financing for France's post-war reconstruction and economic stabilization, the Monnet Plan, came from the US.⁷⁸ Therefore, since in Indochina the French were unwilling to grant any concessions to the Viet Minh, concessions had to be made on the 'European front' in order not to further antagonize the Americans.

Clearly, the time of de Gaulle's irreconcilable opposition to the establishment of a centralised administration in Germany was over; if for nothing else then for pragmatic economic reasons. France's strategy of vetoing the Potsdam agreements' proposal for the future of Germany was driven by de Gaulle's creed to prevent the "existence of a centralized Reich" that could threaten the territorial, political and economic integrity of France.⁷⁹ However, as the Indochina conflict drifted into an ever deeper spiral, French policy had to realise that unless some sort of cooperation was achieved in Europe France was risking losing its say in the question of European reconstruction and subsequently, on the issue of German rearmament. On the other hand, the Monnet Plan with its awareness of both the utility of German coal in the pursuit of French economic recovery and of the role of foreign policy signalled a profound change in the French approach to European affairs.⁸⁰

2.3. Conclusions

In the Parisian intellectual circles, the Indochina War was but a futile, hopeless and pointless pursuit of a myth de Gaulle was so passionate about.⁸¹ French policymakers' focus on the restoration of *grandeur* put both political and economic pressure on France while forcing a division of both attention and resources to the benefit of neither foreign policy issue at hand. The conflict in Indochina, much like the question of European reconstruction, demanded full attention and resources that simply were not at France's disposal, especially in the case of the Indochina issue.

⁷⁸ Wall and Raviart, "Jean Monnet, les États-Unis et le plan français," pp. 4-5.

⁷⁹ Fontaine, "What is French Policy?" p. 60.

⁸⁰ Hitchcock, *France Restored*, pp. 56-57.

⁸¹ Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals 1944-56*. University of California Press, 1992.

French policymakers sought to restore the lost imperial prestige through colonial dominance the Indochina issue gained prominence in French foreign policy. As France managed to force its re-entry into Indochina, despite the initial American disapproval, it had less space to manoeuvre and to essentially 'extort' favourable and largely disproportionate concessions in Europe such as the dismemberment of Germany. The restoration of French sovereignty in Indochina was seen as the key to national unity and higher international standing for a France profoundly humiliated by Germany in 1940. Since reclaiming Indochina became synonymous with the restoration of France's great power status, a misguided albeit inherently influential predisposition, it was seen as the solution to all problems France was facing both in Europe and on the domestic front. As Hitchcock explains it, upon the restoration of prestige and French pride, diplomatic leverage vis-à-vis the US, greater influence in Germany and an elevated role for the French Empire in world affairs would follow.⁸²

For de Gaulle, the reconstruction of the nation was not possible without a new constitution. Therefore, this new constitution was supposed to bring forth change and reform, both in domestic affairs and in the colonies. However, this new constitution failed to grant equal rights to all under the umbrella of the French Empire, missing a huge opportunity to resolve the Indochina issue peacefully.⁸³ This failure, to a considerable extent, stems from the unwillingness to realise the strength and popularity of Ho Chi Minh's independence movement among the local population. The refusal to grant greater liberties to the colonies shares the blame of deepening the Franco-Indochinese conflict.

The increasing intensity of the Indochina conflict rendered France more and more reliant on American assistance, especially because of the growing economic burden of committing more and more resources and troops to regain control over Indochina. Greater reliance on the US did not come cheap, though. France's entanglement in Indochina, and the economic problems aggravated by it, led to the abandonment of the idea of dismembering Germany, shifting France towards an environment of cooperation in Europe.

⁸² Hitchcock, *France Restored*.

⁸³ "The French Union," *Civilisations*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1951), Institut de Sociologie de l'Université de Bruxelles, pp. 109-132.

Chapter III

The Indochina War and The Shift in France's European Policy

3.1. What this chapter is about

This chapter focuses on the first part of the Indochina War. However, in order to accurately define what is meant by the 'first part,' some clarification is necessary. In this thesis, the 'first part' of the War of Indochina refers to the period between December 19, 1946 and January 1950. In other words, the scope of this chapter covers the period from the start of the Franco-Vietnamese atrocities in Hanoi on 19 December 1946 and concluding with the recognition of Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh government by both Communist China and the Soviet Union. After that the French colonial struggle started to slowly shift towards an ideological conflict with the inclusion of US aid to prolong the war effort in order to fight the Vietnamese communists. As Duroselle argues, as the consequence of the Indochina War, France's interests had diminished in the region while on the other hand, her responsibilities had only increased.⁸⁴

Thus, this chapter sets out to explore how this first part of the war influenced French policy, contributed to the promotion of Franco-German rapprochement and to the abandonment of the idea of the dismemberment of Germany. Thus, the developments of the Franco-German relationship, as well as the development of France's bargaining power vis-à-vis the United States, are interpreted within the framework of the French war effort in Indochina.

3.2. Let there be war

The conflict in Indochina brought to the fore many of the problems de Gaulle's stern anti-German post-war policy was reluctant to acknowledge. The weak state of the French economy and the increase in the military budget due to the outbreak of hostilities in Saigon was a

⁸⁴ J. B. Duroselle, "The Crisis in French Foreign Policy," *The Review of Politics*, Vol 16, No. 4 (1954), pp. 412-437.

deadly combination. By 1948, the Bank of France's gold holdings were severely depleted to a mere 10% of their 1932 level.⁸⁵ This figure, combined with France's staggering trade deficit vis-à-vis the United States made Franco-German rapprochement all the more important, especially in a time of a high-expense colonial war.

Prior to the Indochina War, the paradigm shift in French colonial thinking must be acknowledged. As the French Empire was transformed into the French Union and befittingly, the Indochinese Union into the Indochinese Federation, giving more rights, privileges, opportunities and influence to the indigenous peoples of Indochina.⁸⁶ However, the creation of the French Union and the Indochinese Federation meant that independence was not something the Indochinese peoples (and most prominently the Vietnamese) could achieve through peaceful negotiations. Although the change in the terminology warranted a renewed administrative and economic approach, it brought relatively little political change.⁸⁷ Above all, it most certainly did not include the promotion of independence movements, or the granting of concessions to leaders pushing for more autonomy than what the French deemed adequate. As per the agreement signed on 6 March 1946, Vietnam was to remain part of the French Union but a 'free state' within its structural framework.⁸⁸

The answer to how little thought French policymakers attributed to the eventual independence of Indochina can be traced in Andrew Hardy's paper on 'The Economics of French Rule in Indochina: A Biography of Paul Bernard.' The fact that the French drew up so detailed agricultural and industrial policies for Indochina, influenced by the Japanese economic model suggests that French policy, during the first few years of the Indochina War, did not count with the possibility of losing the colony.⁸⁹ This lends credit to the assumption that the developments in Indochina following the outbreak of the war had a lasting and determining influence on the development of French policy in Europe and on the domestic sphere.

