Laos, North Vietnam, and the Credibility of Nehru's Leadership in Asia, 1954-1962

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Abstract

A central hypothesis in the existing literature on Indian relations with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is that relations between those two countries broke down because of increasing tensions between India and the People's Republic of China preceding the outbreak of the Sino-Indian War of 1962. Based on research at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi, and specifically the papers of Jawaharlal Nehru and M.D. Shahane (a political adviser to the ICSC), this paper contends that the central issue in the breakdown of previously cordial relations between New Delhi and Hanoi was not the Sino-Indian war but a breakdown in trust regarding the increased presence of People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) troops in Laos, which resulted in the inability of the Indian members of the International Control Commission to gain transparent information and access in North Vietnam starting in the late 1950s. Nehru viewed the success of the ICSC and the Geneva Accords in Laos, and later the success of Lao neutralization, as central to the credibility of Indian leadership among non-aligned nations, and the increasing hostility between North Vietnamese officials and Indian officials reflects this view. As a consequence, Indian diplomats shifted from having a wary attitude toward RVN and US interpretations of events in Indochina to increasingly accepting RVN views, as well as the views of the Royal Lao Government.

Introduction

On one typically scorching evening in the suburban outskirts of Mumbai in July 2000, my wife and I braved commute traffic in a rickshaw to visit the flat of a retired Wing Commander in the Indian Air Force, Shreekant Harishchandra Pednekar, who was, not coincidentally, her great uncle. That night over dinner, I asked him what his worst experience in the Indian Air Force was. That question took him right back to the fall of 1962, the year of the Sino-Indian border war. In that war, an ill-equipped Indian Army, still toting Lee-Enfield Rifles from World War I, was sent high into the Himalayas. Some of them marched into the snow wearing only cotton garments, resulting in 3120 Indian soldiers dead in only a month's war.[1]

In that conflict, Shreekant Harishchandra Pednekar's squadron, like the rest of the Indian Air Force, was ordered not to participate in combat, despite the fact that the IAF had technical and numerical superiority over their Chinese counterparts, and instead focused only on a mission of attempting to resupply poorly equipped Indian

[1] For casualty totals, see Aldo D. Abitbol, "Causes of the 1962 Sino-Indian War," *Josef Korbel Journal of Advanced International Studies* 1 (Summer 2009): 74. On war itself, see Brig. J.P. Dalvi, *Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain-Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962* (Bombay: Thacker, 1969);

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troops. This was a difficult task in the middle of the Himalayas where supply drops might end up in ravines or crevasses.[2] Reflecting in retrospect on the needless loss of life in the war, he asked me: "Who were we defending? What was the point? There were only desolate mountains. There were no people. There was nobody there. There was nobody there!"[3]

India's fruitless border war with the People's Republic of China is rendered even more incoherent when one considers that less than a decade before, relations between India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) and communist leaders in Asia, including China, were very cordial. An observer in 1954 might have guessed that the neutralist, socialist-leaning Nehru would be the last person to stumble headlong into a blunder of a conflict with the PRC for what seemed to be anticommunist ideological reasons. A central foreign policy goal of the newly independent India under Nehru was to establish India as a leader of a group of states not explicitly aligned with either the Soviet Union or the United States. This group of states would support anticolonialism and seek to secure peace in Asia. A corollary of this goal was that the Nehru government would seek the neutralization of neighboring territories, so that they would not become Cold War battlegrounds.[4]

While it is logical to look to Sino-Indian relations in the 1950s to explain the sudden about-face of Nehru's government from a neutralism that was open to communist movements in Asia to an apparently full-throated anticommunism, this article suggests it may be fruitful to look first to Southeast Asia, and particularly to Laos. India's foreign policy under Nehru reflected a keen interest in the fate of India's neighboring states to the east, in mainland Southeast Asia. Accordingly, despite the United States' insistence that the nominally socialist and firmly anticolonialist India not be invited to have a formal role in the Geneva Conference, the Indian Government, led by future Minister of Defense Krishna Menon, not only exerted an informal influence to ensure pledges of the independence of the Indochinese states and non-intervention of the major powers, but also was able to secure for India the chairmanship of the International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICSC).[5] Through this body—with the help of the two other member states of the commission, Canada and Poland—India secured a major role in the implementation of the Geneva Accords. The goals of those accords, in providing not only for a cease-fire at the end of the First Indochina War but also for the prevention of foreign power intervention in Indochina and for the preservation of the neutrality of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, provided India with an excellent opportunity to showcase the promise of the

[2] A detailed study of the challenges faced by the IAF can be found in Bharat Kumar, *Unknown and Unsung: Indian Air Force in the Sino-Indian War of 1962* (New Delhi: KW Publishers and Centre for Air Power Studies, 2013).

[3] The Sino-Indian border war was fought over competing interpretations of boundaries drawn during the British colonial era in the Aksai Chin area as well as parts of Arunachal Pradesh, but increasing ideological clashes and diplomatic mistrust were also significant causes. Historically, Aksai Chin has almost always been almost totally unpopulated with the exception of a small number of nomadic herders.

[4] D.R. Sardesai, *Indian Foreign Policy in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, 1947-1964* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968), 2-3; Ramesh Thakur, "India's Vietnam Policy, 1946-1979," *Asian Survey* 19:10 (October 1979)

[5] Nicholas Tarling, *Neutrality in Southeast Asia: Concepts and Contexts* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 65.

nonaligned movement and its five principles of peaceful coexistence, or *Panchsheel*.[6] These principles were ironically formally articulated, and therefore first became widely known, after they were included in the preamble of the 1954 agreement between the People's Republic of China and India over Tibet.[7]

As the chair of the ICSC, India would consistently argue for a return to the principles of the Geneva Accords, even after it appeared clear to all the major parties that neither those accords nor any appeal to the vague enforcement powers of the ICSC would be effective. Additionally, in 1958, the ICSC commissioners voted to adjourn the Laos commission *sine die,* or without any prescribed date for resumption, partially because of the political progress of the 1958 elections and also because Phoui Sananikone (1903-1983), the right-leaning Prime Minister after that election, did not want the ICSC operating in Laos. Nehru believed the government of India could not force the ICSC on a Lao government that did not want it there.[8] Despite this, Nehru continued to argue that the means to secure the neutrality of Laos was through the existing agreements of the Geneva Accords and through a reinstatement of the ICSC's mission in that country.[9] This was because Nehru viewed the enforcement of the Geneva Accords through the ICSC, especially in Laos, as critical to the credibility of a neutralist foreign policy. The importance of Laos for Nehru's credibility was only enhanced by the expectation of other foreign leaders—particularly Cambodia's Norodom Sihanouk (1922-2012)—that Nehru take the lead in enforcing neutralization in Southeast Asia.[10]

This article is based on research conducted in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. The purpose of this research was to discover why Indian relations with North Vietnam, which were extremely cordial and even close throughout most of the 1950s, soured by the late 1950s. Prevailing theories place this decline in relations in the context of the fracturing of relations between India and the People's Republic of China, first stemming from Nehru's decision to offer the Dalai Lama asylum in 1959 and coming to a zenith with the resultant Sino-Indian War in 1962, or to India's inability to stop the "big powers" from influencing the situation.[11] For example,

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[6] Sardesai, *Indian Foreign Policy,* 53-54. The principles of *panchsheel* were mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. See Baljit Singh, "India's Policy and the Vietnam Conflict," *World Affairs* 129:4 (January 1967): 251.

[7] "Sino-Indian Agreement, 29th April, 1954," *Legal Materials on Tibet:The Tibet Justice Center.* Accessed December 8, 2025. https://www.tibetjustice.org/materials/china/china4.html

[8] Ton That Thien, *India and South East Asia: 1947-1960* (Geneva: Librarie Droz, 1963), 220.

[9] Robert Bothwell, "The Further Shore: Canada and Vietnam," *International Journal* (Winter 2000-2001): 95; Jawaharlal Nehru, "Letter to Dag Hammarskjöld: Laos Commission, 27 May 1959," in Madhavan K. Pilat, ed., *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Vol. 49 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1995), 593-594. See also Arthur Dommen, *Laos: Keystone of Indochina* (New York: Routledge, 1985), 56. Nehru's call for a reinstatement occurred in the context of a political crisis in 1959. May 27, 1959 was nine days after resumption of fighting between Pathet Lao and the Royal Lao Government. The Pathet Lao were supposed to reintegrate into the Royal Lao Army, but both units refused on May 11 and a week later on May 18 one was disarmed while the other managed to escape.

[10] Nicholas Tarling, *Neutrality in Southeast Asia: Concepts and Contexts* (Lanham, MD: Taylor and Francis, 2016), 124-127.

