

~~TOP SECRET~~

RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN FRENCH INDO-CHINA

(Short Title: PSIS 400-6)

PUBLICATION OF
PACIFIC STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE SECTION
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF UNITED STATES FLEET and CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
(OP-20-3-650)

6 April 1945

COPY NO. 2 OF 6

~~THIS INFORMATION MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED
IN ANY FORM, IN WHOLE OR IN PART, WITHOUT
AUTHORITY OF COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF UNITED
STATES FLEET and CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
PSIS, (OP-20-3-650)~~

DISTRIBUTION:

COMINCH
CINCPAC
OP-20-3

- (1) No. 1
- (2) No. 2-3
- (3) No. 4-5-6

DECLASSIFIED per Sec. 3, E. O. 12958
by Director, NSA/Chief, CSS

Hmoic Date: 19 Nov '80

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET-ULTRA~~

Recent Political Developments in French Indo-China

(This report is based on Japanese _____ dispatches for the period 9 November 1944 to 15 March 1945.)

When France fell to German occupation in June 1940, French Indo-China was placed in a precarious position for Japan was making rapid political progress in Malaya, Thailand, and China. There was no hope for aid from the conquered mother country and the French Indo-Chinese Army was not equal to the Japanese forces. Thus in 1942 the French Government bowed to Japanese power by forming an Indo Chinese-Japanese agreement for the defense of Indo-China. In this alliance Japan agreed to continue to recognize French sovereignty over the province and the French officials pledged cooperation with Japan for the defense of Indo-China. Japanese troops were then sent to Indo-China and the French Indo-Chinese Government was presented with a demand for funds to defray the occupational costs of the Japanese forces. The troops and the financial demands were increased year by year. By November 1944 the French officials in Indo-China were in an exceedingly complex and difficult position.

De Coux, the Governor General of Indo-China, and his staff were extremely anxious to have contact established between French Indo-China and the mother country when the De Gaulle regime was established in France.

~~TOP SECRET-ULTRA~~
TOP SECRET-ULTRA

~~SECRET~~

The Governor

General desired France to send someone to inspect conditions in Indo-China. He also hoped that France could bring the United Nations to abandon their plan for an attack on Indo-China and that France herself would avoid any foreign relations which might cause Japan to harbor mistrust of France.¹

De Gaulle placed the French officials in the Far East in an even more difficult position by stating the following in an address before the France Consultative Assembly on 22 November: "The loyalty of the Indo-Chinese Union towards unhappy France, despite its own misfortune, and the traditional friendship we have in China, force us to hold that it is our duty to win back all that was wrested from us by the enemy, and we wish to state here and now, that we are ready to participate in any international organization in the Far East whose aim would be to maintain peace. We are ready to do this and accept all responsibilities."²

¹ 9 November 1944,

H-150249

² Page AB MAGIC SUMMARY 1016, 5 January 1945

~~TOP SECRET~~

The Japanese attempted to sound out De Coux's solidarity with France by saying that since the "De Gaulle so-called Provisional Government was recognized in Britain, America, and the U.S.S.R. was not the so-called Provisional Government now the legitimate government?" The Governor General replied that the De Gaulle Government was merely a transitional one and the legitimate government was a matter to be settled by election when the prisoners of war returned home. De Coux then stated that he intended to do his utmost as the protector of French rights and interest in Indo-China, and with that end in view he pledged his solid cooperation with Japan but asked that the Japanese understand his position.⁵

The situation of the French Government in Indo-China was further complicated by native uprisings which broke out simultaneously among the native farmers in Thai Nguyen and Tuyen Quang Provinces. The Japanese interpreted the cause for the riots as the natives' reaction

5 |
15 December 1944,

H-159731

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

to the excessive burden imposed by the compulsory supply rates set on rice by the French authorities. The riots started in early November and Japanese observers expressed the opinion that the rebellions could last 4 or 5 months. The Governor General spent a whole week at the end of November travelling in the border region and a battalion of about six hundred men (all foreign born) were sent to the area.⁶

Additional trouble for the French officials was created in December 1944, when Indian Nationalists who had been collecting funds for the Indian Provisional Government Army urged local Indians who were under French Indo-Chinese rule to contribute funds for they said, "The French Colonies in India would certainly be seized and the privileges and property of the French residing in the Colonies would be forfeited as India's independence was achieved". The French Government arrested the Indian Nationalists and requested the Administrative Embassy to see that the Indian Provisional Government refrained from making such statements in the future.⁷

For the French Government officials the new year brought only one slight hope that might aid their isolated, complex situation. This was the possibility that the French-Russian Alliance might act

⁶25 November 1944,

H-153918

⁷26 December 1944,

H-160219

The Administrative Embassy was apparently composed of Japanese and pro-Japanese native officials.

