

THE VIETMINH THREAT AND THE SECURITY
OF THAILAND: ANGLO-THAI RESPONSE AND ATTITUDE

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With the victory of the Chinese Communists over Kuomintang in late 1949, the character of the Indochinese war had changed tremendously. A Chinese regime sympathetic to Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which was established in 1945, now bordered on Laos and Tonkin, parts of which were more or less controlled by the Vietminh forces. With the aid of the Chinese Communists, Ho Chi Minh was able to develop a regular army to face the French in the Indochinese war. The increasing victories of the Vietminh over the French caused much concern to the British. This concern reached a peak when Ho Chi Minh's Government was recognised by the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China in January 1950.¹ All these events led Britain to believe that Ho Chi Minh was the leading figure in the Communists' drive in Southeast Asia.

Given all these perceptions, it was not surprising that an aim of British policy in the early 1950s was to prevent the Vietminh and other Communist forces from achieving success in Indochina. Malcolm MacDonald, the British Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, considered Indochina 'the most important bastion defending the democratic cause in Southeast Asia'.² The fall of Indochina to the Vietminh would further increase Communist infiltration into Thailand and Malaya.

The Foreign Office decided to recognise the Bao Dai Government. It was hoped that international recognition would consolidate the Bao Dai position, though it was realized that the Soviet and Chinese recognition of Ho Chi Minh's regime much earlier had neutralized the psychological effect of the recognition of Bao Dai. The Foreign Office blamed the French Government for delaying the ratification of the transfer of power to the Bao Dai regime until February 1950 and thus giving the Communist the

¹Robert F. Randle, *Geneva: 1954*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1969, p. 3.

²Singapore-Foreign Office, 20 December 1949, CO537/6027.

opportunity to steal the initiative. On February 15, 1950, in conjunction with the United States, the British Government recognised the Bao Dai Government and the associated States of Laos and Cambodia within the French Union.³

The British, however, realised that the Bao Dai Government also needed the support of the Asian nations, particularly Thailand, if it was to be seen as a truly nationalist regime. This was felt to be important because the Thais in general regarded the Vietminh movement as a nationalist rising and were sympathetic to its struggle. At the close of the 1941–45 war, discarded Japanese arms were also smuggled across the Thai border with official sanction for the Vietminh cause. Thai recognition of the Free Cambodian Government in exile in Bangkok came in September 1947, at which time raids into Cambodia from Thailand by representatives of this government were officially tolerated. Although when Pibul Songgram regained political power in April 1948, this support was considerably less positive than it had been, he did not try to prevent arms from being smuggled across the Mekong river. In part, this policy was motivated by the deep anti-French feeling which persisted in official Thai circles after the war and was reinforced after France had threatened to veto Thailand's membership in the United Nations unless former French territories in Laos and Cambodia were returned. Another reason for caution on the part of Bangkok was that Thailand was still not convinced that Ho Chi Minh would not win, and it, therefore, did not wish to antagonize him unnecessarily, at least until it was known that the United States and Britain were prepared to support the French in this war.

In early February 1950, Geoffrey H. Thompson, the British Ambassador, approached Pote Sarasin, Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs, to consider the possibility of Thailand according recognition to the Bao Dai regime.⁴ Pote Sarasin, however, was quite reluctant to entertain Thompson's suggestion that Thailand should recognise Bao Dai, firstly because he did not consider Bao Dai a truly independent agent, and secondly, because he feared that recognition might incur the hostility of some 60,000 Vietnamese in Thailand. Thompson pointed out to the Minister that the Anglo-American action was to be regarded as a positive step toward strengthening those indigenous elements in Southeast Asia which were directly threatened by the Communists. In

³Donald E. Neuchterlain, *Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1965. p. 107.

⁴Thompson-Foreign Office, 9 February 1950, CO537/4325.

particular, the decision taken by the United States to recognise Bao Dai illustrated the growth of interest in limiting the southward advance of Communist imperialism in Southeast Asia. Pote Sarasin replied that if the demarche was really designed to help the cause of the anti-communists in Southeast Asia, the great powers would have to do more than indulge in moral gestures and verbal statements. Pote Sarasin referred to the speech by Dean Acheson, the U.S. Secretary of State, which omitted to make any mention whatsoever of Thailand. Pote Sarasin conceded that his government might issue a statement to the effect that they would wish the Bao Dai regime to succeed.

Meanwhile, Dr. Phillip Jessup, the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large, arrived in Bangkok in mid-February and held a three-day conference with all the United States Ambassadors in the Far East.⁵ The diplomats discussed the serious Communist threat to Southeast Asia and considered various measures to bolster defence within the region. After the conference, Jessup discussed with Pibul Songgram and the members of his government the monolithic character of Communism and its 'total worldwide threat', as well as its activities in the countries bordering on Thailand. Ambassador Jessup subsequently asked Pibul to support the American and the British policy of extending recognition to the Bao Dai government and the newly established governments of Laos and Cambodia. The United States and Britain believed that if Bao Dai's regime were supported vigorously, the Vietminh could be stopped in their efforts to take over Indochina.

Pibul seemed to be convinced by Jessup's arguments about the Communist threat. In contrast to his Foreign Minister, Pibul and his military colleagues were in favour of recognising the Bao Dai regime. This matter caused a split in Pibul's government. While the Prime Minister and the military leaders favoured recognition, the Foreign Minister, Pote Sarasin, strongly opposed it. In the meantime a compromise was proposed in the Cabinet whereby Thailand would grant diplomatic recognition to the Kingdoms of Cambodia and Laos and withhold it from the Bao Dai regime in Vietnam. According to this plan, Laos and Cambodia would be able to serve as type of buffer between Thailand and Vietnam, whether the latter was under Bao Dai or Ho Chi Minh.