⁸⁵ Hitchcock, *France Restored*, pp. 65-66.

⁸⁶ Ellen J. Hammer, "Blueprinting a New Indochina," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1948), pp. 252-263.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁸⁹ Andrew Hardy, "The Economics of French Rule in Indochina: A Biography of Paul Bernard (1892-1960)," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (1998), pp. 807-848.

French policy was adamant that the independence of Indochina, outside the framework of the French Union, was out of the equation. Talks in Dalat and later in Fontainebleau in 1946 on the economic and political structure of Indochina ended rather abruptly with the outbreak of the hostilities in Hanoi on 19 December; the French conditions of control over the federal authority (of the Indochinese Federation), over customs and money supply were unacceptable for the Vietnamese.⁹⁰ The Vietnamese, above all, wanted complete independence in both political and economic terms. Granting this would have required a remarkable policy shift in Paris, one that the political climate and the restoration of grandeur and prestige simply did not allow for. The fundamentally divergent standpoints of the French (having just reasserted themselves in the region) and the Vietnamese (having tasted independence for a brief period in 1945) were impossible to synthesize.⁹¹

The very idea of the Indochinese Federation was but an illusion. Before the Indochina War, virtually all power was concentrated in the hands of the French Governor General and Paris without any sign of a “division of power between the various constituent units on the one hand and the federal government on the other.”⁹² The largely ambiguous definition of the French Union contributed to the blurring of the line between direct French colonial control and varying degrees of local autonomy. However, the growing menace of the Soviet Union in Europe to American interests in particular, swayed American policymakers to support the once vigorously opposed French return to Indochina in order to secure France’s support and alliance in Western Europe.⁹³

Post-war France was met by numerous challenges. However, the most destructive of all was not the ‘failure’ to dismember Germany, or to realise some largely unrealistic expectation about the role of France among the great powers. It was France’s colonial policy, the mismanagement of which resulted in statements such as de Gaulle’s press conference in October 1948. There, de Gaulle famously answered, to the question of whether he would change France’s foreign policy, that he would not change anything for there was no foreign policy to

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 830-831.

⁹¹ Hammer, “Blueprinting a New Indochina,” pp. 255-256.

⁹² Ibid., pp. 259-260.

⁹³ Herring, “The Truman Administration and the Restoration of French Sovereignty in Indochina,” pp. 115-116.

begin with.⁹⁴ De Gaulle was by no means alone in his thinking. Nevertheless, during the era of the Fourth Republic's divided domestic political landscape there still was a sense of unity and a "shared anguish at the passing of national greatness, a shared humiliation at a century of defeats," based on the unchallenged thesis that the colonies were to remain French.⁹⁵

3.3. Changing landscapes

On the eve of 19 December 1946 no one had thought that Vietnam was embarking on a journey of war spanning through decades. The reason for that is probably found in the nature of the outbreak of the war. As French historian Alain Ruscio argues, the war was the result of an aggression cycle, a series of provocative incidents that one by one, little by little, elevated the tensions from "the possibility of war to the probability of war, and then from this to its inevitability."⁹⁶ Along this road of hostilities of ever increasing intensity, there were opportunities for both sides to de-escalate the conflict and to find a compromise. It is also important to note that the negotiations at Dalat and at Fontainebleau did not collapse entirely – steps ahead were made, some form of acceptable coexistence was promoted. Rather, it was the events of late 1946 that can be invoked as the primary cause for the outbreak of the Indochina War.⁹⁷

Certainly, geography too, played an important role in the outbreak of hostilities. As Indochina was far from Metropolitan France and news took longer to travel, the colonial administration had more liberty in designing its policy. On the other hand, far from Paris' glaring eyes, Indochinese nationalism could blossom without too much disturbance from the French.⁹⁸ This was especially true at a time when the French army (or the economy for that matter) was not in the best of shapes, a fact further exacerbated by the loss of legitimacy the French wielded after the Japanese coup. In the meantime, Paris would still express its fixation on the idea of France's 'civilising work,' supported by the strong belief that France had a mission and thus

⁹⁴ Tony Smith, "The French Colonial Consensus and People's War 1946-58," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (1974), pp. 217-247.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.

⁹⁶ Stein Tønnesson, *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began*. University of California Press, 2009.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹⁸ Smith, "The French Colonial Consensus," pp. 223-224.

it was to remain in Indochina, as expressed by Paul Ramadier (then prime minister) during a debate in March 1947.⁹⁹

Once the war had broken out it was impossible to contain it. As France was under stringent economic constraints following the second world war it could neither support nor administer the forces necessary to put out the fire of rebellion while it was still largely localised.¹⁰⁰ It is a well-accepted interpretation of events that the outbreak of hostilities was the result of cunning and substantial planning as response to French aggression most famously at Haiphong. However, it is not necessarily an accurate one. Much like the French colonial administration's approach to the conflict and their refusal to settle measures peacefully as instructed from Paris, Tønnesson posits that it was the French provocation that caused the Vietnamese to defy Ho Chi Minh's preference for peace, resulting in the December 19 attack on Hanoi, setting the conflict ablaze.¹⁰¹ After careful analysis it becomes transparent that the leaders on both sides were in favour of peaceful coexistence. The March 6 accords, together with the *modus vivendi* signed in September at Fontainebleau support this interpretation. This author agrees with Tønnesson in his assessment of the designs and motivations of the leaders of the French colonial administration in Saigon, acknowledging their rather substantial role in the outbreak of hostilities; it is especially true for High Commissioner Admiral d'Argenlieu, a Gaullist who embodied de Gaulle's ideals even after de Gaulle's resignation in January 1946.¹⁰²

This example illustrates perfectly how deeply entangled the colonial administration was with domestic politics. The motivation of the leading figures of the colonial administration in Saigon was not that of personal gain or ambition. D'Argenlieu, a true Gaullist, opposed peace and resented the thought of granting concessions to Ho Chi Minh out of a drive for the restoration of de Gaulle's ideal of *grandeur* and French imperial prestige. Whereas, Supreme Commander General Jean-Etienne Valluy and Federal Commissioner of Political Affairs Léon Pignon were eager to see communism tremble as much in Vietnam as at home, at a time when Léon Blum, the veteran socialist was at the wheel in Paris.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 227.