~~TOP SECRET~~

as a check against Japan.⁸ For the Japanese officials in French Indo-China the situation in January 1945 was also complex. Japan expected American invasion in Indo-China soon and the Japanese troops stationed there were inadequate.⁹ In view of the stand taken by the Government in Paris, Japan must have been uncertain as to what the action of the French Indo-China Army would be in the event of an American invasion. Also since the French-Russian Alliance Japan did not want to provoke Russian anger over any incident in Indo-China.¹⁰

Each year since the common defense agreement between French Indo-China and Japan the Governor General had been presented with a demand for funds to defray the cost of maintaining the Japanese forces in Indo-China. These funds were drawn from the treasury of the French Indo-Chinese Government. In January 1945 the financial demands, written in budget form, were again presented. These figures amounted to 110,000,000 piasters a month. In 1942 the monthly rate was 7,500,000 piasters,¹¹ and in 1944 it was 51,650,000 piasters. Even when an adjustment to compensate for a 37.5% decrease in the value of the currency was used the demands for 1945 were considerably higher. The complete budget follows:

⁸ 17 January 1945, H-163753

⁹ 6 January 1945, H-166390

¹⁰ 6 January 1945, H-160974

¹¹ Page A6 MAGIC SUMMARY 1016. 5 January 1945

~~TOP SECRET~~

Contemplated Monthly Expenditures for First Quarter¹²
(in yen)

| | (A) | (B) | (C) |
|--------------------------|-------------|---|------------|
| | 1945 | 1945, after apply- ing corrective for inflation | 1944 |
| <u>Army</u> | | | |
| Unit Maintenance | 22,000,000 | 13,750,000 | 6,650,000 |
| Special Installations | 22,000,000 | 13,750,000 | 12,650,000 |
| Purchases | 16,750,000 | 10,468,750 | 12,000,000 |
| Wooden ship construction | 4,000,000 | 2,500,000 | 2,500,000 |
| Railroad expenses | 4,000,000 | 2,500,000 | 350,000 |
| Railroad survey | | | 850,000 |
| Total | 68,750,000 | 42,968,750 | 35,000,000 |
| <u>Navy</u> | | | |
| Unit Maintenance | 13,300,000 | 8,312,500 | 6,650,000 |
| Special Installations | 13,300,000 | 8,312,500 | 3,000,000* |
| Purchases | 8,250,000 | 5,156,250 | 7,000,000 |
| Wooden ship construction | 5,700,000 | 3,562,500 | |
| Ship Repair | 700,000 | 437,500 | |
| Total | 41,250,000 | 25,781,250 | 16,650,000 |
| Grant Total | 110,000,000 | 68,750,000 | 51,650,000 |

*Called "expenses related to Naval Affairs" in the 1944 budget.

¹² Page A1 MAGIC SUMMARY No. 1038, 27 January 1945

~~SECRET~~

The budget brought stormy protest from the French authorities. General Mordant, Vice President of the New Indo-China Council, stated that French Indo-China would be financially ruined at once.¹³

The Governor General went to the Japanese Ambassadors and protested against the possible arrival of additional troops in Indo-China. His comments were: "It seems that these troops were to be stationed in the Kaobang Hsianglaokai area and that inasmuch as there were French Indo-Chinese troops already stationed in the same area who have been charged with the defense of the border, the transfer of new Japanese forces to that area could be regarded as nothing more or less than an expression of mistrust toward the French Army". De Coux went on to say to the Japanese Ambassador: "as you know, the starting point of an alliance has been reached in French-Soviet relations and it is our wish again that Japan reconsider in the light of this alliance"¹⁵

The Japanese reply was: "From the point of view of the Japan-French Indo-China agreement, these are lawful reasons and there is no

¹³7 January 1945, H-162846

¹⁵17 January 1945, H-163753

~~TOP SECRET ULTRA~~

room for change".¹⁶ Thus on 19 January, Matsumoto informed the Governor General of the army's decision to send additional troops into Indo-China, then sent a message to Tokyo stating: "So there is no turning back now".¹⁷