However, Pibul overrode his Foreign Minister and decided to recognise the Associated States of Indochina-Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. On February 28, the government announced its recognition of the Bao Dai government and of the newly es-

⁵ Donald E. Neuchterlein, *op.cit.*, p. 106

tablished governments of Laos and Cambodia — a step that precipitated the resignation of the Foreign Minister, Pote Sarasin.⁶ It was therefore an act of considerable political courage on the part of Pibul to recognise the Associated States of Indochina. There was no doubt of the public unpopularity of this move, which was also made against the advice of his officials.

Pibul was no doubt acting for immediate advantage in the shape of increased American aid, which he expected this unequivocal alignment with the Western powers would bring. However, he should also be credited with the wisdom of having risen above the level of petty local antagonisms in Cabinet. Pibul did not allow these to distract him from the implications for Thailand of a Vietminh victory in Indochina. This would undoubtedly engulf Cambodia and Laos as well as Vietnam, and if the whole of Indochina were under Vietminh control this would, in effect, bring the might of the communist Chinese to Thailand's border. Even without open invasion there would be boundless scope for the planning of subversive movements in Thailand, from bases in Cambodia or Laos and the likelihood of the large Vietnamese community in Thailand being roused to active rebellion.

Following the recognition of Vietnam and the French-sponsored governments of Laos and Cambodia, a number of measures were taken by the Thai government which aimed at driving the Vietnamese refugees back over the border, or restricting their residence in certain specified areas away from the border, where their movements could be more easily controlled. Pibul's action against the Vietnamese caused protestations from Peking and this further hardened Thai opinion against the Vietnamese minority group because of the resentment against what was regarded as an interference in Thailand's internal affairs.⁷

The Thai Government also cooperated over the prevention of arms smuggling through Thailand to the Vietminh force and there was exchange of information between the Thai and the French authorities. There were also considerable improvements in the attitude of Thai local officials in the northeastern border areas towards the French or French-sponsored civilians and military authorities on the other side.

THE VIETMINH INVASION OF LAOS

Despite great efforts, the French failed to defeat the Vietminh. Though a quarter of the French armed forces were employed in

⁶ Bangkok-Foreign Office, 1 March 1950, FO371/836554 (FF10340/6)

⁷ *Annual Report for Siam 1953*, FO371/112261 [DS1011/1].

Indochina the military position was virtually a stalemate. In the political field, Bao Dai had not made progress as had been expected. By 1953, the military situation in Indochina had changed in favour of the Vietminh. With the approaching truce in Korea, the Chinese began to focus their attention on Indochina by helping to strengthen the Vietnam forces. In early April 1953, Général Vo Nguyen Giap, Commander-in-Chief of the People's Army, aided by the Vietnamese sympathisers in northeastern Thailand, thrust into Laos in an effort to disrupt the French defence lines.⁸ The Vietminh forces occupied Luang Prabang which was situated just about 60 miles from the Thai border. By the end of April, the Vietminh had wrested control of Northern Laos from the French, whose forces were isolated at Luang Prabang and on the Plain des Jarres, 50 miles north of Vientiane.

The Thai Government was clearly alarmed at the Vietminh threat to its security. It was now feared that the ultimate aim was to mould northern Thailand, along with Laos and parts of Tonkin, into a new state, under Vietminh auspices. This appraisal was engendered by the announcement made by the Chinese Communist government in early January 1953 of the formation of a Thai Autonomous Region in Southeast Yunnan.⁹ The Thai government construed the formation of a Thai Autonomous Region as the establishment of a Thai Government in exile. They regarded its appearance as the prelude to a Free Thai attack, supported by the force of Communist China. Inevitably Pridi's name was connected with the Thai Autonomous Region, and he was said to be at the head of the alleged Free Thai Movement-in-exile in Cheli. But all these alarms proved unfounded and at no time has confirmation been found of any connexion between Pridi and the Thai Autonomous Region or any attempts by the Chinese to use this Region as a base for attacks on Thailand.

Although Pibul regarded the Vietminh invasion of Laos as 'an internal problem' of Indochina, several measures were taken by the Thai authorities along the border. Police reinforcements were sent to patrol the northeastern frontier from Chiengrai to Ubol provinces. The Thai Government began to evacuate inland all Vietnamese refugees of military age from the border area. They were moved to Phetchabun and Pattalung provinces.¹⁰ By evacuating these Vietnamese refugees, the Thai Government was

⁸ *New York Times*, 4 May 1953.

⁹ FORD, *Nai Pridi*, 27 March 1957, FO371/129610 (DS1015/21).

¹⁰ Bangkok-Foreign Office, 1 May 1953, FO371/106886 (FS1016/20).

attempting to avoid a situation wherein the Vietnamese might readily be able to join forces with the Vietminh in Laos and possibly in Thailand in case of an actual invasion.

The British authorities were equally worried at the deteriorating situation in Indochina. Although the British officials on the spot did not believe that the Vietminh would attack Thailand, at least until after the absorption of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, they did not believe that the Thai Government would then be able to face political and ideological pressures from an established Communist regime near her border.¹¹ Firstly, there was an endemic tendency for the Thais to reinsure with the winning side, and this response was encouraged still by the Thai belief that Ho Chi Minh was a nationalist who was fighting the colonial French who were historically disliked in Thailand. Secondly, there was the presence of 60,000 pro-Vietminh Vietnamese and other dissident elements in the northeastern part of Thailand. Lastly, the presence in Thailand, especially Bangkok, of the three million fence-sitting Chinese who might constitute a possible fifth-column.