¹⁰⁰ Bernard B. Fall, *Streets Without Joy: The French Debacle in Indochina*. Stackpole Books, 2018.

¹⁰¹ Tønnesson, *Vietnam 1946*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁰² Tønnesson, "The Longest Wars," pp. 9-29.

¹⁰³ Tønnesson, *Vietnam 1946*, pp. 5-6.

Still, it could be argued that the widely accepted date marking the start of the Indochina War is rather arbitrary. Even though the Viet Minh attack on Hanoi 19 December tossed the conflict into an ever bloodier spiral it was by no means the beginning of the conflict as a whole. There is ample reason to suggest that the conflict, and with it, hostilities, began the moment the French expeditionary forces stepped foot on Indochinese soil in October 1945 after years of absence.¹⁰⁴ From that moment onwards, although deals were struck and agreements reached, the aggression, provocations and hostilities grew ever more fierce, especially upon the re-establishment of the French colonial administration in Saigon.

Therefore, the tragedy of Vietnam, if one prefers to so refer to the sequences of horror that would befall the country for decades to come, was the failure of the French political system as well. Not only did it contribute to a great extent to the fall of the Fourth Republic but it also showed how bitterly divided the domestic political composition of France was. This also illustrates the importance of a substantial awareness of the linkages between external and domestic affairs. Ultimately, the French debacle in Indochina also shows the limitations of imperial policy at a time of economic weakness when more pressing and more substantial issues were at hand in Europe. This manifests in the deep interconnectedness of external and domestic policy, shedding light on the extent to which foreign policy can influence domestic affairs.¹⁰⁵ The three main characters' actions in Saigon were motivated by external considerations. D'Argenlieu's quest for the restoration of French greatness, and the others' drive to swipe communism off the face of the earth make sense only if one is to interpret these actions in the realm of the international politics.

Since the French did not possess the financial and political resources necessary for a full-scale invasion, especially in the early years of the conflict, they had to get creative, aiming for the Vietnamese' top leaders and strategic points within the framework of "Operation Lea" in 1947; countless operations would follow 'Lea,' but none particularly successful.¹⁰⁶ As this operation, like most following it, has failed the French would seek to force a 'set-piece' battle

¹⁰⁴ Ivan Cadeau, *La Guerre d'Indochine: De l'Indochine française aux adieux à Saigon 1940-1956*. Tallandier, 2015.

¹⁰⁵ Hanrieder, "Compatibility and Consensus," pp. 971-982.

¹⁰⁶ Fall, *Streets Without Joy*, p. 63.

in which their superior units, organisation and technology would no doubt crush Vietnamese resistance. However, as Fall so dramatically puts it:

*“for the French, the search for a big set-piece battle in which they could out-manoeuver and outgun the enemy, began then. It was to end seven years later, when they found the set-piece battle in a small mountain valley whose English name would be “Seat of the Border County Administration.” Its Vietnamese name was Dien Bien Phu.”*¹⁰⁷

This ‘chasing a large-scale land battle’ mentality no doubt contributed to the French debacle, as later the Americans would experience it too, fighting a guerrilla war with equipment and training valuable for the battlefield but worth next to nothing in the thick jungles of Indochina was no easy task.

3.4. Domestic tensions and Indochina in party politics

In the post-war atmosphere of economic and political weakness the preservation of the integrity of the Empire became of paramount importance. As de Gaulle and his followers saw in it the only way for France to regain its prestige and international greatness, one could argue that its perseverance was of even greater importance than the dismemberment of Germany.¹⁰⁸ In retrospect, the French risked their relationship with the US, their primary post-war economic benefactor, for the sake of achieving both goals symbolises their significance. However, the fact that they managed to force their return to Indochina while having to abandon the idea of the dismemberment of Germany demonstrates a sense of hierarchy between the two. Certainly, Germany’s dismemberment was to hurt the French economy in a significant way, and French policymakers were aware of this, especially after de Gaulle’s resignation from office.

Nevertheless, the economic argument on its own does not hold, as no one could argue that the Indochina War left the French economy in a particularly stable state. That is, it would be un-

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, “The French Colonial Consensus,” pp. 240-243.

reasonable to assume that the French abandoned the idea of the dismemberment of Germany out of purely economic reasons. If economics had truly played the main part, the Indochina War would not have been pursued with such intensity either. Both the Indochina War and the dismemberment of Germany were economically questionable enterprises at best but they differed in one meaningful way. French policymakers defined their colonial empire as the key to France's return to great power status, whereas the dismemberment of Germany did not carry such a connotation. The idea that through the quest of restoring imperial greatness France would find the path towards recovery certainly found eager ears among French policymakers.¹⁰⁹ As the dismemberment of Germany was no longer on the table not the least due to significant American pressure, the Indochina War seemed the only way forward.

The turn of events in Indochina had grave domestic political implications for France. Blum's socialist government was drifting with the flow of events, unable to control its colonial administration in Saigon and thus prevent the war. Furthermore, the hundred and twenty committee meetings between Fontainebleau and December 1947 yielded little progress in devising a structured approach to the Indochina question; many of the committee members took a rather aloof and disengaged approach to the matter, rendering the socialist government essentially incapable of dealing with the war.¹¹⁰ However, reluctance on the French policymakers' side to pursue confrontation with the Vietnamese was not solely based on domestic divisions or economic constraints. The French were concerned about the safety of their citizens in the major cities, the security of the French garrisons, while there was, up until the outbreak of the war on 19 December, hope that negotiation with the moderates in Vietnam was still a possibility.¹¹¹ However, even if one takes the hostile and provocative attitude of the French colonial administration out of the picture, the odds of Ho Chi Minh reaching his goals without resorting to violence were minimal. As French policy was centred around the idea of re-establishing pride and prestige through strengthening its colonial empire, Ho's aim for a politically and economically independent Vietnam was impossible to align with French designs for the 'Indochinese Federation' within the framework of the French Union.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 243.