On 24 January 1945, the Governor General's Department sent a final plea to Japanese Headquarters. It stated that the French Government did not criticize essential military expenditure by the Japanese, but that conditions prevailing at the time, 1940, had been entirely altered by the development of the war. Communications between French Indo-China and abroad had been cut off. The import of Japanese goods had ceased yet Indo-China was supplying large amounts to Japan. The Department hoped that Japan had given proper appraisal to the fact that Indo-China had provided military funds in 1944 to the maximum possible limit. The French authorities expressed their appreciation that the Japanese had respected French sovereignty in Indo-China but they remarked: "It seems that either there will be a great social upheaval or Indo-China will become financially bankrupt and that constitutes an indirect infringement of sovereignty".¹⁸

¹⁶17 January 1945, H-162790

In this report Japanese Ambassador Matsumoto reported to Tokyo that the French officials would be closely watched.

¹⁷19 January 1945, H-163184

¹⁸(24?) January 1945 H-170427

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

With the arrival of Japanese troops in the Northern part of French Indo-China in early February,¹⁹ the French officials felt apprehension lest some sort of change was to be made in Japan's policy towards Indo-China.²⁰ Although these officials were very careful in their relationships with the Japanese, several incidents arose that provoked Japanese displeasure: (a) De Coux expressed the opinion that the value of the "North-South Communication" in Indo-China was a bluff on the part of either the Japanese Government or the Japanese press because in reality, the traffic was light, material was lacking, and numerous bridges were destroyed during American bombing raids. — (b) The French officials hid American aviators who had crashed in Indo-China and refused to give them over to the Japanese unless given formal assurance that the prisoners would be treated according to the Geneva Convention. The Japanese gave no assurance and the French did not release the Americans. — (c) Governor

*The term "North-South Communication" was used to mean the French Indo-China railroad running from the Saigon area along Eastern Coastline to the Northern border of Indo-China plus the railroad the Japanese Army hoped to build between Dong Dang (on the China-French Indo-China border) and Haming (145 miles to the Northwest)—

Magic Summary 1043, 1 February 1945, Page 14

¹⁹3 February 1945, H-166321

²⁰2 February 1945, H-166116

~~TOP SECRET - ULTRA~~

General De Coux stated in a speech at a luncheon: "French Indo-China will be called upon to make additional sacrifices, but she must put up bravely with the various difficulties that beset her. French troops have saved the Motherland from destruction and in line with this, the close alliance which binds Frenchmen with the people of French Indo-China will serve to protect Indo-China until the day that she is able to acquire a first class position in the reestablished French Empire".²³

(d) When there were a good many casualties among the French after thirty B-29's bombed Saigon about 12 February, Frenchmen expressed the opinion that the presence of Japanese troops had caused the bombing and there was open expression of a worsening of feeling towards Japan.²⁴

The French officials' apprehension of a change in Japan's policy towards Indo-China was well justified for the Japanese officials in Indo-China began rapid communications with Tokyo, discussing what the policy in Indo-China would be.²⁵ The first messages discussed the possibility of "inventing" some pretext for the overthrow of the French

²³ 30 January 1945, H-165265

²⁴ 12 February 1945, H-167455

²⁵ Unfortunately, for the continuity of this report, the Japanese sent special officials from Tokyo to Indo-China who transmitted confidential papers and thus spoiled a complete story in the available despatches.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

regime.²⁶ Then the term "put under military control" came to their attention and the Japanese officials expressed the possibility that such a term might be interpreted to mean that Indo-China was under military administration like Manchukuo or the Nanking Nationalist Government.²⁷ The situation was extremely difficult. Japan felt that Indo-China would become a battlefield and the Japanese military and administrative positions must be strengthened.²⁸ However, in handling military control of French Indo-China they had to give consideration to Japan's relation with France and to the international implications of the matter.²⁹ It was evident that "inventing" some pretext for the overthrow of French rule and then open military occupation should not be done under such circumstances.