Commenting on this situation G.A. Wallinger, the British Ambassador in Bangkok, noted:

"The end result, even if there were no direct threat to Siam's territory from across the border of Siam's frontiers, would, I fear, by the establishment in Bangkok of a fellow-travelling regime".¹²

He added:

"With the establishment of a new Communist-administration in Siam, rice would be certainly not flow to non-Communist territories under the conditions or at the price now available".¹³

As a change of government of a leftist tendency in Bangkok would increase immensely the external and internal threat to Malaya, Malcolm MacDonald, the British Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, urged the British Government to do everything possible to avert such a consequence.¹⁴ The objective could be achieved, he believed, if the American and the British Govern-

¹¹MacDonald-Winston Churchill, 13 June 1953, FO371/15689 (FS1043/1)

¹²Notes by G.A. Wallinger, 1 May 1953 in Foreign Office Minute to Prime Minister, 2 May 1953, FO371/106999 [FS1195/119].

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴MacDonald-Winston Churchill, 13 June 1953, FO371/106895 [FS 1043/1].

ments could make a declaration to the effect that they would take any necessary action to protect Southeast Asia from further Communist aggression.

The Foreign Office decided that it could not make any declaration as suggested by MacDonalld but however was prepared to train the Thai police, especially in Special Branch work, as a contribution to securing Northeast Thailand against Vietminh penetration. Meanwhile, it was hoped in British circles that the appointment of General Donovan (Buffalo Bill) as the new United States Ambassador in Bangkok would help to stiffen Thai government resistance against the Vietminh threat.

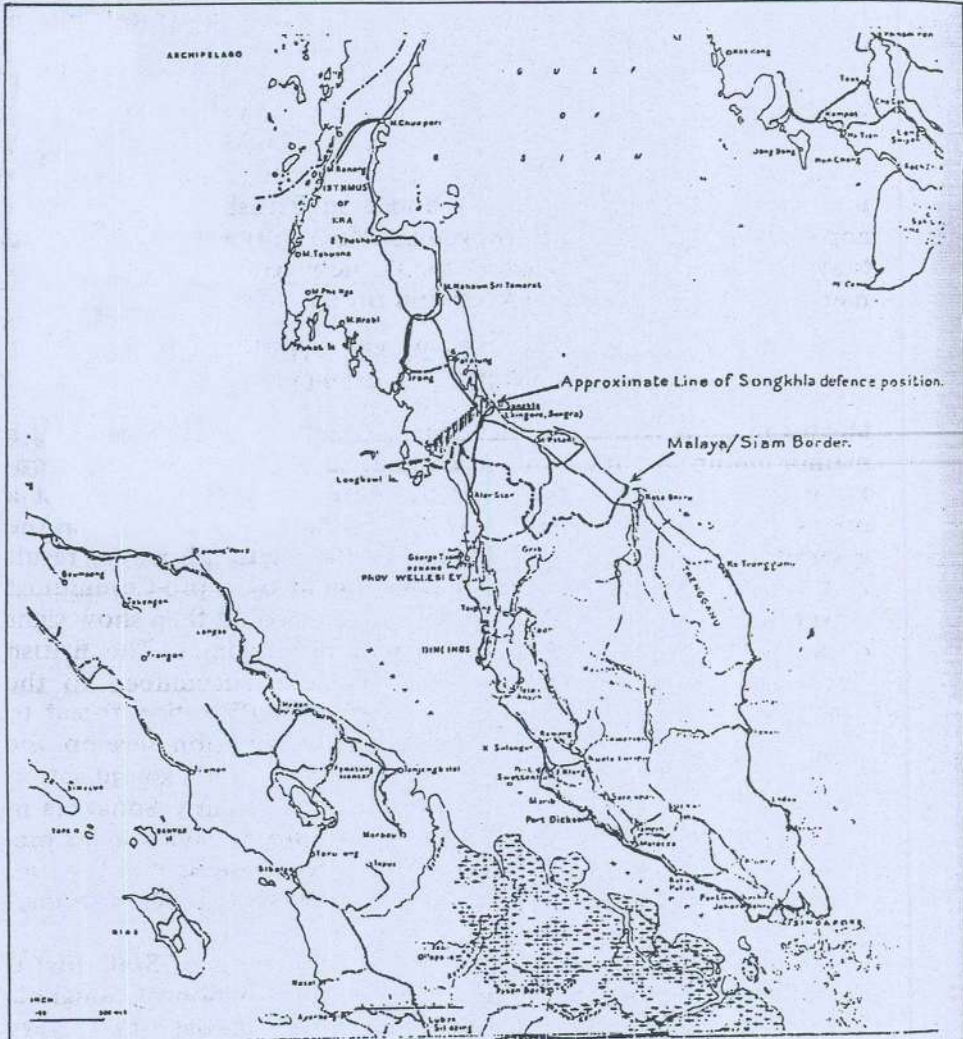
BRITISH CONTINGENCY PLAN: THE OCCUPATION OF SONGKHLA PROPOSAL

Meanwhile, on April 26, the British Chiefs of Staff submitted a memorandum to the British Cabinet Defence Committee containing a contingency plan for the defence of Malaya against a possible Communist threat.¹⁵ The memorandum was based on the assumption that the fall of Tonkin to the Vietminh would result in the replacement of the Pibul government by a pro-Communist Government, or that the Pibul government would then show signs of active cooperation with the Communist regimes. The British Chiefs of Staff believed that if Thailand succumbed to the Communist as a result of internal coup, the infiltration threat to Malaya might rise drastically. Should such a situation develop, the British Chiefs of Staff were convinced that the only sound action to assure the security of Malaya would be to occupy Songkhla in order to prevent Communist infiltration into Malaya and to prepare a strong defensive position, which could be held with comparatively few troops, against an attempt by the Chinese Communists to intervene in Malaya.