¹¹⁰ Daniel Le Couriard, "Les socialistes et les débuts de la guerre d'Indochine (1946-1947)," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* (1954-), Vol. 31, No. 2 (1984), pp. 334-353.

¹¹¹ Tønnesson, *Vietnam 1946*, pp. 148-149.

Given that the Chinese were troubled with the bloody civil war, and the Americans removed themselves from the equation after realising that granting concessions to the French in Indochina was their best strategy in securing France's cooperation in Europe, France remained the only major player in the region. The new post-war status quo in Indochina thus provided France with remarkable freedom to conduct its colonial policy (or rather, to fight its war) until the Americans would reappear on the scene following the Mao's triumph in the Chinese Revolution in 1949.¹¹² However, the period after 1949 falls outside the main focus of this thesis, as American involvement in France's Indochina War changed the nature of the conflict, albeit gradually, from a war for re-establishing colonial supremacy to that of ideological struggle.

Tønnesson concludes, that the French were adamant in maintaining their presence in Indochina already in early 1945 before the negotiations on March 6 would take place.¹¹³ This readiness to resort to force if necessary certainly contributed to the escalation of tensions in the autumn while making the French colonial administration in Saigon confident that there surely was a plan in place should the war break out. Furthermore, as the Chinese were no longer in a position to prevent the war with their presence in Indochina, there was little restraint for the French in Saigon to refrain from provoking the Vietnamese into aggression.¹¹⁴ As it has already been established in this thesis, the main figures in Saigon were interested in provoking the Viet Minh into aggression. The preparedness for war should the talks break down and the colonial administration's stance make it clear that the French were perfectly prepared to re-establish themselves in Indochina by all means necessary.

Arguably the real tragedy in the outbreak of the hostilities is that the two leaders expressed no desire for war. Blum, like Ho, was committed to finding a peaceful solution. However, due to events outside their control and due to substantial political division on the French domestic scene, war that was initially perfectly avoidable became but a certainty.¹¹⁵ The escalation of the Indochina conflict had grave implications for France's domestic policy on the one hand

¹¹² Harrison E. Salisbury, "Image and Reality in Indochina," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (1971), pp. 381-394.

¹¹³ Tønnesson, *Vietnam 1946*, p. 234.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 234-236.

and on France's plans for European reconstruction on the other. As France refused to give in to the requests to grant concessions to the Viet Minh, it had to adopt a significantly more co-operative policy in Europe.

To illustrate the extent to which France was essentially granted 'free reign' over Indochina by the turn of geopolitics, it is worth it to look at the relationship between Vietnamese and other communists. Communist China and the Soviet Union only granted recognition to Ho Chi Minh's government in January 1950, while the Vietnamese communist party had closer and more meaningful links to the French communist party than to the Russian or the Chinese before the ceasefire of 1954.¹¹⁶ This striking non-alignment with other communist movements leads to the conclusion that Vietnamese insurgency had a lot more to do with the desire for national self-determination than with communist doctrines. The Viet Minh were first and foremost fighting for their independence out of patriotism, gaining the popular support of the rural populace while the umbrella term of communism was disproportionately exaggerated.¹¹⁷ This was especially true for the period between 1950 and 1954 when the conflict gradually transformed into an ideological struggle.

Paul Mus¹¹⁸ claimed, that the Viet Minh government's practices did not emulate those of the communists. The ideas of anti-capitalist behaviour or class warfare were not structurally definitive concepts.¹¹⁹ Rather, the Viet Minh regime was not founded upon repression by force but upon the concepts of some form of moderate socialism.¹²⁰ However, this was not sufficient to yield unity regarding France's colonial presence in Indochina. Leaders of the socialist party were torn between being sympathetic to the idea of colonial liberalism and insisting on the importance of colonial assimilation.¹²¹ This fragile balance was somewhat held together by the March 6 accords (1946) and the *modus vivendi* signed in September in the same year. Yet, the outbreak of the hostilities on 19 December tipped the scales in favour of imbalance. As the primacy of French rule was the main prerequisite for a large chunk of the party's

¹¹⁶ Salisbury, "Image and Reality in Indochina," p. 390.

¹¹⁷ Susan Bayly, "French Anthropology and the Durkheimians in Colonial Indochina," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (2000), pp. 581-622.

¹¹⁸ French author and scholar.

¹¹⁹ Bayly, "French Anthropology and the Durkheimians in Colonial Indochina," pp. 611-614.

¹²⁰ Paul Mus, *Vietnam. Sociologie d'une guerre*. Éditions du Seuil, 1952.

¹²¹ Martin Thomas, "The Colonial Policies of the Mouvement Républicain Populaire, 1944-1954: From Reform to Reaction," *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 118, No. 476, pp. 380-411.

members to consider economic and political reforms in Indochina, the outbreak of the war damaged the party substantially.¹²²

Tensions increased further between the socialists and the MRP in the French parliament as the war progressed. The MRP (Mouvement Républicain Populaire) was not willing to consider entering negotiations with the Viet Minh, as they argued that further negotiations would imperil French attempts to regain control over northern Vietnam.¹²³ Such developments clearly indicate that the Indochina War exerted a rather considerable influence over French domestic affairs, including areas that had no direct link to the military or to foreign policy.

Furthermore, losing Indochina was not unequivocally regarded as the worst thing that could happen to France. On the contrary, there were voices, intellectuals and policymakers alike, arguing that France stood more to gain from abandoning its colonial war in Indochina and focusing on Europe than from prolonging the struggle against the type of guerrilla warfare the Viet Minh was specialised in and the French seemed to have no answer to.¹²⁴ In fact, if France were able to focus completely on her European affairs, it would have less reason to fear German rearmament as mobilisation of her army would be that much easier. Furthermore, letting Indochina go would free up valuable assets, especially relieving France of a huge economic burden that it bore for little to no gain.

3.5. Conclusions

With France's gold reserves exhausted, there was little economic benefit in fighting a prolonged and generally high-expense colonial war. The paradigm shift in French colonial thinking that was supposed to restructure the empire and allow for an extended range of liberties was too little and came much too late. As the new framework of the French Union failed to

¹²² Ibid., pp. 393-395.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 406.