[11] Thakur, "India's Vietnam Policy," 962-963; Gilles Boquérat, "India's Commitment to Peaceful Coexistence and the Settlement of the Indochina War," *Cold War History* 5:2 (May 2005): 233-234. This is

Ramesh Thakur claims the Indian delegation's "voting behavior in the ICC in Vietnam" was a result of "the dramatic realignments in India's external relations in this period," particularly after "India's relations with China reached their nadir in 1962."[12] Similarly, Mark Atwood Lawrence asserts that the "serious deterioration of the Sino-Indian relationship" was the development that "most undercut India's ability to play an effective role in Indochina."[13]

However, an examination of the decisions of the ICSC, of the internal discussions of the Indian diplomats involved in the ICSC, particularly of its political advisor M.D. Shahane (1904-?), and Nehru's communications with other leaders reveal that it was neither Nehru's disagreements with China nor the international big-power situation that altered India's relationship with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Rather, it was India's sense of North Vietnam's duplicity in violating the Geneva Accords by infiltrating Laos to aid the Pathet Lao and to send troops down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to attack the south that provoked a cooling of relations between India and the DRV.[14] This paper will argue that, to Nehru, Krishna Menon, and the Indian ICSC members, the prestige of India's foreign policy was inextricably linked to India's ability to maintain the neutrality of the Indochinese states. Accordingly, Nehru regarded the DRV's violation of Laos's territorial integrity as an affront to India's foreign policy and was increasingly unwilling to support the DRV's complaints to the ICSC about the actions of Ngô Đình Diệm in South Vietnam as a consequence.

Background of Relations between Postcolonial India and Vietnam, 1945-1954

In 1954, Jawaharlal Nehru paid a state visit to Indochina. In the course of this visit, he toured Vientiane, Hanoi, and Saigon. His impression of the Lao capital was that it was a "sleepy and rather depressing place" still suffering from "a good deal of French influence." His impression of Saigon was a starkly negative one; he saw it as a chaotic situation with little support for the government:

> The whole place seemed to be at sixes and sevens with hardly any dominant authority. The Prime Minister and his Generals were opposed to each other. There were three private armies of some kind of semi- religious sects. Foreign Representatives apparently also pulled in different directions. It was generally estimated that if there was a vote now, 90 percent or more of the population would vote for Viet-Minh. What would happen a year or two later, one could not say.[15]

However, Nehru had a decidedly positive view of the DRV and of its leader:

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not to say that the Sino-Indian war had no impact on events in Laos. The Lao rightwing politicians regarded the Chinese invasion of Tibet as proof that atheistic communists were fomenting a war against Buddhism, and these attitudes hardened the divide between the *Pathet Lao* and the Royal Lao Government.

[12] Thakur, "India's Vietnam Policy," 962-963.

[13] Mark Atwood Lawrence, "The Limits of Peacemaking: India and the Vietnam War, 1962-1967," *India Review* 1, no. 3 (2002): 45.

[14] The history of DRV intervention in Laos is well covered by Christopher Goscha, "Vietnam and the World Outside: The Case of Vietnamese Communist Advisers in Laos (1948-62)," *South East Asia Research* 12:2 (2004): 141-185.

[15] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Note on Visit to China and Indo-China, November 14, 1954," *Woodrow Wilson Digital Archive*, accessed May 29, 2019, paragraphs 47, 49. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121651.pdf?v=d7e143cb60346614a337c648500cf3a7

> The person who impressed me most was Dr. Ho Chi-minh of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam, who came to see me at Hanoi. Hanoi had passed into his hands just five days previous to my arrival. This was a peaceful and very disciplined transfer from the French to the Viet-Minh. Dr. Ho Chi-minh impressed me as an unusually frank, straight-forward and likable person. Although he has been engaged in a war for seven years against the French, he was the very reverse of a war-like person. He struck me as a man of peace and goodwill. He did not say a word against the French to me. Indeed, he expressed his desire for cooperation with the French and even to be associated with the French Union, provided his country had complete independence. He mentioned the relationship of India with the Commonwealth and asked me for further particulars about it. It was evident that Viet-Minh was well-organized and disciplined.[16]

Nehru's positive impressions of the Viet Minh and Hồ Chí Minh's leadership likely originated before his 1954 trip. Hồ Chí Minh was introduced to Nehru's influential father Motilal Nehru at the International Anti-Imperialism Conference in Brussels in the late 1920s.[17] Additionally, many Indians were present at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), where Hồ Chí Minh studied. Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru visited Moscow in 1928, perhaps around the time Hồ Chí Minh also visited before traveling elsewhere in Europe.[18]

While briefly imprisoned by a Chinese warlord in 1942, Hồ Chí Minh, was said to have composed a poem to Jawaharlal Nehru, who had also been imprisoned in the summer of 1942 in the wake of the Quit India Movement, which was included in Hồ's famous *Prison Diary*. Hồ Chí Minh was purported to write: "We struggle together to bring action for self-rule/you are in prison, and I am forced to dwell in a cage/An incalculable distance separates us, so we have not yet met/But our spirits intersect, even without the essence of our words."[19]

Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Congress Party and the Việt Minh cultivated occasional ties based on their affinity as anticolonial organizations. In July 1945, Nehru wondered whether the countries "overrun by Japan" such as Indochina would be subjected to French rule again, and proclaimed unequivocally that the Congress Party (India's ruling party, of which Nehru was a member) "will not tolerate this," because "our struggle is but a part of the struggle of all the supressed peoples, and we are not to lose sight of this fact."[20]

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[16] *Ibid,* paragraph 48.
[17] Pierre Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 43.
[18] Muhammad Ali Raza, *Revolutionary Pasts: Communist Internationalism in Colonial India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 85; for the best attempt to trace Hồ Chí Minh's whereabouts between his departure from Guangzhou around May 1927 and his arrival in Siam around July 1928, see Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
[19] *Hồ Chí Minh toàn tập,* Volume 3 (Selected Works of Ho Chi Minh) (Hanoi: Nhà xuất bản chính trị quốc gia, 2011), 402. On questions of the authorship, timing, and accuracy of the *Prison Diary,* see Peter Zinoman, "Reading Revolutionary Prison Memoirs," in Hue-Tam Ho Tai (ed.), *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 39.
[20] Jawaharlal Nehru, "In Defense of the August Rising," (Speech at Lahore, July 17, 1945), in S. Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Volume 14 (New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1982), 56.

Congress published formal declarations objecting to Colonel Douglas Gracey's use of Indian sepoys to reoccupy Saigon, and Việt Minh propaganda appealed to the common desire of Indians and Vietnamese to escape from the colonial yoke.[21] Commenting on the British actions in Saigon in December 1945, Nehru criticized Great Britain for stepping "in to help in crushing the people" of Indochina, and compared their actions to Nazi Germany's intervention in the Spanish Civil War.[22]

Hồ Chí Minh made a point of cultivating sympathy for the Việt Minh cause. On his way to negotiate with the French at the Fontainebleau palace in 1946, he stopped in Agra and Calcutta, making a point to meet with Indian communists, and even visit a local communist party office.[23] When settlement talks between the French and the Việt Minh broke down in 1946 and the French occupied Hanoi, Nehru reacted with "grave concern." Writing to the French Minister of Overseas Territories, socialist Marius Moutet (1876-1968), Nehru expressed regret that a decolonization could not have been negotiated with Hồ Chí Minh and noted that Indian public opinion was "disturbed" by the French hostilities and hoped that a "peaceful solution" could be found.[24]

The Congress Party repeatedly made declarations in support of the Việt Minh during the First Indochina War, and Nehru went as far as to restrict French military operations over Indian airspace, though he very reluctantly agreed for them to fly eleven non-combat related transport aircraft over India.[25] Wary of alienating the United States and attempting to exercise caution, Nehru refused to provide funding and material support for an effort organized by Sarat Chandra Bose (1889-1950) to organize a band of "Indian Lafayettes" to assist the Việt Minh after the outbreak of the First Indochina War in December 1946.[26]

Nehru's position was a delicate balance. He had welcomed leaders from across Southeast Asia to the Inter-Asian Relations conference in 1947, where representatives from both the Việt Minh and the Royal Lao Government were in attendance. In his speech, he emphasized India's role in shepherding decolonization and hearkened back to an earlier time: "so we meet together and for a moment the past two centuries fade away from our minds and we think again of earlier times when we used to function as free nations."[27]

To recreate that, Nehru emphasized the importance of decolonized countries cooperating to promote their mutual interests. Therefore, at that conference, the

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[21] Ton That Thien, *India and Southeast Asia, 1947-1960*, 121; Marc Jason Gilbert, "Persuading the Enemy: Vietnamese Appeals to Non-White Forces of Occupation, 1945-1975," in Wynn Wilcox (ed.), *Vietnam and the West: New Approaches* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 122-125.

[22] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Towards a New Destiny," Address to the All India States People's Conference, Udaipur, December 30, 1945. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 14, 407.

[23] Mohit Sen, *A Traveller and the Road: Journey of an Indian Communist* (New Delhi: Rupa and Company, 2003), 36-37.

[24] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Letter to Marius Moutet," December 26, 1946, in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Volume 1 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1984), 558.

[25] Jawarhalal Nehru, "French Policy in Vietnam," *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Volume 2, 527.

[26] Ton That Thien, *India and Southeast Asia,* 123; SarDesai, *Indian Foreign Policy,* 11-12.

[27] Jawaharlal Nehru, "A New Era of Asian Fellowship," March 3, 1947, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru,* Second Series, Volume 2, 501.