The Committee agreed with the British Chiefs of Staff that if Thailand succumbed to Communism the occupation of Songkhla was necessary. Nevertheless, the Committee thought that every effort should be made to obtain the consent of the Thai Government to an occupation of Songkhla. On this point the Committee was told that the Thai Prime Minister, Pibul Songgram, during his talks with the British Ambassador, G.A. Wallinger, in early December 1952, had expressed his willingness to allow the British forces to use South Thailand as 'the Pusan' of his country.¹⁶ In view of

¹⁵Cabinet Defence Committee D(53) 2nd meeting 26 April 1953: Defence of Malaya, CAB 131/13.

¹⁶J.G. Tahourdin - G.G. Buttershaw, 22 April 1953, FO371/106999 [FZ1195/10].



British Contingency Plan: The Occupation of Songkhla Proposal

Source: 'Defence in Southeast Asia' memorandum by the British Chiefs of Staff, 16 December 1954, PO371/11 1920 (D1 193/25C)

this, it was thought that the Thai Government might welcome the British occupation of the Songkhla position as providing a convenient back-door to safety through which they might slip, while still remaining the nominal Government of Thailand.

The Foreign Office representative, on the Cabinet Defence Committee, T.G. Tahourdin, suggested that the United States Government should be informed of the existence of this plan. Sir Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister and the Chairman of the Cabinet Defence Committee, however, thought that 'there is no need for hurry and grave need for secrecy. Plans are being prepared but it may well be 2, 3 or 4 months, or never before they will become urgent. Let us keep this matter in the planning stage at present.'¹⁷ The Cabinet was duly informed of the decision.

THAILAND'S APPEAL TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Alarmed at the Vietminh threat to its security, the Thai Government decided to appeal to the Security Council to send an Observation Commission to Thai-Laotian border. If the appeal met with a Soviet veto, the Thai Government hoped that the case could be transferred to the General Assembly and pursued there. Prince Wan, Thai Foreign Minister, told Whitteridge, the British Charge d'Affairs, about his Government's decision and sought British Government support in bringing the Thai appeal to the Security Council.¹⁸ The presence of 60,000 Annamite refugees on the Thai side of the border was seen as a source of international friction which the Commission might look into and it might also indicate that the crossing of the Mekong river by Vietminh would be regarded as a direct threat to Thailand.

The Foreign Office was of the view that there might be some advantage accruing to Thailand and to the Western cause if it was possible to get an Observation Commission of the United Nations to Thailand. Not only would it help to stiffen Thailand's resistance against the Communist pressure but it would also help to discourage Communist infiltration into Thailand. On this aspect, J.G. Tahourdin minuted:

"Siam's continued independence and adherence to the Western cause are of great importance in view of her geographical situation and the dependence of the British territories in Southeast Asia on her rice. Siam, a staunch

¹⁷Minute by Winston Churchill, 2 May 1953 in G.G. Buttershaw-J.G. Tahourdin, FO371/106999 (FZ1193/129).

¹⁸Bangkok-Foreign Office, 7 May 1953, FO371/106898 [FS1071/7].

supporter of the United Nations, might be discouraged if the United Kingdom opposed the first Siamese attempt to focus United Nations attention on their problem."¹⁹

The United States was also in favour of an appeal to the Security Council but the French opposed it. On May 11, M. Massigli, the French Ambassador in London, called on Selwyn Lloyd, the British Minister of State at the Foreign Office, requesting the British Government to dissuade Thailand from appealing to the United Nations.²⁰ The French foresaw no effective result but believed rather that it would carry the risk of involving China and bringing the war nearer. Despite the French reaction the Foreign Office stuck to its decision 'to avoid discouraging the Thai from appealing to the United Nations.'

On the afternoon of May 22, Pote Sarasin, the Thai Ambassador to the United Nations, handed to Sir G. Jebb, the British Permanent Representative at the United Nations, and at that time the President of the Security Council, the text of the proposed communication to the Security Council.²¹ The text pointed to the invasion of Laos by 'foreign military force' and the Thai Government's concern lest 'these forces may effect incursions into contiguous territories including Thailand'. The situation, they considered, constituted 'a serious threat to international peace and Security'.

In view of Thai decision to bring the matter to the United Nations, Sir Oliver Harvey, the British Ambassador in Paris, was instructed to discuss with the Quay d'Orsay the advantages in supporting Thailand's appeal to the Security Council.

On the morning of May 24, Sir Oliver Harvey called on M de Margerie, the Assistant Political director at the Quay d'Orsay. Harvey put the Foreign Office view that it would be in the French interest to support measures designed to avert any threat to Thailand.²² Despatch of the United Nations observers to the Thai-Laotian border might restrict assistance to the Vietminh in Laos

¹⁹Minute by J.G. Tahourdin, 29 May 1953, in Bangkok-Foreign Office, 17 May 1953, FO371/106898 (FS1071/24).

²⁰Minute by Sir Robert H. Scott, 13 May 1953, FO371/106898 [FS 1071/17].

²¹New York-Foreign Office, 22 May 1953, FO371/106899 [FS1071/34].

²²Paris-Foreign Office, 24 May 1953, FO371/106899 (FS1071/38)

from pro-Vietminh sympathisers in Thailand. M de Margerie was sceptical about the advantages of a Thai appeal to the United Nations. He foresaw three disadvantages. They were:

- a) the danger of acrimonious debate in the United Nations involving great embarrassment to France;
- b) the danger of a Soviet veto, and
- c) a Thai appeal without practical result would demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the United Nations, notwithstanding the experience in the Korean war.

Margerie thought that if a Peace Observation Commission sub-committee were requested and agreed it would be difficult to avoid the despatch of observers to Thailand. He believed that it would not be politically feasible for the French to use their veto to prevent a discussion of related matters in the Security Council which would be contrary to their interests.

However, he hoped the Thais would confine themselves to addressing a letter to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General of the United Nations calling attention to the 'abnormal situation' on the frontier without mentioning the source of the danger or asking for any particular attention to be taken. This would be in line with the practice adopted by the Yugoslavs when they complained about frontier violations and would make it possible for a debate to be avoided. However, since the Vietminh threat to Thailand had receded, Margerie thought that there was no apparent advantage in pursuing the matter in any case.