¹²⁴ Duroselle, "The Crisis in French Foreign Policy," pp. 422-424.

bring meaningful political change it was not enough to satisfy the appetite of those calling for independence.¹²⁵

The popular illusion in Paris that the people of Indochina would welcome back the French when the fire of rebellion is extinguished was no doubt a dangerous one. The outbreak of the war had a determining influence on French domestic politics and France's European policy alike, fundamentally weakening the French communist party by the end of the war.

Furthermore, geography has to be taken into account. The fact that Indochina is practically on 'the other side of the globe' allowed for a more liberal interpretation of Paris' instructions in Saigon. This also meant that Vietnamese nationalism could blossom without much disturbance from the French government. These two factors together, along with the personal creed embodied by the leaders of the colonial administration in Saigon, led to the escalation of hostilities to the level of war by late 1946. As war broke out, due to France's stringent economic constraints, it was not feasible to contain it. This further exemplifies how much power external policy decisions have over domestic policy and how intertwined the whole decision-making process really is. For essentially, a small group of men far from Paris wielded so much power in determining the line of action the France had to take, their external policy decisions practically shaped French domestic policy, causing further division between the political parties in Paris and thus halting France's economic recovery.

¹²⁵ Hammer, "Blueprinting a New Indochina," pp. 252-263.

Chapter IV

How It All Comes Together

4.1. US aid and coal

Four days after what is traditionally regarded as the outbreak of the Indochina War (19 December 1946), the State Department of the US issued a memo warning about the difficulties France was facing. As the director of the Far Eastern Affairs noted,

*“with inadequate forces, with public opinion sharply at odds, with a government rendered largely ineffective through internal divisions, the French have tried to accomplish what a strong and united Britain has found unwise to attempt in Burma.”*¹²⁶

One of the main reasons for the French pursuit of such a war was undoubtedly the idea of restoring *grandeur* and prestige through colonial domination. However, the Indochina debacle not only prevented that but also shed light on the weaknesses of the French colonial empire as a whole.

Even though the US had no direct interest in Indochina up until Mao proclaimed the People’s Republic of China on 1 October 1949, their influence was still very much present. This was especially true in an economic sense. However, in the military sector the arrangement between the US and France over the sale of arms was concluded on 8 January 1947. Even though this did not allow for the sale of arms destined for use in Indochina, it helped, the very least, relieve the pressure on French supplies.¹²⁷

As far as economics is concerned, the impact was much greater. During the period between December 1945 and June 1955 France received 7.8 billion US dollars’ worth of aid in the form of the Marshall Plan and other sources of financial contributions to the reconstruction of

¹²⁶ Ted Morgan, *Valley of Death. The Tragedy at Dien Bien Phu That Led America into the Vietnam War*. Random House (New York, 2010).

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 140.

Europe.¹²⁸ This number however, does not include the substantial military aid the US provided France with over the period discussed.

Certainly, the most pressing economic issue of post-war French reconstruction was the revival of the coal industry. Although mostly an economic question, it was deeply political, especially for its implications for the future of Germany. In French appeals for the increase of its coal supplies, one can trace the same mindset that dominated French politics during de Gaulle's provisional government. The argument that stable coal supply for France was not purely a French issue but was central to European reconstruction and even further, it concerned the whole world was a familiar concept.¹²⁹ The idea that France's stability and economic prosperity was central to the maintenance of world order speaks of French policymakers' desire to project France's power through the framework of the empire, to the whole world. This creed certainly included the restoration of French rule in Indochina, where similar arguments relating to the implications of French presence for the stability and welfare of the region were made. Furthermore, the political developments in Indochina during the years 1946 and 1947 made it abundantly clear that France was in need of a much stronger economy in order to finance the war effort and return to a path of growth at home at the same time.

On the Asian theatre, events took a sharp turn in October 1949. With the proclamation of Mao's communist China, followed by his recognition of Ho Chi Minh's Vietnamese government in January 1950 Indochina suddenly re-entered American policy. Even though the US had been largely critical of French re-entry into Indochina, by January 1950 they found themselves at a crossroads. As the communist menace was growing in Europe and the Western powers had no interest in allowing a Soviet presence in the Saar region, containment of the communist threat in South-Eastern Asia was equally important to American policymakers.¹³⁰ By 1948 the French economy was in bad shape, its gold reserves plummeted and its coal supply still short of adequate.¹³¹ With the return of American interests in Indochina followed higher expectations towards the French in prolonging the war effort that already proved ra-

¹²⁸ Gérard Bossuat, "L'aide Américaine à la France après la seconde guerre mondiale," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, No. 9 (1986), pp. 17-35.

¹²⁹ Darryl Holter, "Politique charbonnière et guerre froide," *Le Mouvement social*, No. 130 (1985), pp. 33-53.

¹³⁰ Hitchcock, *France Restored*, pp. 110-118.

¹³¹ Holter, "Politique charbonnière et guerre froide," pp. 44-47.

ther costly and largely inefficient. Even if the growth of American attention towards the Indochina conflict meant greater expectations, the willingness of the US to assist the French in the struggle also meant much needed economic contributions to some degree.

To counter the Soviet threat in Europe, American policymakers started to turn towards the idea of German rearmament. As France was experiencing profound difficulties in dealing with the Viet Minh in Indochina, was more than troubled by the concept of its primary source of humiliation in the second world war being allowed to rearm, albeit this time, as a counter-measure against the ever greater Soviet influence in Europe. However, as East Germany was undergoing the process of rearmament, leaving the West essentially 'defenceless' was too great a risk to take.¹³² Since the French had exploited their 'joker card' by re-establishing themselves in Indochina contrary to what the US wanted, and since they were heavily dependent on US aid, concessions regarding the political future of the West German state had to be made. Schuman concluded that since the French public's political opinion was perhaps only united on the issue of German rearmament, showing openness to the idea would have had grave consequences for the future of the coalition government.¹³³ Had the French not been tangled up in Indochina in the meantime, a costly enterprise that contributed more to the division of domestic political opinion rather than to its unity, they would have had a stronger bargaining chip on their shoulder. But as the French were heavily reliant on US aid, constantly swimming against the current would yield no tangible result. If anything, that would have pushed France into an even deeper domestic division.