The Japanese officials of the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War were of the opinion that the answer to the situation lay in the immediate realization of independence for Annam and other provinces of Indo-China.³⁰ The army, however, did not hold the same opinion for they felt the "vigorous systems already in effect should not be

²⁶10 February 1945, H-167910

²⁷9 February 1945, H-168484

²⁸15 February 1945, H-168287

²⁹21 February 1945, H-168886

³⁰19 February, H-168408

~~TOP SECRET~~

upset". They held that the independence of Annam and other provinces would create a hazard if Indo-China were invaded by American troops. The local army contended that action should be delayed until after 25 April in view of relations with Russia but steps should be taken toward independence with maintenance of military control at the same time.³¹ To investigate the opinions of the military and administrative officials in Indo-China the Supreme Council sent Secretary Toko to Saigon. Toko commented that the army's desire to have complete control "implied that the army was endowed with some special virtue whereby it alone knew what is right". He also stated: "It seems to me that the army does not seem to have enough confidence in itself with regards to the forthcoming operations". The chief point against complete army control, as stated by Toko, was that under such rule it would be impossible for Greater East Asia Ministry personnel to attempt anything which did not conform to the wishes of the army. Toko urged the immediate approval of Annamese independence by the Supreme Council from the following standpoints:

- (a) De Gaulle had already made preparations to grant Indo-China self-government and independence to Annam.
- (b) Since Russia had already called Japan an aggressor, the independence of Annam was essential if Japan wished to make the occupation of French Indo-China look less aggressive.

³¹24 February 1945,

H-169002

~~TOP SECRET~~

(c) Local communist parties were arising in Indo-China and they opposed replacement of France by Japan and advocated National independence.

(d) By proclaiming independence and then taking military measures Japan would weaken the Indo-China army and would win over tens of millions of natives.*

Toko was in favor of overruling the local army in this instance by formulating the Japanese policy for Indo-China Government around independence of the various provinces.³² The Supreme Council for the Direction of the War agreed.

After deciding that independence of Annam and other states in Indo-China would be the best diplomatic approach to military control, the Japanese prepared a plan to be presented to the French Governor General. The plan was:

"In view of the growing gravity of the general situation, the Governor General of Indo-China shall hereby accept the demands of the Government of Japan with a view of providing for the joint defense of French Indo-China in accordance with the spirit of the joint defense agreement.

*Total population of French Indo-China is 24,461,251
Distributed as follows:

| | | | |
|--------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| Cochin-China | - 4,615,968 | Tonkin | - 9,264,309 |
| Annam | - 6,211,228 | Loas | - 1,023,314 |
| Cambodia | - 3,046,432 | Kwangchow | - 300,000 |

³² 24 February 1945,

H-169072

~~SECRET~~

"In order to avoid useless bloodshed, the Governor General shall in accordance with the orders of the Supreme command of the Japanese Army disarm its army, navy, air force, and all other armed units and then proceed to re-organize them under the command of the Japanese Army."³³

If the Government General agreed to the demands, De Coux was to make a suitable announcement to the French Indo-Chinese.³⁴ If the plan was refused, the Japanese would issue a proclamation of the Imperial Government in the form of a "report".³⁵ The plans for the administrative set-up of Indo-China under the proclamation were as follows:³⁶ (1) The duties of the leaders of the Government General together with those of the High Commissioner and similar officials were to be entrusted immediately to the Administrative Embassy. However, the Administrative Embassy officials were to take over these duties in the capacity of advisers. (2) For less important duties use was to be made of the natives and French citizens. In the event of the removal of a French official the duties were to be taken over by the senior official among the natives. An adviser was to be appointed to provide essential guidance. (3) In general, the set-up of the Government was to be retained in its present form. (4) Military

³³ 3 March 1945, _____ H-171612

³⁴ 27 February 1945, _____ H-169371

³⁵ 2 March 1945, _____ H-170040

³⁶ Apparently these plans were to go into effect whether the Governor General did or did not refuse. Consensus of Japanese opinion held he would refuse.

factors were to take over railroads and communications but were not to interfere with commerce and industry.

The policy for general handling of the French was "to move and resettle them in the interior".³⁷ Since Japan did not recognize the De Gaulle regime, the French were not to be considered enemies, and due to international complications the Japanese felt that "it would be a good idea to be somewhat liberal in our provisions for their daily living conditions".³⁸

On 8 March 1945, the Japanese Political Affairs Bureau and the Military Affairs Bureau reached an agreement on the plans for Indo-China and gave their sanction for the presentation of the demands to the French Indo-China officials.³⁹ On 9 March the Japanese officials read the proposal to the Governor General and informed him that they would like a reply by 2200 (time was then 1950) expressing "absolute and unconditional acceptance". The Governor General made a stormy protest saying that the demands were "a flagrant violation of sovereignty" and "since the period of time was so short for requiring an answer it amounted to an ultimatum". De Coux then called together the Director of Diplomatic Affairs and the French Indo-China Council and prepared a written reply as follows:

³⁷ 3 March 1945, _____ H-171107

³⁸ 21 February 1945, _____ H-168886

³⁹ 8 March 1945, _____ H-171422

~~TOP SECRET-ULTRA~~

"1. I, Governor General of French Indo-China, in case the American Army should invade French Indo-China, agree that the Japanese Army commanding officer shall assume all responsibility for the conduct of operations and will support him fully.