The Foreign Office agreed with the French that, since the Vietminh threat had receded, it would be wise for Thailand to delay its appeal to the Security Council. Furthermore, it was feared that the Thai appeal would become mixed up with the Panmunjun talks on the Korean conflict. Apart from that, the unstable political situation following the fall of the Pinay Government in France was felt not to be a suitable time to raise the Thai appeal in the United Nations. The Thai Government was given the same advice by the State Department.

In view of the situation in France as well as the receding threat from the Vietminh, the Thai Government decided to postpone its appeal to the United Nations. The proposal for an appeal was not raised until June 1954 when the Vietminh resumed its intrusion into Laos and Cambodia.

In late December 1953, the Vietminh forces again approached Laos, this time taking Thakkek, a town on the central Mekong across the Thai frontier. The Thai Government met the situation by placing the nine border northeast provinces in a state of emergency and rushing reinforcements there. In early February 1954,

the Vietnamese forces approached Luang Prabang and in April they invaded Cambodia.

Faced with Vietminh success, the French leaders sought a negotiated settlement on Indochina conflict. At the four-power conference in Berlin the ground work for a conference in Indochina that would negotiate a settlement of the conflict was prepared.²³ The French plan for a negotiated settlement was strongly supported by the British Government on the grounds that it would help to prevent the war becoming a wider conflagration. The United States, on the other hand, wanted to delay the talks on Indochina until there was a marked improvement in the military situation in order to allow negotiation from a position of strength. John F Dulles, the US Secretary of State, called for the creation of an alliance that would stiffen the French will to resist. However, the French and the British responded coolly to the proposal, on the ground that it would wreck any prospect for success of the Geneva conference. Thus, without Anglo-French support, the United States was forced to delay its plan to form a defence alliance until the final conclusion of the Geneva talks. On April 26, Geneva conference on Indochina convened.

The fall of Dien Bien Phu to the Vietminh on May 8, 1954 heightened Thai anxieties about her security. Thailand feared that the event would mark the beginning of the French defeat in the Indochina war. Bangkok did not believe that the Geneva conference would succeed in settling the Indochina crisis but would, on the other hand, give the Communists an opportunity to extend the authority there. Thailand was in favour of the United States proposal to establish a security pact to face the Communist threat. However, in view of the Anglo-French opposition to the idea, the Thai Government, encouraged by the United States, decided to revert to its plan of June 1953 to secure the despatch of a Peace Observation Commission to the Indochina-Thai frontier.²⁴

The British Government, at first disagreed with the plan because it feared that it would adversely affect the Geneva conference. However due to the United States insistence, it reluctantly agreed.²⁵ There were several reasons for this. Firstly, the British attitude towards a Thai appeal to the United Nations had been set out as early as May 1953. While unenthusiastic about a border Commission T.G. Tahourdin had reflected the British position then when he minuted:

²³ Robert F. Randle, *op.cit.*, p. 107.

²⁴ Geneva-Foreign Office, 15 May 1954, FO371/112274 [FS1071/3].

"If however, the Siamese are anxious to proceed with their appeal, opposition would have disadvantages."²⁶

It was felt that support for the Thai appeal would not only bind the Thai government more firmly to the West but would stiffen its resistance against the Vietminh threat. Not less important was the consideration that Britain wanted to maintain close relations with the United States.

As expected, the French expressed their concern at the decision to appeal to the Security Council. They still feared that the Thai plan might wreck the Geneva Conference. They maintained that the Thai appeal would result in acrimonious debate in the Security Council. As a compromise, the French suggested the Security Council might adopt the Thai proposal on the agenda and then decide to postpone the debate until the outcome of the Geneva Conference.²⁷

At the Tripartite meeting between the British, French and American representatives on May 28, 1954, Sir Pierson Dixon, the new British Permanent Representative at the United Nations suggested that in order to minimise the danger of adverse reactions on the Geneva talks of a Thai move at the United Nations, the Thai request should be limited to asking for observers to go to Thailand only, and that the Security Council instructions to the Peace Observation Commission should be similarly limited.²⁸ Hoppenot, the French Representative, supported the plan. So did Cabot Lodge, the US representative and currently President of the Security Council. The Thai Representative was duly informed about the suggestion that observers be limited to Thailand. As a result, the broad references to 'the area' and 'the region' were removed from the Thai draft letter to the Security Council.

On May 29, Pote Sarasin, Thai UN delegate, formally requested the Security Council to place his Government's complaint on the agenda.²⁹ The Thai based their request for the sending of the Peace Observation Commission on the ground that 'it would protect humanity from the Scourge of war'.

²⁶Minute by J.G. Tahourdin, 20 May 1953, in Bangkok-Foreign Office, 17 May 1953, FO371/106898 [FS1071/24].

²⁷New York-Foreign Office, 27 May 1954, FO371/112274/[FS1071/20].

²⁸New York-Foreign Office, 28 May 1954, FO371/112275 [FS1071/25].

²⁹New York-Foreign Office, 29 May 1954, FO371/112275 [FS1071/28]

On June 3, the meeting of the security Council was convened. However, before the meeting took place, Dixon reminded Lodge to ensure that the Thai delegate's speech was restricted to requesting the despatch of observers to Thailand as already agreed.³⁰ Any resolution should also confine the Observers group to Thai territory and prevent action by it in Laos and Cambodia.

During the meeting, the Soviet representative, Tsarapkin, opposed placing the Thai appeal on the agenda. He maintained that consideration by the Council of the Thai appeal, which was tantamount to considering the question of Indochina, was not necessary in view of the Geneva Conference.³¹ Discussion in the Security Council might hinder a solution there. The Soviet representative intimated that the United States, working with Thailand, was trying to sabotage the Geneva Conference.