Surely, France had to pay a big price for its entanglement in Indochina. During the period of less than four years between de Gaulle's resignation from office in January 1946 and mid-1949, French European policy took a sharp turn. The idea of the dismemberment of Germany that was the centrepiece of the provisional government's European policy was nowhere to be found by 1949. Instead, French leaders, giving in to considerable American pressure on the subject, began to favour the *rapprochement* between France and Germany. By 1949, the question was no longer whether the dismemberment of Germany is possible or is in the inter-

¹³² Hitchcock, *France Restored*, pp. 117-119.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 119.

est in France but how to go about the plan of the German rearmament and France's place in the new European supranational politic-economic structure.¹³⁴

By 1953, largely due to the increase in US aid to fund the prolongation of the French war effort in Indochina, France found itself ever more entangled in the conflict. As the funding for the war was secured, France committed more and more men to the quest, meaning that by 1953 more than half of the French officers were stationed in Indochina, and each year, the conflict saw the death of officers equivalent to a class of the military academy.¹³⁵ This of course diverted attention away from European affairs, at least to a considerable extent while weakening the French military. Furthermore, instead of contributing to the restoration of grandeur and prestige, it became a source of profound humiliation.

The impact of the Indochina War on French economic recovery was also remarkable. The resources that had to be directed at extinguishing the flame of Vietnamese nationalism halted Metropolitan France's development. There was one area however, where the Indochina conflict contributed to French domestic unity. As French policymakers pushed a narrative of the conflict from the very beginning that placed France as the defender of civilisation and morality against the brute force of communist insurgency, the popular support for the communists saw a steady decrease in France. Despite the fact that roughly twenty percent of the voters registered in June 1951 were aligned with the communists (still a considerable number) their force was on the decline.¹³⁶ On the eve of the Indochina War there were more than a million members of the French Communist Party; by 1954 there remained less than half of that.¹³⁷ Certainly, American influence and the call for resistance against communism in Western Europe also had a significant impact.

However, this process was to a large extent influenced by the atrocities committed by the Vietnamese in the war, as well as how French foreign policy interpreted France's struggle in Indochina.

¹³⁴ Duroselle, "The Crisis in French Foreign Policy," p. 418.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 420.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 421-423.

4.2. Dien Bien Phu and the nuclear question

Finally, let us direct our attention to one of the most controversial issues that arose in France shortly after the end of the second world war. In June 1946, France indicated to the United Nations that it had no designs on developing nuclear technology.¹³⁸ However, that would change soon after, mostly relating to the growing soviet menace in Europe. No account of the French colonial debacle in Indochina can be complete without proper acknowledgment of the final engagement between the French and the Viet Minh that put an end to French ambitions in South-Asia.

In order to be able to interpret the nuclear question in the framework of French Indochina, a brief outlook to the role of the French military is useful. Gaullism was certainly an idea much of the army could embrace, especially during the early years of the Indochina War.¹³⁹ However, Gaullism was not what determined the role of the French military in Indochina but the countless errors and mistakes that were made throughout the eight-year long campaign, the most famous of which was certainly the debacle at Dien Bien Phu. Military triumph would have demanded domestic unity and support from the central government in metropolitan France, much like how the Viet Minh went about their business.¹⁴⁰

The fall of Dien Bien Phu is of particular significance as it can be interpreted within the framework of the nuclear question. As Tony Smith puts it, “all the French had learned from eight years of warfare in Indochina was a destructive self-doubt.”¹⁴¹ Due to the continuous military failures and the hopeless state of the conflict in early 1954 steered French policy-makers to begin to contemplate the use of the atomic bomb as the last resort against Vietnamese insurgency in 1954. But there was also the threat of communist dominance in South-East

¹³⁸ Maurice Vaïsse, “La choix atomique de la France (1945-1958),” *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire*. No. 36 (1992), pp. 21-30.

¹³⁹ George A. Kelly, “The French Army Re-Enters Politics 1940-1955,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No. 3 (1961), pp. 367-392.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 382-383.

¹⁴¹ Smith, “The French Colonial Consensus and People’s War, 1946-58,” p. 241.

Asia, the main driver of the US' 'supposed offer' to equip the French with two nuclear weapons in April 1954.¹⁴²

Of course the nuclear question could not have come up in 1954 without US assistance. As American policymakers decided that as much as they opposed European colonialism, they feared the spread of communism more. It was the western way of life under siege at Dien Bien Phu on 13 March 1954 and not simply the carcass of European colonialism.¹⁴³ There is no scholarly consensus as to the level of seriousness behind the contemplation of the deployment of nuclear weapons in Indochina. Certainly, after the fall of Dien Bien Phu on 7 May the nuclear option was no longer entertained by the Eisenhower administration.¹⁴⁴

By the time the Viet Minh faced the French at the 'Valley of Death' as Dien Bien Phu is sometimes referred to, the Americans were essentially funding the French war effort, contributing roughly 80 percent of the budget.¹⁴⁵ It is no surprise therefore, that the French were counting on American assistance on the ground too. In early 1954 the situation in Paris was far from optimal. The French government feared that losing Dien Bien Phu would mean the collapse of the government too, especially that defeat at the 'Valley of Death' would cause a 'diplomatic tragedy' at Geneva.¹⁴⁶ This mindset clearly illustrates how intertwined the Indochina War was with French domestic affairs. The 'existential fear' on the side of the French government signalled that they were inclined to listen to any proposal that could change the course of war; including that of the deployment of nuclear warheads.

This preparedness to explore every possible avenue as the last resort for maintaining French presence in Indochina manifests in the French Prime Minister's Parliamentary address on 4 May 1954 (a mere three days before the surrender of the French forces), according to whom "military conversations with our Allies, all solutions susceptible to improve a situation such

¹⁴² Julian Jackson, "The Siege of Dien Bien Phu," *BBC Media Centre*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/proginfo/2014/17/siege-of-dien-bien-phu>. Accessed on 2/6/2020.

¹⁴³ Richard Hananina, "Tracing the Development of Nuclear Taboo: The Eisenhower Administration and the Four Crises in East Asia," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2017), pp. 43-83.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 54-57.

¹⁴⁵ Morgan, *Valley of Death*, pp. 452-454.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 455.

as that of Dien Bien Phu had been studied.”¹⁴⁷ The strongest deterrent from the use of nuclear weapons was most likely the upcoming Geneva Conference.