Vietnamese delegation explicitly called for a "fighting federation" to defeat French colonialism in Indochina and asked for Indian recognition of the Việt Minh as the legitimate government of Vietnam.[28] In reply, Nehru, though he reiterated his sympathy for the Việt Minh cause, emphasized the need to "observe the rules and decorum of international affairs."[29] When Mohandas Gandhi himself followed up on Bose's other request, one for a medical mission to Vietnam, Nehru reiterated that granting Bose's request for a volunteer force would be "practically declaring war on France." Nehru was even lukewarm about a medical mission to help the Việt Minh. Although he did not intervene to stop that mission, he refused to assist with transporting the medical supplies to the field in Vietnam.[30]

Nehru's motivations for treading lightly with France were about more than a mere desire to maintain good diplomatic relations. Nehru brokered a 1948 meeting between Congress President (and soon-to-be President of India) Rajendra Prasad and an unnamed representative of the Việt Minh. In that meeting, Nehru reaffirmed the Indian policy of banning French military overflights in Indian airspace and refuels on Indian territory. But Nehru also made clear that he did not want to jeopardize negotiations for the cession of French territories such as Pondicherry back to India. In addition, the French had been helpful to India on the Kashmir issue on the security council.[31]

Despite his caution, Nehru's sympathies were with the Việt Minh. In a letter to British Labour Party politican Stafford Cripps (1889-1952), he criticized the United States for sending aid with the aim of "indirectly supporting French colonial agression" and observed in regard to the First Indochina War that "the French are going on in this foolish pursuit although there is not the least chance in the world of their succeeding in crushing the Vietnam[ese]."[32] Though officially India's position was to not recognize any government until after the Vietnamese people were given an opportunity to decide their leaders, privately Nehru expressed his disdain for anti-communist alternatives to the Việt Minh.[33] After Bảo Đại came back to power as the head of the State of Vietnam in 1949, Nehru dismissed him as the leader of a "reactionary" government.[34] Meeting with United States Secretary of State Dean Acheson (1893-1971) in Washington, DC in October of 1949, Nehru emphasized that a government under the former emperor was "hopeless" and "doomed to failure" because Bảo Đại was inept and lacked the proper character traits to be the leader of

[28] Vineet Thakur, "An Asian Drama: The Asian Relations Conference, 1947," *The International History Review* 41, no. 3 (2018): 679-680.
[29] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Letter to Sarat Chandra Bose," February 9, 1947, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Volume 2, 528-529.
[30] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Letter to Mahatma Gandhi," February 21, 1947, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru,* Second Series, Volume 3, 497-498.
[31] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Letter to Rajendra Prasad," January 11, 1948, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Volume 7, 537.
[32] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Letter to Stafford Cripps," December 17-18, 1948, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 8, 337.
[33] Jawaharlal Nehru, "On a No-War Declaration," (Press Conference, January 8, 1950), *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 14 Part 1, 12.
[34] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Cable to Vijayalakshmi Pandit," July 19, 1949, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 12, 390.

a nationalist movement, in obvious contrast to his more sanguine view of the Việt Minh leadership.[35] When Bảo Đại sent an envoy to Delhi in 1950, Nehru refused to recognize him in any official capacity.[36] During the Commonwealth Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Colombo in 1950, Nehru opined that the State of Vietnam was "merely a puppet government acting under French control."[37]

By the early 1950s, Nehru's views, not only about Indochina but also about Southeast Asia more generally, had solidified. He continued to believe that communist movements such as the Việt Minh were primarily nationalist in character, and that the major communist powers, and in particular China, did not seek to expand into Southeast Asia.[38] He was able to take this position because he did not consider the Communist Party of India (CPI) a major threat to his rule, given his overweening confidence in the superior electoral position of the Congress Party in the early 1950s and his faith in his ability to co-opt the CPI's economic agenda through his adoption of a "Socialist Pattern of Society" and to keep the far left at bay by encouraging CPI members to participate in the democratic process.[39] Given that a forcible communist invasion of Southeast Asia was unlikely, the best course of action to take by those powers that wished to stanch the spread of communism was to recognize the nationalist aspirations of the people by expanding electoral politics. As long as the French failed to do so convincingly in Indochina, they would continue to lose the First Indochina War.[40] This was true not only in Vietnam but also in Laos. In a series of meetings with United States Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in New Delhi in 1953, Nehru denied that the situation in Indochina "had nothing to do with China" and that "the Chinese government did not have much hand in it."

Nehru, Nonalignment, and Laos

In the wake of the end of World War II at the end of the summer of 1945, Laos was occupied by an array of different forces. Japanese troops were still present after the surrender, and British and Guomindang forces sent to secure a Japanese surrender were sent to occupy Laos as well. In October 1945, Prince Phetsarath (1890-1959), who had been prime minister under the Japanese earlier in the year,

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[35] This exchange precipitated an interesting debate between Acheson and Nehru over whether the Vietnamese communists would follow the Eastern European model and consolidate power by killing their rivals or follow what Nehru perceived as the Burmese and Indian model in which the communists were helpful anticolonial allies who were subsequently integrated into republican government. Nehru argued that the Việt Minh would do the latter; Acheson argued in favor of the former. Jawaharlal Nehru, "Record of Talk with Dean Acheson," October 12, 1949, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 13, 295-296.

[36] Nehru, "On a No-War Declaration," 28.

[37] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Minutes of the Seventh Meeting," Colombo, January 12, 1950, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 14, Part 1, 532.

[38] Jawaharlal Nehru, "An Asian Vision," (Press Conference with the BBC, June 12, 1953), *Selected Works*, Second Series, Volume 22, 68.

[39] Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1959); on Nehru's confidence in Congress's electoral supremacy and reliance on democratic processes to coopt rivals, Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1970), 168-170.

[40] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Far East and Southeast Asia, (Minutes of the second meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, London, June 4, 1953), *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 22, 444-446; Jawaharlal Nehru, Letter to Winston Churchill, June 8, 1953, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 22, 485.

and his movement, the Lao Issara (the "Free Lao"), which had been formed in exile in World War II, helped to organize Lao independence.[41] They removed King Sisavang Vong (1885-1959) from power. They could not organize a successful government, primarily because of the French armed reoccupation of Laos, which ended with the massacre of Lao Issara supporters at Thakhek in March 1946.[42] Also, they lacked sufficient political support, particularly from Western powers, and were unable to access bank funds. After suffering a series of defeats at the hands of French forces that were seeking to recolonize Laos in the spring of 1946, the Lao Issara retreated into Thailand. This led the French and the King to pursue Lao autonomy on terms acceptable to the French. A new constitution was promulgated in 1947, and France granted partial autonomy to Laos in 1949 in a bid to win the Lao Issara over, which enticed moderates of the Lao Issara to return. This new quasi-autonomous Laos joined the French Union in 1948.[43]

Meanwhile, the other significant political force in Laos was the Việt Minh, representing Vietnamese communist forces.[44] The Việt Minh pursued an uneasy alliance with the Lao Issara which ultimately collapsed over differences over the extent of Vietnamese involvement in Laos. In October 1946, the Việt Minh formed a Committee for Lao Resistance in Vinh. Hồ Chí Minh and Prince Souphanouvong (1909-1995), a nationalist royal who had split from Prince Phetsarath and the Lao Issara, had first met in 1945. In 1949, they met again, and their subordinates followed up on this meeting.[45] In 1950, Vietnamese officials and nationalist Lao who were sympathetic to the Vietnamese, including Souphanouvong, held a secret congress in Vietnam that created a front to create a "united struggle against the French" with Việt Minh support known as the Neo Lao Issara. The state they formed was given the name Pathet Lao (Lao Nation). Agreements were made in 1945 and again in 1949 to allow for the presence of PAVN soldiers, and their numbers began to increase. Though it is not precisely known how many PAVN soldiers were in Laos at any given time, Arthur Dommen has estimated that the presence of Việt Minh cadres increased from around 500 in 1946 to 17,000 in 1953.[46] By 1951, the Pathet Lao's "liberation army,"

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[41] For a detailed description of Prince Phetsarath's activities, see Soren Ivarsson and Christopher E. Goscha, "Prince Phetsarath (1890-1959): Nationalism and Royalty in the Making of Laos," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38:1 (February 2007): 55-81; See also Christopher E. Goscha, *The Road to Dien Bien Phu* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022), 359.

[42] Vatthana Pholsena and Suriya Khamwan, "A 'Forgotten' Massacre: The Battle of Thakhek in Laos, 1946," *Critical Asian Studies* 56, no. 1 (2024): 53-54. See also Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 65.

[43] Ryan Wolfson-Ford, *Forsaken Causes: Liberal Democracy and Anticommunism in Cold War Laos* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2024), 26-27; Arthur Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 182.

[44] By 1948, most non-communists had left or been forced out of the Việt Minh. See Tuong Vu, "It's Time for the Indochinese Revolution to Show Its True Colors: The Radical Turn in Vietnamese Politics in 1948," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40, no. 3 (October 2009): 519-542.

[45] Paul Fritz Langer and Joseph Zasloff, *Revolution in Laos: The North Vietnamese and the Pathet Lao* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1970), 65; Paul Fritz Langer and Joseph Zasloff, *North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1970), 49; *History of Vietnam-Laos, Laos-Vietnam Special Relationship, 1930-2007, Memoirs* (Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, 2012), 76.

[46] Dommen, *Indochinese Experience*, 183.

composed largely of ethnic minority groups living near the Lao-Vietnamese border, had been sufficiently organized to engage in skirmishes with the French Union forces, though they were heavily supplemented by Việt Minh troops.