The French representative, in his statement, shared the concern of the Soviet Government about prejudice to the discussion at Geneva, but recognised that the request did not bring up the question of Indochina as a whole, and since it was clear from the Thai letter that observers were only requested for Thailand itself, he did not believe that consideration at that time, within those strict limits, could do any harm. He believed that members of the Council would take great care not to enlarge the scope of the discussions or do anything which would interfere with the Geneva talks.

The vote on the adoption of the agenda was then taken. The result was ten in favour and one against.

The Thai representative was then invited to present his Government's case. He argued that until 1953 the war in Indochina was fought only in Vietnam, but after that there were serious incursions into Laos and Cambodia by Vietminh regular troops. This created a threat to the security of Thailand which he wished to bring to the attention of the Security Council. He based his speech in the main on his letter to the Security Council with the exception of the part in which he made the actual request for observers. Here, he said:

“ . . . in consequence, Mr. President, I would suggest that a sub-commission be established with the authority to despatch observers to any states concerned, but only to the territory of states consenting thereto.

³⁰New York-Foreign Office, 3 June 1954, FO371/112276 [FS1071/54].

³¹*Ibid.*

"The Commission should also have the authority to visit any area in which Observation is being conducted".³²

He made it clear that he did not consider that Thailand's appeal would in any way interfere with negotiations at Geneva and that it was not his desire to do so.

The Lebanese representative proposed the adjournment of the meeting, saying that he was fully mindful of the need to avoid prejudicing Geneva, but that he nevertheless had voted for the adoption of the agenda. The adoption of the agenda did not mean that the Council had to undertake immediately detailed consideration of the debate on the item. It had seized itself of it, and members of the Council would doubtless need time to consider the statement made by the Thai representative. The motion for the adjournment was passed by ten votes in favour, none against and one abstention. The Soviet representative did not take part in the vote. The meeting was adjourned until 16 June.

Dixon, in his comment to the Foreign Office on the proceedings, considered the Thai statement, as quoted above, as 'unfortunate',³³ because it referred to despatch of observers to any state or states concerned which consented to receive them. Although it did not commit the Council to do anything more than to send observers to Thailand, and indeed Hoppenot, in his speech made clear that this would be the proper thing to do in the view of the French Government, the British Government were clearly going to have great problems in holding the United States to their undertaking about limiting the scope of the observers when they came to discuss the text of the Thai draft resolution.

As expected by Dixon, the United States wanted the scope of the Thai resolution to be expanded so as to allow for the possibility of observers later to operate in adjoining territories. The draft resolution was as follows:³⁴

"The Security Council, recalling General Assembly resolution 337(v) (Uniting for Peace), Part A, section B establish a Peace Observation Commission which could observe and report on the situation in any area where there exists international tension, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security; finds that there exists in the general region in which Thailand is located a condition of international tension the continuance of which is likely to endanger international peace

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ New York-Foreign Office, 9 June. 1954, FO371/112276 [FS1071/71A].

and security; requests the Peace Observation Commission to establish a sub-commission on Southeast Asia composed of . . . with authority:

- (A) to despatch such observers as it may deem necessary to any part of the above region on the request or with the consent of any State concerned, but only to the territory of States consenting thereto;
- (B) to visit, it is deemed necessary, any area in which observation requested under sub-paragraph (a) is being conducted;
- (C) to consider such data as may be submitted to it by its members or observers and to make such reports as it deems necessary to the Peace Observation Commission and to the Security Council."

Commenting on the draft, Dixon suggested that they should try to avoid any such wide competence for the sub-commission. It would be sufficient, Dixon thought, for the despatch of observers at this time to be limited to Thailand, while authorizing the Peace Observation Commission to deal with any further application for observers. This would mean that action beyond Thailand would have to be taken in the Peace Observation Commission and not simply by the sub-commission, but it would also avoid the need for going back to the Security Council. To limit the sub-commission's sphere, Dixon proposed that the 'requests' paragraph be redrafted so as to omit mention of Southeast Asia.

Lodge agreed to a compromise draft on the proposed line. He also accepted a suggestion to cut out all general references to Southeast Asia. As regards the passage in the draft resolution that authorised action outside Thailand, Lodge proposed a new draft which should define the functions of the sub-committee as follows:³⁵

- "(C) To consider such data as may be submitted to it by members or observers and to make such reports and recommendations as it deemed necessary to the Peace Observation Commission and the Security Council. If the observers or members of the sub-commission are of the opinion that they cannot adequately accomplish their mission in relation to Thailand without observation or visits also in states contiguous to Thailand, then they are to report to the Security Council or the Peace Observation Commission for further guidance on this matter."

Dixon agreed with the new draft as it would delay the question of observers being sent outside Thailand for many weeks.

³⁵New York-Foreign Office, 11 June 1954, FO371/112277 [FS1071/81].

Before the Security Council meeting on June 16, Dixon discussed the draft resolution with Lodge, Hoppenot and Pote Sarasin. They all accepted the draft.

The Security Council met in June 16. Pote Sarasin submitted his draft resolution which referred to General Assembly resolution 377 (V) (Uniting for Peace), Part A, section B, establishing the Peace Observation Commission, and asked that the Council request the Security Council to set up a sub-commission of three or four members to send observers to Thailand and make reports and recommendations as thought essential to the Peace Observation Commission and the Security Council.³⁶ If the Commission thought it could not carry out its task well without visiting Thailand's neighbour, it should report to the Commission or the Security Council for necessary instructions.