"2. I, the Governor General, will make no statement concerning paragraphs A and B until after I have been in touch with the French Supreme Commander.⁴⁰

"3. I, the Governor General, am prepared to continue conversations with the Embassy. Likewise the French Supreme Commander is also prepared to enter into negotiations with the Japanese Supreme Commander.

"4. I, the Governor General, guarantee that, as long as the Japanese Army shows no hostility in assuming its responsibility, the French Army shall not engage in any hostile activity with regard to the Japanese Army."⁴¹

The Japanese then published the pre-arranged "Declaration of the Japanese Government Concerning French Indo-China". This read:

"Japan, in conformity with her obligations to France for the common defense of Indo-China, has never ceased cooperating with French civil and military authorities in Indo-China in the defense of that area.

"Recently, however, with the development of the war situation, a gradual change has occurred in the attitude of the local French authorities; they have ended by failing _____."⁴²

⁴⁰ Paragraphs A and B apparently dealt with the disarming of the French Indo-Chinese Army and Navy and the recognition of these forces under Japanese Command.

⁴¹ 9 March 1945, H-171568

⁴² Part missing, apparently contains measures Japan intends to take in Indo-China with regards to military control.

~~SECRET~~

"These are measures which Japan has been obliged to take for reasons of military necessity; their application will be limited to the minimum. It goes without saying that Japan has no territorial ambitions vis-a-vis Indo-China and ⁴³ the Japanese Government declares that it is ready to give all possible aid to the inhabitants of Indo-China who defend their soil against the invaders of East Asia, and that, faithful to the principles of the Joint East Asia Declaration, it will give full support to these long-oppressed peoples toward realization of their aspirations for national independence."⁴⁴

The Japanese then carried out the pre-arranged plans. High French officials were confined in the Governor General quarters and visitors were forbidden to enter the buildings without permission. (However, they were to be treated as "liberally as possible".)⁴⁵ The Cambodia independence proclamation was to be presented on the evening of the 12th March 1945,⁴⁶ Annamese independence was proclaimed on the 11th,⁴⁷ and the Cochinchina Government was restored to the Saigon area on the 12th.⁴⁸ The Army reported that the first phase of military operation was over and the cleaning up of remote areas was then in process.⁴⁹ Tokyo sent congratulations: "In adopt-

⁴³Word or phrase missing.

⁴⁴8 March 1945, B-171159

⁴⁵10 March 1945, B-171978

⁴⁶12 March 1945, B-172107

⁴⁷12 March 1945, A-172984

⁴⁸12 March 1945, B-172097

⁴⁹12 March 1945, B-172097

~~TOP SECRET-USA~~
ing our recent military measure in French Indo-China we expected to have to deal with very many exceedingly complex problems. We are therefore gratified to see that present matters are proceeding very smoothly".⁵⁰

Thus in the middle of March 1945, part of French Indo-China had become small independent states who were pledging alliance to Japan. The French officials who opposed complete submission to Japan were confined to quarters while government offices in the remaining parts of Indo-China were filled with pro-Japanese natives or Frenchmen. The French Indo-Chinese fighting forces were under complete Japanese control and military strength of that area was being increased for the expected American invasion. The army would have liked to have the French Government outwardly expelled and complete military control established but the Japanese diplomats approved the plan of independence of the racial provinces with the belief that such action might be sanctioned in Russia and even France. What the reactions of the newly independent states will be towards Japanese occupation and possible invasion remains to be seen.

5014 March 1945,

H-172504

APPENDIX

Titles of the Persons Mentioned or Referred to in the Text.

DE COUX, Admiral Jean Governor General of French Indo-China.

COSME, Henri 1943--French Ambassador to China, March 1944--French Indo-China Ambassador to Japan.

MORDANT December 1944--Vice President of New Indo-China Council. Previously High Commanding General of French Indo-China forces.

MATSUMOTO, Shunichi 1 November 1944--Japanese Ambassador to French Indo-China, previously Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs.

TOKO Japanese Secretary sent to French Indo-China by Japanese Supreme Council for the Direction of the War.