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NSC BRIEFING

DRAFT 29 JULY

INDOCHINA

The war in Indochina continues with no real break in sight on either the political or the military side.

It is apparent that French leaders continue to dispute the extent of concessions to be granted the Associated States. There has been no dramatic announcement from Paris of a bold new policy that might rally Indochinese nationalism to the anti-Communist fight. In Vietnam, the time may have passed when such an announcement would be effective. Suspicion and inertia among Indochinese leaders continue.

In the military field, the French airborne operations at Langson two weeks ago and action at points along the central Vietnam coast offer evidence of a reinvigoration of the French High Command under General Navarre. The task of destroying the Viet Minh, as distinct from harassing attacks, will depend on the activation of effective Indochinese armies, and progress in this respect has been far from satisfactory.

In addition, General Navarre's request to Paris for 20,000 more troops to enable him to take the offensive in the fall will apparently be met only with a limited number of new cadres. The psychological effect of the Korean truce is not calculated to bring additional support in France for a larger military effort in Indochina.

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Meanwhile, Chinese Communist aid is being delivered to the Viet Minh at a rate nearly double that of last year and the Viet Minh is believed to be in a stronger position than ever before to launch another major offensive in the fall.

So far as the current fighting is concerned, the Langson operation caught the Viet Minh completely off balance and about 5,000 tons of enemy materiel were destroyed. The operation's psychological impact on both French and Viet Minh troops in Indochina probably overshadows its strategic significance. There are indications of improved morale among French Union forces, and of Viet Minh efforts to disperse their supply dumps.

Several relatively small-scale amphibious raids against Viet Minh positions along the central Vietnam coast culminated on 28 July in an operation involving some 10,000 French Union troops who landed at a point north of Hue. Their objective was the destruction of a regular Viet Minh regiment located in the area. According to latest reports, heavy fighting was still in progress, but many Viet Minh troops may have escaped encirclement. The French command is taking advantage of the dry season in this part of Indochina which ends in September -- about the same time that the skies start to clear above Tonkin.

The latest information on Chinese Communist aid to the Viet Minh indicates that it averaged 900 tons monthly during the first half of 1953. This compares with a monthly average of 500 tons last year. Deliveries during June, however, are reported to have

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reached 2,600 tons. The cessation of fighting in Korea will provide China with a greater capability.

There is as yet no positive indication of the major direction of the Viet Minh's anticipated autumn campaign. The two most important alternatives are massive attacks in the Tonkin delta and a renewal of last spring's offensive in Laos, and in fact both these courses may be pursued simultaneously.

On the political side, the relations between France and the Associated States are to be renegotiated in accordance with the French 3 July policy declaration. This declaration offered to "perfect" the independence of the states, but evaded the basic issue of whether the states have the right to withdraw from the French Union.

The note's vagueness reflects a split in the French cabinet. Foreign Minister Bidault is at the head of those who would avoid sharing French control, and who look toward an eventual Far Eastern conference as the means of solving the Indochina problem. Vice-premier Reynaud would stress greater Indochinese and perhaps American responsibility. He has suggested a plan for the phased withdrawal of French troops.

Public pressures in France for a solution to the Indochina problem are mounting, and will be further stimulated by the Korean truce. But parliamentary support for negotiations with the Viet Minh, which at this stage would amount to virtual surrender, has not yet reached serious proportions.

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The latest French note to Cambodia promises eventual complete independence, and thus goes further than the 3 July note. Cambodia has insisted on French acknowledgement of the actual independence of Cambodia, rather than a promise thereof. The king is apparently willing, however, to accept the note as a basis for negotiation but insists that his government have the right to determine the military sectors which should be under French command and that the negotiations shall take place in Cambodia rather than France.

He is proceeding with a program to "mobilize the peasants" ostensibly as a means of refuting the French contention that Cambodia is not capable of defending itself against the Viet Minh. The French charge, with some justification, that the recruiting program is directed against them more than against the Viet Minh.

Tension in Cambodia remains high, and a favorable outcome will depend on the king's ability to control the anti-French feeling he has helped foster, and on the French clarifying their position toward independence.

Vietnam expressed satisfaction with the French 3 July note and is preparing to negotiate the transfer of services still wholly or partly under French control. Vietnam obviously expects to profit by any concessions won by Cambodia.

In general, much uncertainty and suspicion prevails among the Indochinese regarding French intentions, and inhibits the fight against the Viet Minh.