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If Geneva Fails

TWO facts emerge clearly from the Geneva discussions on the Far East. There are substantial differences among the three Western Powers on their policy to the Far East. That is why the Western Powers have no co-ordinated policy either on Korea or on Indo-China. Mr Eden is trying his best to act as an honest broker. M Bidault is diplomatic, in fostering an impression that he is anxious to reach an honourable settlement in Indo-China. Both the American and the South Korean delegations are blunt in their gloomy prophecies that the Geneva Conference is doomed to failure. France has not seemingly lost hopes. But she is concerned about making active preparations for the steps to be undertaken in the event of a failure in Geneva. While the differences among the Western Powers are hampering progress in Geneva, the Communists are united in their policy. That is why, they retain the initiative at Geneva.

Six weeks have passed since the start of the Geneva Conference, From the deliberations so far, it is clear that both sides are repeating the tactics employed by each in Korea. Both sides are agreed on a cease-fire in Indo-China. But on all the other related issues, they differ. This has, as in Korea, provoked allegations and counter-allegations. While the Western Powers allege that the Communists are adopting delaying tactics at Geneva in order to gain a decisive military initiative in Indo-China, the Communists make the counter-allegation that the Western Powers are exploiting the Geneva Conference to have military staff talks. They have openly accused America of inducing Thailand to make an appeal to the United Nations for sending a team of observers in order to sabotage the Geneva Conference.

There is complete deadlock on Korea. Both sides are agreed on the need for an all-Korean election. It is on the composition of the body which is to supervise the elections that there is disagreement. According to the Western Powers, the Commission which will be entrusted with the task of supervising all-Korean elections should be a United Nations' Organisation. This demand is rejected by the Communists on two grounds. One is that the international organisation is one of the belligerents in Korea. That China is not a member of the United Nations, is the second reason for the Communist rejection of the Western demand. But the Communists suggest that they have no objection to the formation of an "appropriate international organisation" to supervise the all-Korean elections. Though the South Koreans are too eager to slam the door shut, M Molotov has left the door ajar by suggesting that the Geneva Conference should try to reach decisions on agreed points, and then proceed to discuss the issues in dispute.

Until last Saturday, the Korean deadlock seemed complete. Though the South Koreans remain adamant, the belief is growing in Geneva that M Molotov's suggestion demands careful consideration. Even as hopes have revived that the Korean deadlock may yet be solved, the

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hopes of an agreed settlement on Indo-China have receded. A few days ago, even M Bidault could claim that the Geneva Conference had "already taken several steps along the road that leads to peace" in Indo-China. But he enumerated three points on which agreement had yet to be reached. From the start, both sides had expressed agreement on the need for a cease-fire in Indo-China. When it was decided to hold discussions among the military experts of France, Viet Minh and Viet Nam on the establishment of re-grouped zones, the decision was widely welcomed as evidence that both sides were eager to complete the arrangements for a cease-fire in Indo-China. These military experts have held many meetings. But they have failed to make any progress. They have yet to reach an agreed basis for discussions on re-grouping and de-limitation of military zones.

Future of Laos and Cambodia is the second point on which there is disagreement. This was the main issue on which there was an original hitch. While the Viet Minh demand for cease-fire in all the three States of Indo-China was supported by Russia and China, the Western Powers were unanimous in rejecting the demand. It was argued that there was no Communist stronghold in Laos or in Cambodia, that the problem of cessation of hostilities should be discussed only in relation to Viet Nam. France has since relented on this issue. Discussing the progress made so far, M Bidault conceded that Geneva had accepted the principle "of a total cessation of hostilities which will, if possible, be simultaneous throughout Indo-China. Even the Cambodian delegation has accepted the principle of a simultaneous cease-fire in all the three States of Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia. This is a major concession, and its implications are significant in any future discussions on a settlement of the political issues involved.

There is, in the third place, dispute over the procedure for controlling an armistice. An agreement on this issue, M Bidault rightly emphasised, is an urgent necessity. All the nine "nations", represented at Geneva, are agreed about the need for International Commission to supervise an armistice in Indo-China. But there is controversy about the composition of such a Commission. While the Communists demand that the Neutral Na-

tions Supervisory Commission, should be composed of India, Pakistan, Poland and Czechoslovakia, "the Western Powers suggest that the Armistice Commission should be composed of the Colombo Powers. France has yet to take a definite line on the details of this issue, Though she is not opposed to supervision of the armistice by the Colombo Powers, she is in favour of creating "a superior organisation" to which the difficulties may be referred for consultations. Evidently, M Bidault has suggested the need for establishing "a superior organisation" in order to meet some of the objections raised by Viet Nam.

Viet Nam insists that the United Nations should supervise the armistice. Viet Nam's Foreign Minister is blunt in his rejection of the status of neutrality of some of the Colombo Powers. It is not difficult to appreciate the Communist objection to the Western Powers' formula for the composition of the proposed Armistice Commission. The Communists insist that the Commission must be composed of both Communist and non-Communist States. It is of interest to note that both the Communist States and Western Powers seem agreed that the Armistice Commission should not be an organisation of the United Nations. France has a three-tier structure in mind: An Armistice Commission, composed of the Colombo Powers, should be under "a superior organisation", which, in turn, should consult guarantors in cases of dispute. M Bidault suggests that the guarantors should be members of the Geneva Conference. Viet Nam has raised an objection that, as Viet Minh is not a "nation", the Armistice Commission cannot be under a nine "nation" team of guarantors.

Political issues complicate the controversy over the procedure for controlling the armistice in Indo-China. There is dispute not as much over the composition of the Armistice Commission as over its voting rights and powers. The Communists insist on veto powers of the members of the Commission in order to avoid American domination of the Commission. Though it is difficult to appreciate how America can dominate a Commission composed of Colombo Powers, this is the main reason why the Communists insist that the Commission must be composed of Commu-

nist and non-Communist States. As the Korean experience indicates, the Communists have reasons to adopt a firm attitude on the composition and the voting procedure of the proposed Armistice Commission. They are anxious to ensure an arrangement which will prevent them from being out-voted.

While the Communist States and the Western Powers are debating on the composition of the proposed Armistice Commission, two intervening events need emphasis. In the Red River Delta, the Communists are gaining military initiative. Hanoi is under an imminent military threat by the Communists. And the threat to Hanoi is of more military significance than even the fall of Dien Bien Phu. This is realised in Washington. There have been hints that, under certain circumstances, Washington may "go it alone" in Indo-China. Strategists consider that launching of a massive Communist attack on Hanoi may be one such circumstance. Thailand's appeal to the United Nations to send a team of observers to watch developments on her border areas is the second development. The timing of the move by Thailand has irritated both London and Paris. The Communists have openly accused America of trying to internationalise the Indo-China war. Here lies the danger. There are difficulties in any active intervention in Indo-China by the Western Powers. It may not be possible, as in Korea, to localise the war, because of the adjoining land frontiers between Red China and Viet Minh. This is the ominous risk, and the danger, that the Powers assembled in Geneva must bear in mind.

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