In the early 1950s, Pathet Lao leaders had the military support of the PAVN. They also had the advisory support of the People's Republic of China, who under the head of the Chinese advisory group Luo Guibo supported the Việt Minh's aspirations to build communism elsewhere in Indochina, and advised the Việt Minh to push the war into the mountains of Laos.[47] By 1950, Prince Souphanouvong had established a resistance government, and by 1953, the PAVN and the Pathet Lao firmly controlled Sam Neua.[48] There were also substantial PAVN forces in southern Laos, who were sent there on advice of Chinese advisors who thought an expansion of their presence there, and in northeastern Cambodia, would put the PAVN in a position to threaten Saigon.[49]

Nehru attributed the Việt Minh invasion and occupation of Sam Neua as an initiative of the Pathet Lao. It was not to be interpreted as a Vietnamese design to control Laos.[50] This is despite the fact that Việt Minh troop strength had reached 17,600 by 1954.[51] Nehru interpreted it as "basically a local nationalist upheaval" thoroughly under the control and direction of Prince Souphanouvong, who "had been the leader of the resistance movement against the French in 1945." Therefore, Nehru concluded that "merely to talk of communism in Indo-China was to make the wrong appraisal."[52]

From that point, Nehru's views on nonalignment come into focus. To him, the primary impetus for the political upheaval in Southeast Asia was anticolonial nationalism, and communist and non-communist revolutions alike were chiefly nationalist in character. These movements were forced to resort to armed conflict because of two related phenomena: the futile efforts of colonial powers such as the French to hold on to their colonial possessions, and the Cold War fight to ensure client states. But since the movements in Indochina were anticolonial nationalist movements whose primary goal was to produce unified and independent countries, all that was really necessary was to ensure the noninterference of foreign powers in these countries, and to encourage the process of building civil societies and seeking popular elections. The result, to Nehru, would most likely be that these formerly colonized areas would become nonaligned countries neutral in the Cold War, and

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[47] Shu Quanzhi, "From Armed Revolution to Neutralism," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 36, no. 1 (March 2021): 125; Goscha, *Road to Dien Bien Phu*, 374-376.

[48] Dommen, *Indochinese Experience*, 208.

[49] Van Nguyen Duong, *The Tragedy of the Vietnam War: A Vietnamese Officer's Analysis* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2008), 35.

[50] On the Lao theater of events of the First Indochina War in 1953, see Arthur Dommen, *Conflict in Laos: The Politics of Neutralization* (New York: Praeger, 1964), 40-41.

[51] Christopher E. Goscha, "Vietnam and the World Outside: The Case of Vietnamese Communist Advisers in Laos," *South East Asia Research* 12:2 (July 2004): 150.

[52] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Talks with John Foster Dulles," New Delhi, May 22, 1953, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 23, 506-507. Nehru's theory is perfectly plausible, especially given the Pathet Lao's coalitional tendencies in recruiting ethnic minority leaders who were arguably more interested in justice for ethnic minorities than communism, and considering how many leaders were primarily nationalist. See Wolfson-Ford, *Forsaken Causes*, 27.

those those countries would be natural diplomatic allies with India and prevent conflict near India's eastern borders.

From Colombo to Geneva to Bandung: Nehru's Role in Crafting a Nonaligned Indochina, 1954-1955

Armed with a vision of a neutral Indochina as part of a greater non-aligned South and Southeast Asia led by the Indian example, Nehru sought to make this vision a reality during 1954-1955. He began his quest at the Colombo Conference, which brought together the five countries that had by 1954 achieved total independence from their colonizers: Pakistan, India, Ceylon, Indonesia, and Burma. The conference was to bring together these powers to discuss matters of common interest, with no particular agenda to be superimposed (with the exception that the India/Pakistan conflict was a topic to be avoided).[53] Though the brainchild of Ceylon's Prime Minister Sir John Kotelawala (1895-1980), Nehru was an enthusiastic participant. The conference began April 28, 1954, just two days after the start of the Geneva Conference, which was a conference designed to resolve issues surrounding the Korean and Indochinese wars. The First Indochina War was therefore a main topic of discussion of the Colombo Conference. Anthony Eden (1897-1977), the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, asked the Colombo powers to be willing to guarantee whatever peace settlement was agreed to at Geneva by operating as a joint peacekeeping force. Since the United Kingdom was one of the convenors of the Geneva Conference, it is likely that Eden's proposal was taken seriously. However, it was rejected—not least because it was difficult to imagine Indian and Pakistani soldiers working together under such conditions.[54] But this proposal did give Nehru an opening to articulate his own views on what an appropriate peace in Indochina would entail. Through his initiative, the five Prime Ministers at the Colombo Conference drafted a joint statement calling for an immediate ceasefire, direct talks between France, the Việt Minh, and the three Associated States of Indochina, a declaration by France of her commitment to the total independence of Indochina, and consultation with the United Nations on the implementation of any further agreement.[55] These points were derived from Nehru's original six-point proposal to the Colombo Conference, which including stronger language about the need to make sure that the great powers—particularly the United States and China—avoid intervening in Indochina.[56]

In Nehru's mind, peace in Indochina was made far more urgent by the rapid development of nuclear weapons. On March 1, 1954, the United States had

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[53] I.J., "The Colombo Conference: Neutrality the Keynote," *The World Today* 10:7 (July 1954): 293-295.
[54] Robert Randle, *Geneva 1954: The Settlement of the Indochinese War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 188.
[55] Jawaharlal Nehru, "India and International Situation," Statement to the Parliament, May 15, 1954, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 25, 402. See also Randle, *Geneva 1954,*
[56] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Six-Point Proposal on Indochina," Minutes of the First and Second Meetings of the South East Asian Prime Ministers' Conference, Colombo, April 28, 1954, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 25, 424-425. This language was excised because Pakistan's Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra (1909-1963) worried that any reference to nonintervention might "embarrass" the powers at Geneva. See Jawaharlal Nehru, "Message to Anthony Eden," Delhi, May 4, 1954, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 25, 435.

successfully detonated the Castle Bravo, a thermonuclear weapon yielding fifteen megatons of TNT, over Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. It remains to this day the largest U.S. nuclear bomb ever tested. The fallout from that test spread radioactive material all the way to India.[57] Alarmed, Nehru called for the Geneva Conference to begin with a ceasefire prior to the talks resuming, primarily so that the danger of extremely hostile rhetoric between the United States and the Soviet Union could be calmed down in an increasingly dangerous nuclear world.[58] Writing to provincial heads of the Congress Party, Nehru worried that what was being debated at Geneva was a crisis "more dangerous than any we have had before," which could either result in a "peaceful settlement" or in a step "towards the great disaster that all have feared."[59]

With such urgency in mind, Nehru turned his attentions even more firmly to the events in Geneva. Though India was not a formal participant, Indian Ambassador to the United Nations and future Defense Minister Krishna Menon (1896-1974) was present at Geneva as Nehru's personal representative and was able to exercise influence over the proceedings due to the influence of British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, who had a good relationship with Nehru, and over the objections of the Americans, who apparently believed that Indian influence would be against their interests.[60] Through Eden, Nehru was able to hold off a Thai proposal to the Security Council to create a peace action commission to enforce the Geneva Ceasefire under Thai leadership.[61] Moreover, it was Eden who suggested that any armistice agreed to at Geneva ought to be enforced by the five Asian powers present at the Colombo Conference. Upon hearing this news, Nehru replied that "India is prepared to undertake such responsibility as it can shoulder in the interests of a peaceful settlement in Indo-China."[62] Eden's proposal was eventually revised so that three Colombo powers, one additional non-communist country, and one additional communist country were to be included.[63] This proposal would eventually be diluted to the actual shape of the three-member International Control Commissions set up in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam to enforce the Geneva Accords, with India as Chair and Canada and Poland as the other members.

Effectively, India chaired three separate control commissions—one each for Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. In Laos, the terms of the Geneva Accords specified that all foreign forces be withdrawn by four months of the agreement with the exception

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[57] Gerard DeGroot, *The Bomb: A Life*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004): 196-198.
[58] Jawaharlal Nehru, "India in the World of the Hydrogen Bomb," (Speech at a public meeting in Chowpatty, Bombay, April 11, 1954), *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 25, 35. On Nehru's specific reaction to the fallout from the Bikini Atoll test, see Jawaharlal Nehru, "Principles of Foreign Policy," (Parliamentary Debates, March 24, 1954), *Selected Works,* Series 2, Volume 25, 385.
[59] Jawaharlal Nehru, "To Presidents of PCCs," Simla, May 30, 1954, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 25, 178.
[60] Sardesai, *Indian Foreign Policy*, 44-45.
[61] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Message to Anthony Eden," New Delhi, June 2, 1954, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 26, 344.
[62] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Message to Anthony Eden," New Delhi, June 11, 1954, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 26, 345.
[63] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Letter to Ali Sastroamidjojo," New Delhi, June 12, 1954, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 26, 347-348.

of a small French military garrison with instructors for the Royal Lao Army. Pathet Lao troops, whose delegates were excluded from formal participation in Geneva, were to regroup in Attapeu and Houaphan, the two provinces substantially held by them. Additionally, the Royal Lao Government agreed "to take the necessary measures to integrate all citizens, without discrimination, into the national community," and also pledged not to enter into military alliances. Finally, Article 12 of the final declaration bound the members of the conference to refrain from any interference in the internal affairs of Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia.[64]

Meanwhile, an "Afro-Asian Conference" that had been proposed by Indonesian Prime Minister Ali Sastroamidjojo (1903-1976), to which Nehru had promised "full moral support," was by the summer of 1954 well into the planning stage. As part of the preparations, Nehru insisted that the implementation of the Geneva Accords as part of the International Control Commission be a central topic of consideration. India's role as Chairman of the ICSC was therefore a linchpin in Nehru's entire neutralization strategy. Along with leaders in Burma, Ceylon, and Indonesia, Nehru was attempting to carve a position for states wary of American hegemony.