Even though nuclear weapons were not deployed in the conflict, it is unreasonable to assume that they were never seriously considered. That is not to imply that the main policymakers in either the US or France were in favour of unleashing such destruction. However, the fact that the Seventh Fleet of the US was present at the Gulf of Tonkin, armed with nuclear warheads, indicates that the possibility of deployment was indeed real.¹⁴⁸

One of the main reasons for not deploying nuclear weapons in the Indochina War and at Dien Bien Phu especially was the concern for French troops. The fact that nuclear weapons would have clearly obliterated both sides at the siege certainly was a strong disincentivising factor in the decision.¹⁴⁹ With the French public overwhelmingly in favour of ending the struggle and the government’s fate in the hands of the Geneva Conference, risking such a disaster was not viable.

4.3. Conclusions

The French attempt to re-establish themselves in Indochina by force after their imperial prestige plummeted and the economy was in a bad state was rather misguided. However, the French believed, that what a stronger and better-equipped Britain did not dare to attempt in Burma, they could manage to secure in Indochina.¹⁵⁰ Even though American aid would relieve some of France’s economic burden, the prolonged war effort and the lack of success contributed to the deterioration of domestic political stability in a meaningful way, whereas substantial reliance on US aid weakened French bargaining position in Europe.

Moreover, Soviet and Chinese recognition of Ho Chi Minh’s government persuaded the US to place even greater emphasis on the importance of European reconstruction and the inclu-

¹⁴⁷ Bernard B. Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu*. Da Capo Press, 2002.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 581.

¹⁴⁹ Morgan, *Valley of Death*, pp. 476-478.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 141.

sion of the West German state into the post-war Western framework. In addition to this, more than 80% of the French war budget was financed by the US by 1953, rendering France's economic independence an illusion. In such a state, France could not press its own agenda as successfully as it could have had there been no lengthy and costly conflict in Indochina.

Conclusion

This thesis argues that the main tragedy of the outbreak of the Indochina War was the false sense of obligation that arose from the Gaullist policies of *La Résistance*. De Gaulle's ideals of the restoration of *grandeur* and of prestige rested upon the reconstruction of the French Empire. The French colonial administration's failure to understand the complex socio-political developments that occurred in South-East Asia during the second world war rendered France's quest for the restoration of her sovereignty in Indochina an impossible enterprise.¹⁵¹ It was impossible not because the French military was not superior to the insurgency forces. It failed because the colonial administration in Saigon was led by high-ranking individuals who were either Gaullists and interpreted France's colonial presence and her creed in light of Gaullism – or were profoundly opposed to communism as a governing idea and saw in it the destruction of French ideals.

Furthermore, this thesis sheds light on how the Indochina conflict shaped France's European policy. This is conducted through an analysis of the limitations of imperial policy at a time of economic weakness and through exploring the consequences of essentially equating France's vital interests with the preservation of its empire, and with its forced re-entry into Indochina in particular. The colonial debacle in Indochina incentivised policymakers to redirect their focus towards Europe and towards Franco-German relations in order to secure a leading role for France in Europe once the preservation of the French Empire in its pre-war form was no longer realistic. It is important to note that the Indochina conflict's influence on European affairs and French domestic developments is interpreted within the context of Hanrieder's Compatibility and Consensus theory. Thus, the developments of the Indochina conflict are understood within the framework of linkage theory, where weight is given to assessing the viability of a certain foreign policy goal in the wider context of the international system while foreign policy decisions are weighted based on their 'measure of agreement' on the domestic political scene.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Duroselle, "The Crisis in French Foreign Policy," pp. 428-429.

¹⁵² Hanrieder, "Compatibility and Consensus," pp. 971-982.

Moreover, it is imperative to recognise that French colonial policy on its own cannot explain the complex intricacies of the development of the Indochina conflict. De Gaulle's creed for the restoration of *grandeur* and imperial prestige or the French colonial administration's defiance of Paris in December 1946 do not provide a sufficient explanation of the escalation of the conflict.¹⁵³ In order to be able to see the 'bigger picture,' other factors needed to be taken into account. Geographic distance between France and Indochina, the natural limitations of imperial policy amidst economic and political instability, the role of ideologies in the conflict (and in metropolitan France itself) and the development of Franco-American relations all need to be accounted for.

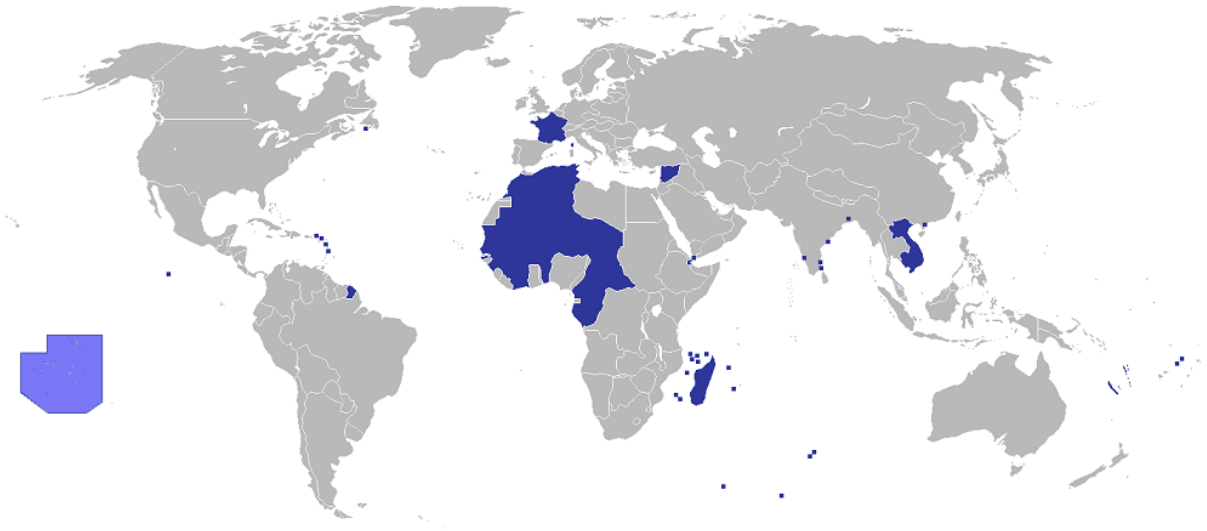
Thus, the research yielded the following results. Firstly, the Indochina conflict had a determining influence on French policymaking even before the conflict would turn into a colonial war. The constitutional debate that determined French politics in 1946 was influenced by the events in Indochina to a considerable extent. The establishment of the French Union and the 're-branding' of French Indochina to the 'Indochinese Federation' were half-hearted attempts to try and keep the colony within the framework of the French Empire.¹⁵⁴ Secondly, the colonial administration's influence over the developments of events and its responsibility for the escalation of hostilities between the French and the Viet Minh had a defining impact on the conflict. The colonial administration's Gaullist and anti-communist sentiments thwarted the achievement of a peaceful dispute settlement. This placed, albeit indirectly, stringent economic constraints on France. In such a politico-economic atmosphere US aid became a defining factor, swaying the direction of French foreign policy towards one that was more aligned with American interests, especially in the post-war European space. More and more substantial reliance on American financial aid steered France's European policy from its mission to dismember Germany towards promoting economic cooperation in Western Europe. Thirdly, France's entanglement in a prolonged conflict in Indochina diverted valuable resources away from its economic reconstruction efforts while further decreasing France's imperial prestige and practically ending any meaningful discussion about the perseverance of de Gaulle's 'myth of *grandeur*.'