In a brief statement, Pote Sarasin drew attention to the phraseology of the last sentence of the resolution, which differed from the suggestion he had made earlier that the Sub-Commission should be given authority to despatch observers to any part of the general area of Thailand on the request of any state or states concerned. He pointed out that this important change was not the Thai Government's choice, but was the result of a compromise in deference to other's wishes that the scope of the activity of the Peace Observation Commission be limited at least for the time being. Despite this compromise, he considered that the observers should be as close as possible to the disturbed area and that any attempt to deprive the sub-commission of the possibility of visiting the trouble spot would be almost reducing it to impotence.

Delegates from New Zealand, Turkey, Columbia and China indicated their general support for the draft resolution. The Chinese delegate however expressed his doubts as to the wisdom of the compromise to which Thailand had referred. In a brief intervention, Dixon explained that the Thai apprehensions were natural and understandable in the circumstances, and that it was commendable that the Thai Government should have brought its anxieties to the attention of the Council. The British Government, he said, viewed the appeal with sympathy and considered the Thai

³⁶New York-Foreign Office, 18 June 1954, FO371/112277 [FS1071/97].

proposal as reasonable and moderate. The constraint in the last sentence of the draft resolution seemed to him a wise provision.

Lodge described the Indochina conflict as the latest attempt of Communist imperialism. The threat to Thailand had increased and the Vietminh troops were equipped with modern weapons. He supported the Thai request and urged the Council to act with all speed in sending observers to Thailand. The threat to Thailand originated beyond her borders. On the basis of the last sentence of the draft resolution the Security Council or the Peace Observation Commission would be in a position to authorise the sub-commission to extend its functions. Without such provision, it might be prevented from fulfilling its mission. The observers should first be authorised to visit the area where the threat existed and if their reports bore out the Thai estimate, the position could then be reconsidered.

The Council adjourned until Friday June 18. After the meeting, Dixon discussed with Lodge and Hoppenot the tactics to be adopted at the June 18 meeting. It was agreed that they should all firmly discourage any attempt, for example by the Chinese, to amend the draft resolution and should endeavour to bring the matter to a vote on Friday. They also agreed that in the event of a veto there should be an interval for consultation before proceeding to the General Assembly and in the meantime the item should be left on the Security Council agenda.

On June 18, the draft resolution was put to a vote.³⁷ The Soviet representative opposed the draft, asserting that there was no threat to Thailand's security. By getting the matter raised in the Council, he said, the Americans were threatening the people of Indochina with a view to expanding the war there and dominating the country. He asserted that the Thai move was simply a camouflage for American manoeuvres to befuddle world opinion and scuttle the Geneva Conference at the moment when new possibilities for settling the Indochinese problem had appeared. He asked why the Thai Government wanted to ask for observers to be sent to Thailand when a peaceful settlement was already appearing on the horizon, and when Pierres Mendes-France, the new French Prime Minister had declared his intention of concluding a peace settlement within a month. Tsaropkin declared that his government could not support the resolution relating to Thailand.

³⁷New York-Foreign Office, 18 June 1954, FO371/112277 [FS1071/99].

Dixon, in response to Soviet allegations, pointed out that there were a number of contradictions in Tsaropkin's speech. He agreed that it would be wrong to raise the Indochinese problem in the Council as it was already being discussed in Geneva but the Soviet representative had then proceeded to raise that very subject. Dixon objected the Soviet allegation that Thailand's appeal was part of an American plot designed to scuttle the Geneva Conference. Thailand was a sovereign state with a mind of its own, and conscious of its obligations under the United Nations Charter. The debate had shown that a majority of members felt that the Thai apprehensions which had caused them to bring the matter to the Security Council were fully justified.

The Council then voted on the draft resolution with nine in favour, one against (USSR), and one abstention (Lebanon). Because of the Soviet veto the resolution failed.

Lodge commented sharply on Tsaropkin's speech. It was absurd, he said, to accuse the United States of preparing for armed intervention in the face of the military aid which had been sent to the Communists in Indochina. It was the United States policy to respond to requests for aid from independent peoples striving to protect themselves against Communist imperialism. He blamed the Soviet Union for preventing the United Nations action in Indochina and Korea. If left unchallenged, the veto would prevent the United Nations from responding to Thai appeals. He proposed to take the matter to the General Assembly.

On the same day 18 June, Dixon reported to the British Foreign Office about the State Department idea of taking the Thai appeal to the General Assembly.³⁸ He did not believe that they would be able to limit the Assembly debate to the resolution about the despatch of observers to Thailand. If negotiations were still going on in Geneva, it would not be wise for Britain to run the risk of a debate in the Assembly. They ought to try to persuade the Americans that the Thai appeal would not be considered in isolation, and that a real pause was needed to work out future policy and to see how things developed at Geneva before they embarked on the Assembly procedure and committed themselves to a target date for an Assembly meeting. Furthermore, some delay in calling the Assembly would give them an opportunity of trying to get Asian, and in particular Indian, opinion to accept the Thai resolution.

Eden agreed with Dixon about the importance of a delay in bringing the Thai appeal to the General Assembly. He recalled that

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Mendes-France had committed himself to getting an Indochina settlement by July 20.³⁹ It was important that no meeting of the Assembly should take place before that date.

At the tripartite meeting of the British, American and French representatives on June 23, Dixon explained to Lodge why the British Government were unwilling to embark on the Assembly procedure immediately.⁴⁰ Hoppenot also voiced a similar view on the matter. Hoppenot said that the French Government considered that the Government of Thailand should be discouraged from putting in their request for an Assembly until or after July 20. While the new French Government were negotiating seriously with the Communists, they could not possibly support a Thai request for an Assembly meeting.

Meanwhile, in his talks with Sir Roger M. Makins, the British Ambassador, on June 29, Dulles pointed out that even if an agreement were reached at Geneva, it was still important to hold open the possibility of United Nations observers entering Laos and Cambodia, even though they might not in the event need to do so.⁴¹ He personally thought action in the United Nations would strengthen the hands of the French at Geneva. Dulles asserted that whatever happened in Indochina, it seemed wrong and unnecessary for the French to attempt to deny Thailand the protection of the United Nations.