Accordingly, Nehru had rejected calls for India to participate in the September 1954 conference in Manila that would eventually lead to the founding of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) on the grounds that such an effort was merely an attempt by the United States to extend the Monroe Doctrine to non-communist countries in Asia.[65] Moreover, he argued that India's participation in SEATO "would have meant our giving up our basic policy of non-alignment" and would have had a negative effect on India's ability to be perceived as an impartial actor as the Chair of the ICSC.[66] Being actively involved in implementing the Geneva Accords and in organizing the Bandung conference gave India diplomatic authority and gravitas to counteract its non-participation in the SEATO talks. The "Afro-Asian Conference" would be held in Bandung in 1955, and it is widely remembered as an inaugural moment for the nonaligned movement.

However, for Nehru, it was the Geneva Accords, and not Bandung, that made a nonaligned movement possible. The settlement at Geneva put into place what Chinese Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai (1898-1976), in his discussions with Nehru, had called "the South-East Asia pattern of countries," in other word, "neutral countries" that were "not aligned with any group." Nehru found Zhou Enlai's positions at Geneva "reassuring" because it made clear that the PRC was effectively in favor of the neutralization of Indochina and was willing to curb the territorial ambitions of the Việt Minh in order to achieve that goal. This allowed him to approach Bandung with optimistic visions of Chinese support for a neutralized and nonaligned Southeast Asia.[67] The Geneva Settlement offered this prospect because it sought to

[64] Patit Paban Mishra, *The Contemporary History of Laos* (New Delhi: National Book Organisation, 1999), 28-30.
[65] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Proposals on Indo-China," Statement in Parliament, April 24, 1954, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 25, 441.
[66] Jawaharlal Nehru, "The Broad Policies," Speech in the Lok Sabha, September 29, 1954. *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 26, 318.
[67] Andrea Benvenuti, *Nehru's Bandung: Non-Alignment and Regional Order in Indian Cold War Strategy* (London: Hurst and Company, 2024), chapter five.

ensure, on the one hand, that Laos and Cambodia were not "absorbed or interfered with in any way by China," and on the other, that Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam not be made into potential "bases of action against China" by the United States. In other words, the very credibility of nonalignment for Nehru rested on the ability of the ICSC to enforce non-interference and non-intervention in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The neutrality of Indochina was Nehru's litmus test for his own foreign policy.[68]

At a closed session of the Bandung conference on April 23, 1955, Nehru emphasized the centrality of the Geneva Accords as a roadmap for achieving non-alignment. Responding to the Philippine delegation's assertion that the SEATO agreement in Manila was "purely defensive," Nehru urged delegates to "remember its timing": the Manila agreement was signed immediately in the wake of the Geneva Accords, not in the wake of increased tensions, but of lessened ones. The Geneva and Manila agreements represented two irreconcilable approaches: while the Geneva agreement stopped a war and lessened tensions by removing the Cold War, the Manila agreement would seek to heighten tensions by bringing the Cold War back to Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.[69] Nehru drew the attention of the Bandung delegates to Indochina because "the only way" that was "open is the way of the Geneva Agreement which is the way of non-alignment and friendly cooperation and peaceful existence. There is no other way."[70]

Crafting an Initial Trust Between the DRV and India, 1954-1958

Nehru's optimism in the ability of the ICSC to implement the terms of the Geneva Accords was derived from his relatively good personal relations with key figures in the communist governments, in particular Zhou Enlai in China and President Hồ Chí Minh and Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng in the DRV. Nehru's impressions, along with lukewarm impressions of the Lao royal family and the Royal Lao Government and negative impressions of the political leaders of the Republic of Vietnam, including Ngô Đình Diệm, continued and intensified through the first three or so years of India's chairmanship of the ICSC.

Nehru and Zhou Enlai developed a close relationship during a series of talks in New Delhi in late June of 1954, just as the outlines of the final agreement in Geneva were beginning to take place. In these talks, Zhou Enlai voiced his support for the principles of neutrality, non-intervention, and independence for the Indochinese countries.[71] In these discussions, it became clear that on many of the Geneva Conference issues, Nehru and Zhou Enlai shared common views and attitudes. For example, hearing that the Bảo Đại would be named head of state in 1954, and knowing that the ex-Emperor spent most of his time on the French Riviera, Nehru asked: "Does Bao Dai intend to govern his empire from Cannes?" This question apparently caused

[68] Jawaharlal Nehru, "The Broad Policies," Speech in the Lok Sabha, September 29, 1954. *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 26*,* 319.
[69] Jawaharlal Nehru, "The Policy of Friendly Coexistence," Speech in closed session at the Bandung Conference, April 23, 1955, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 28, 122-123.
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Message to Anthony Eden," New Delhi, June 26, 1954, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 26, 354.

Zhou Enlai to burst into laughter.[72] More than that, however, Zhou indicated his support for India's chairmanship of the ICSC, and Zhou reassured him that India would not have to commit ground troops in any number as ICSC chair.[73] Most importantly, in a joint statement after their discussions, Zhou and Nehru agreed to the five principles known in India as the *panchsheel* (five virtues): 1. Mutual respect for each others' territorial integrity and sovereignty, 2. Non-aggression, 3. Non-interference in each other's internal affairs, 4. Equality and mutual benefit, and 5. Peaceful coexistence.[74] These were originally articulated as the guiding principles of India/China relations, but they were quickly recognized as the hallmark of Nehru's vision for a nonaligned foreign policy. They were also an articulation of what Nehru and Zhou Enlai both thought was being achieved in the Geneva Accords. Indeed, it was a point of pride in India that the Geneva Agreements "were Indian ideas," and, conversely, "failure of the Geneva Accords would be a failure of *Panchsheel*," which meant that India was doubly committed to the Accord's implementation.[75] Nehru felt comfortable with that responsibility, in part, because he believed Zhou Enlai shared his views.

Nehru's impression of the leadership in Hanoi also remained positive. Hồ Chí Minh "produced an instant impression upon me, which was good," Nehru wrote. He was "one of the most likeable men I have come across," and "gives one the impression of integrity, goodwill and peace." Nehru recalled that when meeting Hồ Chí Minh for dinner, Hồ leapt forward to embrace and kiss him in a way that made it "obvious that this was not a showpiece. He felt it and meant it."[76] Having met with Hồ, Nehru felt even more sure that there would undoubtedly be a tremendous victory for Hồ Chí Minh were national reunification elections to be held. In addition, Nehru remembered his meeting with Phạm Văn Đồng positively too, remembering that Phạm Văn Đồng struck him "favorably."

Hồ Chí Minh had an equally favorable impression of Nehru. Writing under his frequently used pseudonym "C.B." in Nhân Dân (*The People)*, he wrote that Nehru was a man who had the audacity to call out the United States as a colonial power attempting to replace France in Indochina, and willing to point out that the United States was a reactionary country which had propped up those such as Bảo Đai who made decisions against the interests of the people. Hồ approvingly noted that while in Hanoi, Nehru has said that the United States policy was dictated by the Cold War, but that the Cold War "cannot bring peace to the people of Asia."[77]

Nehru also briefly visited Laos on October 17, 1954 and met with Crown Prince Savang Vatthana (1907-1978) and Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma (1901-

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[72] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Conversation with Chou En-lai I," New Delhi, June 25, 1954. *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 26, 368.
[73] *Ibid.,* 376-379.
[74] "Panchsheel: A Model Code for Bilateral Relations," Joint statement issued after the talks between Nehru and Zhou Enlai, June 29, 1954, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 26, 411.
[75] Ramesh Thakur, *Peacekeeping in Vietnam: Canada, India, Poland, and the International Commission* (Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 1984), 48.
[76] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Impressions and Experience," Daires of Indochina and China visit, October 15-18, 1954. *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 27, 580.
[77] C.B., "Thủ tướng Nêru," [Prime Minister Nehru], in Bảo tàng Hồ Chí Minh, *Bác Hồ với Ấn Độ* [Uncle Ho and India] (Hanoi: Nhả xuất bản thông tân, 2003), 49-50.

1984), among other ministers. These figures left Nehru with a lukewarm impression. Souvanna Phouma was "a good man who wanted to come to terms."[78] In his own diary, he recalled with hesitation that the Lao leaders were members of an "old, out of sorts royal regime of good people."[79] Nehru expressed to Zhou Enlai, however, that he was very concerned about whether a withdrawal of foreign troops would actually take place on both sides. Souvanna Phouma had expressed reservations to Nehru that the United States was pressuring him to avoid withdrawing French troops. At the same time, Nehru worried that either a lack of timely withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces or a sudden withdrawal of French troops might give the United States a pretext to intervene.[80] His impressions of the Lao situation were therefore somewhat ambivalent.