¹⁵³ For de Gaulle's creed and foreign policy, see Jackson, *A Certain Idea of France*. For the peculiarities of the colonial administration in Saigon, see Tønnesson, "The Longest Wars: Indochina 1945-75," pp. 9-29.

¹⁵⁴ Géraud and Pertinax, "The New French Constitution," pp. 433-450.

Maps

French Empire (extent from 1919 to 1939)



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_colonial_empire



<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/507569820486620000/>

Annotated Bibliography

Cadeau, Ivan, *La Guerre d'Indochine: De l'Indochine française aux adieux à Saigon 1940-1956*. Talliander, 2015.

Cadeau's book explores how France ended up losing the Indochina War, and leaving Vietnam in 1956 leaving hundreds of thousands of dead behind and closing the chapter of French dominance in Southeast Asia. The book touches upon the relationship between France and its Indochinese dominion during the Second World War under Vichy rule, on the Japanese occupation and expands its analysis to the buildup to the Indochina War following the liberation of France, while including an analysis of Dien Bien Phu and the road from there to the de-escalation of the conflict, arriving to 1956 when French troops left Indochina for good.

Duroselle, J. B., "The Crisis in French Foreign Policy," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Oct., 1954), pp. 412-437.

Duroselle provides an insightful analysis of the challenges of post-war French foreign policy, including invaluable information on France's economic constraints. Duroselle distinguishes six main policy areas where French foreign policy was met with difficulties. Out of these six, the ones most useful to this thesis are the 'European problem,' the 'Problem of Franco-German relations,' and the 'Problem of Indochina.' The work also touches upon the problem of communism in French domestic and foreign policy.

Fall, Bernard B., *Street Without Joy: The French Debacle in Indochina*. Guildford, Connecticut: Stackpole Books, 2018.

Fall's account of the Indochina War is a comprehensive study of the origins and the beginning of the conflict including the role of American influence as well as an analytical piece of work about the unfolding of the bloody and brutal colonial war, including the question of Laos, a topic that is usually largely marginalised if not ignored. At the end of the book, Fall expands on the Second Indochina War and on the future of revolutionary war. Special focus is attributed to the queer nature of guerrilla warfare the French struggled with so much, the idea of the 'hit-and-run' campaign of ambushes, night-raids and retreats into the jungle. As

the book was first published in 1961 in an atmosphere of the escalation of the US presence in Vietnam it serves as a 'warning' as to what awaits the invaders.

Hanrieder, Wolfram F., "Compatibility and Consensus: A Proposal for the Conceptual Linkage of External and Internal Dimensions of Foreign Policy," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (Dec., 1967), pp. 971-982.

In the main theoretical framework of the research, Hanrieder introduces the idea of compatibility and consensus as a method of connecting the external and domestic dimensions of foreign policy. He identifies two problems with previous efforts at constructing a theory of linkage between the two: the analytical separation of internal and external foreign policy based on their significantly different analytical environments, and a too individualistic approach to the analysis. He identifies foreign policy as a continuous process that bridges the analytical barriers between the international and the domestic political systems.

Hitchcock, William I., *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe, 1944-54*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Hitchcock's book on postwar French restructuring and political reconstruction is an important and coherent addition to the study of French political transformations in the era that corresponds to the focus of this research. Hitchcock guides the reader from identifying the limits of French independence after its liberation through how the French political elite coped with the fact that France was 'no longer a great power,' especially focusing on the question of German rearmament and the corresponding slow but steady Franco-German rapprochement. He also covers the French attempts at a unified European military force, at community building and domestic struggles while analysing the impact of American influence on postwar European political negotiations.

Jackson, Julian, *A Certain Idea of France: The life of Charles de Gaulle*. Penguin Books, 2019.

Jackson's highly influential book on General de Gaulle is an essential piece to this research. He describes the political climate of occupied France and analyses the rise of the then relatively unknown de Gaulle who essentially became the leading figure of the Résistance movement. This stunning biography sheds light on the life of the man that kept the spirit of French

resistance alive and played a crucial role in postwar French reconstruction, arguing that it was de Gaulle who managed to put a shattered and diminished France back into the centre of world affairs. The book builds on multiple memoirs and a range of documents that may prove useful for the purpose of this research.

Rosenau, James N., “Compatibility, Consensus, and an Emerging Political Science of Adaptation,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (Dec., 1967), pp. 983-988.

Rosenau’s work on compatibility and consensus complements Hanrieder’s analysis and therefore provides an important addition to the theoretical framework of this research. Rosenau argues for the necessity of linking what is desired at home with what is feasible abroad. He argues that the presentation of Hanrieder’s theory is so abstract that it makes the evaluation of the utility of the concepts of compatibility and consensus quite difficult. However, Rosenau treats Hanrieder’s concept as illustrative of the emerging political science of adaptation as the concepts of compatibility and consensus confront every actor in the political system.

Tønnesson, Stein, *Vietnam 1946: How the war began*. University of California Press, 2009.

Tønnesson’s book on the Indochina War combines decades’ worth of research on how the war broke out. This book provides a vivid account of the Vietnam debacle and the main actors responsible for transforming Indochina into the most embattled region in the Cold War. Throughout the book, Tønnesson provides a clear and unbiased analysis of the events that pushed France into the Indochina War. He argues, that the outbreak of the hostilities on 19 December 1946 came down to French general Leclerc’s misjudgment of the Chinese presence in Indochina in March 1946, and Viet Minh general Giap’s mistake of aggressively reacting to French provocation in December 1946.

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