On July 2, 1954, Dixon discussed the issue with Prince Wan, the Thai representative at the United Nations.⁴² Prince Wan explained that he intended to address a letter to the Secretary-General or to the President of the General Assembly stating that he would shortly be asking for the General Assembly to reconvene under Rule 6 of its rules of procedure, to consider the Thai appeal for United Nations observers. At that stage, he said, he would make no specific request and mention no specific date. The request would be for a resumed, not a special, session. However, in the event of a settlement on Indochina, the Thai Government might quite possibly not wish to press their request for Assembly action.

³⁹Geneva-Foreign Office, 19 June 1954, FO371/112277 [FS1071/100].

⁴⁰New York-Foreign Office, 23 June 1954, FO371/112277 [FS1071/105].

⁴¹Washington-New York, 29 June 1954, FO371/112277 [FS1071/114]

⁴²New York-Foreign Office, 2 July 1954, FO371/112277 [FS1071/120]

Prince Wan explained that it was not his government's wish to interfere with the prospects of an Indochina settlement at Geneva by bringing up the Thai appeal at the United Nations. From the Thai point of view, it was desirable to put on record their request for the Assembly to take action before it became clear at Geneva whether an Indochina settlement was going to materialise or not, since it might be difficult for them to ask for Assembly action if a settlement on Indochina was in sight.

The Foreign Office had no objection to Prince Wan proceeding on the line proposed, although it hoped that he would not allow himself to be pressed into action until July 20, 1954.⁴³

On July 7, Prince Wan submitted his letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations requesting the inclusion in the agenda of the eighth session of the General Assembly an additional item entitled 'Request of Thailand for Observations under the Peace Observation Commission'.⁴⁴ In an explanatory note, Prince Wan referred to the 'hostile foreign forces' that had invaded Cambodia and Laos. 'These foreign interventions', he noted, 'which have received and are receiving material and political support from outside of Indochina are designed to overthrow the legal Governments of Laos and Cambodia and to establish the Vietminh supremacy in those countries. At the same time, the Vietminh regime and its foreign associates have stepped up their propaganda campaign against Thailand by making serious and false charges against it, while urging within Thailand itself those elements which are subservient to them to undertake and intensify subversive activities which are directly related to the war which is being fought on Thailand's eastern and north-eastern frontiers'.

On July 21, 1954, the Geneva Conference reached its conclusion. An agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam was signed and came into force on July 22.⁴⁵ The agreement provided for a ceasefire in Indochina, and the neutralism of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

In view of the Geneva settlement, the British Government did not think that Thailand needed to press for an extra session of the General Assembly to discuss the threat to Thailand's security from the Northeast.⁴⁶ To do so would demonstrate a

⁴³Foreign Office-New York, 5 July 1954, FO371/112278 [FS1071/1237].

⁴⁴New York-Foreign Office, 7 July 1954, FO371/112278 [FS1071/123].

⁴⁵For detailed discussions on Geneva Conference see, Robert F. Randle *op. cit.*

lack of confidence in the Agreement. Furthermore, it was only one aspect of a much larger problem. The French were of a similar opinion. The Americans, however, remained consistent in their policy. The State Department still intended to include the Thai item on the Assembly agenda. Their arguments were that it was by no means certain that the armistic would prevail and there would be advantages in having the United Nations observers in the territory adjoining those areas directly covered by the United Nations Supervisory Commission, but not within their orbit. Some mark of lack of automatic confidence in the armistic would be a salutary counterpoise to the current Soviet line that all was now 'sweetness and light in Indochina'. Furthermore, to drop the Thai appeal against the background of a Soviet veto in the Security Council was undesirable. The State Department preferred that the General Assembly should authorize the Peace Observation Commission to establish a sub-commission for Indo-China and despatch observers at once.

In view of the State Department's position, Dixon saw Prince Wan on August 16 to discuss his plan.⁴⁷ Prince Wan said he had not yet taken a final decision, but that, although the danger of invasion had been lessened by the Geneva Agreements, that of infiltration of the Vietminh into Laos was greater. The Free Thai movement was becoming a more serious danger to the Thai Government. He recognised that it would be unrealistic to ask for observers to be sent to Thailand, but his suggestion was that a Peace Observation Commission sub-committee should be set up in New York. He was sure that he would get majority for the inclusion of his request in the General Assembly agenda, though he was doubtful about the resolution itself being passed.

The British and the French continued to oppose the Thai proposal. The Thai Ambassador in London was duly informed of their attitudes, while in New York, Dixon warned Prince Wan that he could not guarantee that the British Government would vote for the inscription of any Thai item.⁴⁸

In view of the Anglo-French opposition, the Thai Government decided not to press for a resumed session of the General Assembly, but reserved the right, if need be, to raise the matter during the forthcoming session. The United States agreed to this

⁴⁶ Foreign Office-New York, 17 August 1954, FO371/112278 [FS1071/1398].

⁴⁷ New York-Foreign Office, 20 August 1954, FO371/112277 [FS1071/143].

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

decision. However, it noted that if the Thai Government decided to submit a proposal in the General Assembly, the United States Government would support her. The Secretary-General of the United Nations was duly informed of the Thai decision on August 23, 1954.⁴⁹

Thailand was clearly compelled by lack of British and French support to wait to see how the Geneva settlement on Indochina was working out. At the same time, she was looking forward as an alternative safeguard to the UK-US proposal to form a security alliance in Southeast Asia which she desperately needed to bolster her defence against the Communist threat.

⁴⁹New York-Foreign Office, 23 August 1954, FO371/112278 [FS1071/1457].