Nehru continued to have a very negative view of the state of affairs in Saigon. In the midst of the *de facto* civil war in Saigon in the spring and summer of 1955, he called conditions there "deplorable," commenting that it was unclear who if anyone was governing the area and repeating his comment that he could not "get over the fact that a man like Bảo Đại is supposed to be the head of the state and that he functions from the Riviera. How such a person can inspire any confidence in his people, is more than I can understand."[81]

During the summer and fall of 1955, as Prime Minister Ngô Đình Diệm gained traction in his fight against factional elements in Saigon, he began to assert himself in foreign policy. In a declaration broadcast over the radio on July 16 of that year, Diệm argued that because the DRV had inhibited the free movement of people and created a regime of terror, and had integrated itself into the Communist bloc, free elections that included the DRV would be impossible to achieve. He further pointed out that his government had not been signatories to the Geneva Accords, and therefore could not be bound by them.[82]

Nehru became increasingly exasperated at South Vietnamese attempts to repudiate the Geneva Accords in order to void the elections for the unification of Vietnam that were supposed to happen in 1956. In response, Nehru made the legal argument that no non-communist Vietnamese regime could have had standing to negotiate the Geneva Accords since the French were the controlling authority at the time, and that, as a successor state, the accords should apply to them. But Nehru's main frustration came from what he saw as Diệm's hypocrisy on the issue. The Republic of Vietnam was more than happy to accuse the DRV of violating the Geneva Accords, he observed, but these accusations were inconsistent with a repudiation of

[78] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Situation in South East Asia," Minutes of talks with Zhou Enlai in Beijing, October 21, 1954, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 27, 24-25.
[79] Nehru, "Impressions and Experiences," 579-580.
[80] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Situation in South East Asia," 24-25.
[81] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Letter to R.G. Casey," New Delhi, April 13, 1955, *Selected Works*, Second Series, Volume 28, 191-192.
[82] Ngô Đình Diệm, "La question des elections: Déclaration radiodiffusé du 16 Juillet 1955," in *La Voie de la Juste Cause* (Saigon: Service du Presse Présidence de la République du Viêt-Nam, 1956), 104-105.

the Accord's validity.[83] This position frustrated Nehru enough for him to wonder whether the ICSC would continue to have any function in Vietnam.

The situation became even more strained when on July 20, 1955, the first anniversary of the conclusion of the Geneva Accords, a mass protest against them that Nehru regarded as tacitly supported by Ngô Đình Diêm was held in Saigon. The sponsors of the protest called for the removal of "pro-communist" elements of the ICSC from India and Poland.[84] More disturbingly, "several hundred men and boys" armed with sticks, knives, and hammers appeared at the Hotel Galienne and the Hotel Majestic in downtown Saigon where the ICSC members were staying, broke into rooms, cut telephone lines, threatened the staff, and destroyed their belongings.[85] Though the Republic of Vietnam's Foreign Minister Vũ Văn Mẫu (1914-1998) would issue an official apology, the incident had the effect of causing outrage in India.[86]

Perhaps because of this more strained relationship, the ICSC would favor the North Vietnamese in seventy-two percent of its decisions between 1954 and 1959.[87] Nevertheless, by the end of 1955 Ngô Dình Diệm had successfully quelled unrest in the Republic, removed Bảo Đại from the political sphere, and stabilized the political situation. By 1956, the French High Command was dissolved, and India had no choice but to pursue the *de facto* recognition of Diệm's government. Moreover, the Geneva powers were unable or unwilling to act to force an election for the unification of Vietnam. This effectively meant that the *panchsheel* vision could not be achieved in Vietnam, which would almost inevitably become a Cold War battleground. This meant that Nehru's efforts to demonstrate the credibility of a neutralist foreign policy would increasingly rest on the ICSC efforts in Laos.[88]

Laos and the DRV-India Break, 1954-1962

Fortunately, while hopes for Vietnamese reunification and neutralization were dashed, the prospects for reunification in Laos were increasing by 1956, despite a very rocky start for the Lao ICSC during 1954-1955. One of the main disputes that the ICSC faced in the 1954-1956 years was whether Lao National Army troops were present in Phong Saly and Sam Neua prior to the date of the 1954 cease-fire. If they were, then Phong Saly and Sam Neua could be reintegrated into the Royal Lao Government; if not, then the Pathet Lao, under the terms of the Geneva Accords, might

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[83] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Observation on the World Issues (Press Conference, July 19, 1955)," *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 29, 288-289.
[84] Thakur, *Peacekeeping in Vietnam,* 235-236.
[85] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Incidents in Saigon," Statement to Parliament, July 27, 1955. *Selected Works*, Second Series, Volume 29, 373-375.
[86] Thakur, *Peacekeeping in Vietnam,* 235-236.
[87] Thakur, "India's Vietnam Policy," 961.
[88] One might suppose that the ICSC efforts in Cambodia would be just as important. However, at least in the 1950s, Cambodia benefited from a pro-neutralist Prime Minister in Norodom Sihanouk who supported ICSC efforts and was "at peace"—at least in the sense of having significantly less foreign soldiers in its borders at the time. For that reason, most of the short-term ICSC work was completed there by 1958, and the continued ICSC presence in Cambodia existed mostly on Sihanouk's insistence as an "insurance policy" against foreign invasion. See Arthur E. Blanchette, *Canadian Peacekeepers in Indochina 1954-1973: Recollections* (Toronto: Dundum, 2001), 4-5. Of course, by the mid-1960s, Cambodia was very much in the thick of the Second Indochina War, but by then the ICSC regime no longer had the same fortitude as in the 1950s.

be able to claim these two provinces as their own territory virtually indefinitely. After this issue threatened to cause an irrevocable rift among the members of the ICSC, in November 1954, Colonel Singkapo Chounlamany of the Pathet Lao Army agreed to recognize the authority of the Royal Lao Government over Attapeu and Houaphan in exchange for their political integration and participation in a future united Lao country.[89]

By this time Prince Souvanna Phouma had been replaced by the more pro-American Prime Minister Katay Don Sasorith (1904-1959). Though the new Prime Minister announced that the policy of moving toward integration would continue, the process hit bumps along the road.[90] In June 1955, the Pathet Lao launched major offensive operations around Sam Neua, specifically in the Muong Peun area, where it was alleged that they collaborated with the PAVN to forcibly conscript local villagers. The case came before the ICSC. When India and Canada ruled against the Pathet Lao, the Polish representative argued that the decision was invalid because the Geneva Accords had given the Pathet Lao sovereign control over Sam Neua. The result was a kind of deadlock in 1955, with 2-1 decisions being made by the ICSC that were subsequently rejected by the Pathet Lao. This ineffectiveness made Lao conservatives dismiss the Commission, and India's role in it, as being a puppet of international communism.[91]

This deadlock ended, happily, in January 1956, when the ICSC ruled that "without further delay the Royal Administration should be re-established in the provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly and the Royal Government should concurrently take necessary measures to bring about the integration of Pathet Lao fully and "without discrimination into the national community."[92] A month later, the neutralist leaning Souvanna Phouma again became prime minister. This led the way for the slow integration of Phong Saly and Sam Neua and elections that would include candidates from the Neo Lao Hak Sat (Lao Patriotic Front), the political wing of the Pathet Lao. By November 1957, a coalition government was established under Souvanna Phouma, with Souphanouvong as Minister of Planning, Reconstruction and Urbanization.[93] A neutralist solution in accordance with the vision of *panchsheel* and the Geneva Accords appeared to be in reach. Given that the main goal of the Geneva Accords, reintegration of the Pathet Lao into a unified country, had been achieved, the ICSC in Laos was adjourned *sine die* (with no assigned date for any resumption).

In 1958, however, the prospects for unification under neutralist auspices began to fall apart. May 1958 saw supplementary elections in which the Neo Lao Hak Sat performed extraordinarily well and right-wing candidates were defeated handily.

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[89] "Declaration made by Colonel Singkapo on the 4th November 1954," in *First Interim Report of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Laos* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1955), 76; Sardesai, *Indian Foreign Policy,* 160-161.
[90] Sardesai, *Indian Foreign Policy,* 162.
[91] Sisouk Na Champassak, *Storm over Laos: A Contemporary History* (New York: Praeger, 1961), 35-39.
[92] "Resolution adopted by the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Laos at its 163rd Meeting on Saturday, January 7, 1956," in *Third Interim Report of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Laos* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1957), 47.
[93] Dommen, *Conflict in Laos,* 108-109; Martin Stuart-Fox, *Laos: Politics, Economics, and Society* (London: Francis Pinter, 1986), 23.

Prince Souphanouvong received more votes than any other candidate.[94] The United States, fearing communist influence, began to threaten to cut off aid to Vientiane, and began to clandestinely support groups of more pro-American "young Turks" such as Oudone Sananikone, Inpeng Suryadhay, a former diplomat at the Lao Embassy in Washington, and Khamphan Panya, a powerful advisor to Crown Prince Savang Vatthana. These groups coalesced in to the Comité pour la Défense des Intérêts Nationaux (Committee for the Defense of National Interests, or CDNI), and the CIA, enthused by their energy but knowing that they did not have the votes in the National Assembly to remove Souvanna Phouma, took matters in their own hands and engineered a coup against him by, in essence, paying Souvanna Phouma to depose himself.[95]

Thus, Souvanna Phouma's government fell. He was replaced by Phoui Sananikone in August 1958, who had declared that while he was for neutrality, that "does not imply a neutrality on the ideological plane: we are anti-communists."[96] Though Phoui was for neutralism, he regarded communism as a foreign ideology that could not be implanted on Lao soil. Accordingly, he sought diplomatic relations with the RVN and other non-communist states. In the meantime, in late 1958 and early 1959, the DRV began to accuse the RLG of encroaching on the border; Phoui claimed in response that the DRV had sent troops over the border to Laos. As a result, in January 1959, the Lao National Assembly granted Phoui emergency powers to handle the crisis.

Nehru reacted to the crisis between the RLG and the DRV with alarm, but with an attitude that could be regarded as still favorable to the DRV. In 1957 and 1958, respectively, both Ngô Đình Diệm and Hồ Chí Minh visited New Delhi. Diệm's visit was very brief, and Nehru did not make much mention of their meeting, though he seemed open to Diệm's expressed plan to consider having elections in "two-three years" when South Vietnam was more "consolidated economically and socially."[97] On the other hand, Hồ Chí Minh was extensively feted during his February 1958 trip in which Nehru expressed his genuine affection for the Vietnamese leader. At his welcoming speech, Nehru recalled being "drawn to" Hồ Chí Minh out of "affection," and spoke of Hồ's "love of humanity" that "begets love." He recalled Hồ's rushing to give him a hug upon his arrival in Hanoi in 1954, which he called "an attack of affection." Most

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[94] *Ibid.*

[95] Ken Conboy, *Spies on the Mekong: CIA Clandestine Operations in Laos* (Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2021), 25-26. Conboy cites John Gunter Dean, who served as a Political Officer in Laos from 1956 to 1958. The CIA Station Chief in Vientiane, Henry Hecksher, asked Dean to carry a suitcase to Souvanna Phouma that he later realized was full of money. Charles Stuart Kennedy, Interview of Ambassador John Gunter Dean, September 6, 2000, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project. Accessed December 8, 2025. https://adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Dean-John-Gunther.pdf. See also Thomas L. Ahern, Jr., *Undercover Armies: CIA and Surrogate Warfare in Laos* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2006), 6, on the point of direct CIA intervention. The payments were not the only potential reason for his resignation—issues with the national budget along with other problems were also factors.

[96] Quoted in Seth Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling: American Foreign Policy in Cold War Laos* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 141.

[97] M.J. Desai, "Talks with Ngo Dinh Diem," (Notes of meeting between Diệm and Nehru, November 11, 1957), *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 40, 626.

notably, he was dumbfounded when he discovered that Hồ had brought garlands to lay for Gandhi's memorial and in memorial to Nehru's father. In response, Nehru simply responded that he "was so moved." He concluded "these things which are generally considered small, reveal a man and make a deeper impression than things which are generally considered big. He is a man of small stature (height). But he is great of heart and welcoming him makes us big."[98] He later wrote that Hồ was "delightful" and had "captured our hearts."[99]

Unsurprisingly, through 1958 and early 1959, Nehru appeared sympathetic to DRV views about the breakdown in relations. Writing to UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961) in May 1959, he noted that the ICSC "had had reports of movement of troops along the Laos-North Vietnam border," but also that there were reports that the United States was sending "telecommunication equipment" and "technical military personnel, though in civilian clothes" to Laos.[100] In these circumstances, consistent with the pleas from Phạm Văn Đồng to reopen the Laos ICSC to investigate these issues, Nehru tried to do exactly that by sending a letter to British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Selwyn Lloyd (1904-1978) and Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Gromyko (1909-1989) with a plea to reconvene the commission, noting that "the deterioration in the relations between the Royal Laotian Government and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam have created a situation which, unless it is resolved promptly, may lead to conflict and breach of peace in Laos and even in the other Indo-China states."[101]

In the summer of 1959, however, a substantial change in policy occurred in the DRV. During the January 1959 Fifteenth Plenum, the Vietnam Workers' Party adopted Resolution 15 which allowed the revolutionaries in South Vietnam to use "armed propaganda" to supplement the non-violent tactics that had been previously used, and in May 1959, they began to use a patchwork of forest trails and paths as a conduit to the south—paths that by 1961 would begin to be developed into makeshift roads that would come to be known as the "Hồ Chí Minh Trail" to transport weapons and supplies to insurgent revolutionaries in the South. This move coincided with a gradual decrease in influence of Hồ Chí Minh and Phạm Văn Đông, who were not in favor of a war with the south, with Lê Duẩn and Lê Đức Thọ, who were.[102]

Though there is no evidence that Nehru was aware of the shift in political power going on in Hanoi, he was more than aware, by late 1959 or early 1960, of the increased incursions of the PAVN into Laos and their infiltration into the Republic of Vietnam. Not coincidentally, 1959 also marks the year of a remarkable shift in the voting pattern of India on the Vietnamese ICSC. For example, in the summer of 1959,

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[98] "Prime Minister J. Nehru's Speech at the Reception," in *President Ho Chi Minh's Visit to the Republic of India and the Union of Burma* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Press, 1958), 18.
[99] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Letter to Vijaya Lakhsmi Pandit," February 9, 1958, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 41, 344.
[100] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Letter to Dag Hammarsjöld: Laos Commission," *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 49, 593-594.
[101] Jawaharlal Nehru, "Letter to Selwyn Lloyd and Andrei A. Gromyko: Reconvening the International Commission on Laos," *Selected Works*, Second Series, Volume 49, 596-597.
[102] Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 59; Ang Cheng Guan, *The Vietnam War from the Other Side* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 34-35.

Phạm Văn Đồng sent a series of increasingly urgent letters to Nehru urging he act in response to the United States's introducing "illegally into Laos new American weapons," and that U.S. technical cooperation with the RLG was actually military training in disguise.[103] While Nehru responded that he thought that the co-Chairman of the Geneva Accords should reconvene the ICSC in Laos and sent a letter to Dag Hammarskjöld calling for a mediation between the DRV and the RLG, he took no further action. Taken in context of his long history of rhetorical statements in favor of the DRV (even if they were not always backed up by action), this response seems tepid in contrast.[104]

In addition, in response to the increased insurgent activity pursuant to Hanoi's change in policy, the RVN announced Decree 10/59 in May 1959, which mandated streamlined judicial procedure in which suspected saboteurs could be sentenced to life imprisonment or even death in a military tribunal.[105] The DRV protested loudly that this law was a violation of Article 14(c) which instructed the parties "to refrain from any reprisals or discrimination against persons or organizations on account of their activities during the hostilities and to guarantee their democratic liberties."[106] But the Vietnam ICSC ruled in early 1960 (with Poland dissenting) that the law did not in itself violate Article 14(c) even if "certain provisions of it may, in specific cases, be applied in a manner which may be incompatible with that Article."[107] The DRV objected strenuously to this ruling. Phạm Văn Đồng wrote to Nehru that a ICSC decision in favor of the RVN on Decree 10/59 would "amount to encouraging" an official RVN policy of "reprisal and murder."[108] Phạm Văn Đồng's letter was met with a polite but noncomittal reply from Nehru that India "will, so far as it lies within our power, continue to implement the provisions of the Geneva Agreement objectively and impartially."[109]

Privately, the small Indian staff of the ICSC for Vietnam—some of whom had been there from the start—were increasingly dismissive of DRV complaints that sentences under Decree 10/59 violated the Geneva Accords. The ICSC's legal office

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[103] "Letter from Pham Van Dong to Nehru, Hanoi, July 31, 1959," Appendix 7, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 51, 590-591; "Consult General of India in Hanoi to Ministry of External Affairs: Telegram of Pham Van Dong to Nehru," *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 51, 623-625.

[104] "Telegram to Pham Van Dong from Nehru (via Meneses)," August 8, 1959. *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 51, 538; Jawaharlal Nehru, "Letter to Dag Hammarskjöld: Mediation," August 30, 1959, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 51, 546-548.

[105] David W.P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta.* Concise Edition. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 102.

[106] "Indochina: Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet-Nam, July 20, 1954," *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Philosophy.* Accessed December 8, 2025. https://avalon.law.yale.edu

[107] "Confidential: Reference Message No. 210/CT/I/B Dated 26th June (1962). July 11, 1962. M.D. Shahane Papers, Archives of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 51-53. See also Ton That Thien, *India and South-East Asia,* 147. Similar arrests were being made in Cambodia. For example, in January 1962, Chou Chet, a well-known member of the Issarak movement and of the pro-communist Pracheachon Group, was arrested by Sihanouk's government in January 1962. The group protested to the ICSC to no avail. See David Porter Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution since 1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1991), 338.

[108] Telegram from Pham Van Dong to Nehru, April 9, 1960, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 60, 650.

[109] Telegram from Nehru to Pham Van Dong, April 18, 1960, *Selected Works,* Second Series, Volume 60, 614.

was led through the 1950s by a career civil service officer named MD Shahane. Relatively little information is known about him. He was born on December 18, 1904, and as a young man was active in the Servants of India Society in Nagpur, a reform organization originally founded by Gopal Krishna Gokhale and dedicated to eliminating untouchability and promoting sanitation and health care.[110] In this capacity, in 1934, he wrote to Gandhi, and received a reply about setting up a meeting with the leaders of that society.[111] After the formation of the Republic of India, he became a civil servant, appointed in 1949 as an information officer the East Africa division, a post he held until working for the ICSC.[112]

Commenting on a 1962 case in which the poet and mathematics instructor Le Quang Vinh and three students were sentenced to death for attempting to assasinate US Ambassador to South Vietnam Frederick Nolting (1911-1989) under Decree 10/59, Political Advisor to the Indian ICSC M.D. Shahane chalked the DRV objection up to being "designed chiefly for propaganda purposes" and argued the following:

> As far as the present protest is concerned, it is an extraordinary thing for a Government to defend persons who have been convicted of attempted murder of a high dignitary and other heinous activities in another jurisdiction. It is worthwhile noting that both these messages do not question the complicity of the persons concerned in the attempt. This would imply that the DRVN approve of the attempt for the assassination of the US Ambassador in Saigon. This is perhaps true but to ask the Commission to be a Party to this approval by implication is an extraordinary suggestion.[113]

Shahane's view of the matter, while confidential and thus not for public consumption, reflects a clear shift in Indian rhetoric about the DRV. This new view also comes into focus in Shahane's secret cable back to New Delhi concerning whether the importation of arms from Malaya and military aid from the United States was a violation of the Geneva Accords. Though Shahane cautioned that "regular and avowed" U.S. military aid would be "a military alliance barred" under the Geneva Agreement, he also noted that perhaps new instructions to the ICSC from the Government of India were necessary in light of the fact that the current instructions for the ICSC Chair, M.J. Desai, were three years old. Shahane noted that the change that had taken place was that India since the previous instructions were written in 1959 was chiefly that India had "a more objective view of communist tactics" than before.[114]

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[110] K.P. Saksena, "Civil Servants and Diplomacy: Recollections and Reflections," *Internaitonal Relations* 25, no. 1 (1988): 76.

[111] Mohandas Gandhi, "Letter to M.D. Shahane," November 14, 1934, in Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi,* Volume 56 (New Delhi: Government of India, 1958), 345-346.

[112] *History of Services of Officers Holding Gazetted Appointments.* Volume 2. (New Delhi: Office of Accountant General, 1961), 2313.

[113] "Confidential: Reference Message No. 210/CT/I/B Dated 26th June (1962). July 11, 1962. M.D. Shahane Papers, Archives of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 51-53.

[114] M.D. Shahane, "Secret: Re: Legal Adviser's Note on the Import of War Material from Malaya by South Vietnam," April 8, 1961. M.D. Shahane Papers, Archives of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 270-272.

In view of the increased intervention of the DRV in the South, India was more tolerant of the involvement of US troops in Vietnam. In April 1960, Phạm Văn Đồng complained to Nehru about the majority ICSC decision of Canada and India, Poland dissenting, that a doubling of the number of advisors at the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) did not violate the Geneva Accords' prohibition on foreign military personnel.[115] Nehru responded with a simple defense of the decision, noting that because the MAAG was replacing the military training mission of the French Expeditionary Corps, a replacement of one preexisting military training program with another did not violate the Geneva Accords.[116]

Consistent with this pattern, and recognizing that the DRV was interfering in both Laos and in the RVN, India's position on Lao matters began to hew more closely with that of the United States. Between 1960 and 1962, political events in Laos became increasingly chaotic. A rigged election in April 1960 put right-wing Prime Minister Tiao Somsanith in power on behalf of strongman General Phoumi Nosavan (1920-1985), but after four months, a neutralist coup led by Captain Kong Le (1934-2014) took control. When General Phoumi retook Vientiane later in the year, Kong Le retreated to the Plain of Jars, producing two different governments in Laos. Additionally, in May 1962, the catastrophic defeat of RLG forces at Luang Namtha in northern Laos near the Chinese border, weakened the RLG's position vis a vis the United States and their negotiating position.[117] A month later, in June of 1962, with the support of the United States led by Assistant Secretary of State Averell Harriman (1891-1986), the Soviet Union, and the governemnts of Poland, India, France, China, Britain, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and the Royal Lao Government, agreed to the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Laos, and that they "would not use the territory of the Kingdom of Laos for interference in the internal affairs of other countries."[118]

Whereas in the mid-1950s, Nehru was frequently put in a position of advocating for the position of communist countries such as China to the non-Communist powers, by the early 1960s, he was more frequently put in a position of advocating for the American position. In May 1961, Nehru received an urgent message from President John F. Kennedy (1917-1963) indicating that in spite of a cease-fire agreement, "Pathet Lao forces have stepped up their offensive military activities," even as the RLG was observing the cease-fire. In response, Nehru directed Krishna Menon to immediately draw the attention of the Soviet government to Kennedy's position. Nehru enthusiastically supported Kennedy's vision of neutrality for Laos. Before the 1962 Geneva Conference that produced the neutralization agreement for Laos, Ambassadors Averill Harriman and John Kenneth Galbraith

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[115] Pham Van Dong, Letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, Hanoi, April 28, 1960, *Selected Works*, Second Series, Volume 60, 669-670.

[116] Telegram from Nehru to Pham Van Dong, May 18, 1960. *Selected Works*, Second Series, Volume 60, 616. This response is despite the fact that French military advisors were primarily confined to military academies, while American advisers were operating throughout the RVN.

[117] Martin Stuart-Fox and Simon Creak, *Historical Dictionary of Laos*, Fourth Edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2023), 47.

[118] "Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos. Signed at Geneva, on 23 July 1962," Retrieved May 11, 2016. https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20456/volume-456-I-6564-English.pdf

(1908-2006) met with Nehru in May 1961 and expressed concern that the communists were "taking advantage of our attempt at a peaceful settlement."[119] Agreeing, Nehru argued that the Pathet Lao "would undoubtedly try to use this to gain a larger political participation, but that we should not permit it to force a division of Laos," adding that the Lao had a historic "hatred for the Annamites" that could be a unifying factor in keeping Laotians together.[120]

Conclusion

In the 1950s, Jawaharlal Nehru sought to craft a foreign policy that would counteract the dangers of waging a cold war in the nuclear age. It sought to remove foreign troops and foreign military influence from the newly decolonized states of the world, especially in Asia. This program of nonalignment and neutrality would reduce tensions in the Cold War and would provide India with a number of like-minded allies among its neighbors in Southeast Asia. Though the Bandung Conference is remembered as the hallmark of Nehru's articulation of a nonaligned policy, it was actually the implementation of the Geneva Accords that Nehru thought was most critical to the success of a foreign policy based on nonalignment, nonintervention, and neutralization. Geneva provided the road map, and the ICSC could demonstrate that such a road map was politically feasible by successfully enforcing the provisions agreed to at the Geneva Conference in 1954.

That vision was never realized. Between 1954 and 1959, Nehru perceived political actors in North Vietnam, such as Hồ Chí Minh and Phạm Văn Đồng, and in China, such as Zhou Enlai, as being helpful in implementing his vision, and he perceived Ngô Đình Diệm's repudiation of the accords and refusal to hold elections for the reunification of Vietnam as the most significant impediment to the achievement of this vision. After the DRV began openly carrying out hostilities against the RVN by ferrying troops and supplies through Laos, thereby further destabilizing Laos, Nehru and the Indian members of the ICSC increasingly regarded the DRV and by extension the Pathet Lao as the major impediment to the achievement of the vision of the Geneva Accords, and by extension the achievement of success for the *panchsheel* vision of a neutral foreign policy.

Ramesh Thakur has emphasized the changing relations between India and the PRC as a main factor in the suddenly cold relations between India and the DRV. In 1959, India had agreed to offer asylum to the Dalai Lama as Beijing's troops stormed into Lhasa during the Tibetan uprising. This created tensions at the border between India and China that led to a destructive and costly China-India border war that India lost. The result was, in the view of Mieczyslaw Maneli, the Polish delegate to the ICSC

[119] It is important to point out that United States aims were not entirely altruistic in this case, nor were they devoid of hyprocrisy, because the US continued to send out White Star Teams (military advisory missions) composed of Special Forces, under Operation White Star through 1962, not only to train the Royal Lao Army but to create anti-communist militias. See Joseph D. Celeski, *The Green Berets in the Land of a Million Elephants: U.S. Army Special Warfare and the Secret War in Laos, 1959-74* (Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2020), 115-138.

[120] "Memorandum of Conversation with Prime Minister Nehru on Laos," May 5, 1961, Department of State, *Virtual Vietnam Archive*, Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX.

in Vietnam, that "since 1961-62, whatever happened at the Commission was interpreted by the Indians through the prism of their hostility toward China."[121]

While there is undoubtedly a grain of truth to that statement, one should not underestimate the importance of seeking neutrality along the principles of the Geneva Accords. By the early 1960s, it was the United States, rather than the DRV or China, who appeared to be interested in those principles. Naturally, therefore, Nehru became more sympathetic to their position. Ultimately, however, the message of this work has been that in the attempt to achieve a credible nonaligned movement of neutral countries, from the point of view of Jawaharlal Nehru, nothing could have been more central than the implementation of the vision of the Geneva Accords in Laos.

[121] Mieczyslaw Maneli, *War of the Vanquished* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 77-78. Quoted in Thakur, *Peacekeeping in Vietnam,* 187.