

# *The Geneva Conference of 1954*

## *A Case of Tacit Deception*

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This article uses a game-theoretic model of deception to examine a game played at the Geneva Conference of 1954 by the Western Alliance, the Sino-Soviet bloc and the Vietminh. It argues that if this game were played as a game of complete information, the sophisticated outcome would have been a withdrawal of French forces from Vietnam, followed immediately by an election whose probable winner would have been Ho Chi Minh. For the Western Alliance, especially the United States, this outcome was seen as the least-preferred of the three possible outcomes. However, because the Western Alliance was able to make a false announcement of its preferences, it was able tacitly to deceive the Soviets, Chinese, and Vietminh into believing that its misrepresentation was its true preference. Thus, it was able to induce its second-most-preferred alternative, the partition of Vietnam, as the (manipulated) sophisticated outcome of the game.

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Contradictions in a nation's foreign policy pronouncements are sometimes explained in terms of bureaucratic inefficiency (Allison, 1971: ch. 4), the lack of an integrated and coherent policy (Reston, 1955: 62), or shifting or "deteriorating" preferences (Howard, 1971: 148, 199-201). However, such a discrepancy may also indicate that another process is at work, namely, deception. In many situations it may be rational for an actor to deceive another in order to induce a more-preferred outcome.<sup>1</sup>

1. For a listing of these situations, see Zagare (1977a) and Brams (1977).

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Contradictory statements by government officials might be a manifestation of such a deceptive strategy.

To demonstrate this contention, I will briefly describe a model of deception developed by Brams and Zagare (1977). Then, once a few key game-theoretic terms are operationalized and ascribed empirical meaning, I will show how the model can be used to offer an explanation of the apparent lack of coherence in the Eisenhower Administration's policy toward Southeast Asia in 1954, a policy that one analyst has characterized as wavering "between a point just short of military intervention and a point just short of appeasement" (Reston, 1955: 62).

### *A Brief Exposition of the Deception Model<sup>2</sup>*

Consider a game composed of three players, *Plane*, *Row*, and *Column*, and assume the players must choose from among a set of three alternatives  $A = \{a_1, a_2, a_3\}$ . Let the first alternative,  $a_1$ , be identified as the status quo.

Assume that decisions in this game are a function of the following *decision rule*: If two or more of the players agree on one of the three alternatives, that alternative is the social choice. If there is no agreement, that is, if all three players disagree, the status quo,  $a_1$ , prevails.

Given this set of alternatives and this decision rule, the three-dimensional outcome matrix depicted in Figure 1 results. Each dimension (plane, row, and column) represents the outcomes associated with the strategy choices available to the players with the corresponding name.

In this game, each player has three possible strategies, that is, to pursue one of the three alternatives. This essay assumes that the the choice of the Plane, Row, and Column players associated with the strategy "pursue  $a$ " is the first plane, row, and column respectively, and similarly for the other strategy choices. Hence, the symbol " $a$ " not only stands for an alternative but also for a

2. This section is based on Brams and Zagare (1977, 1979).

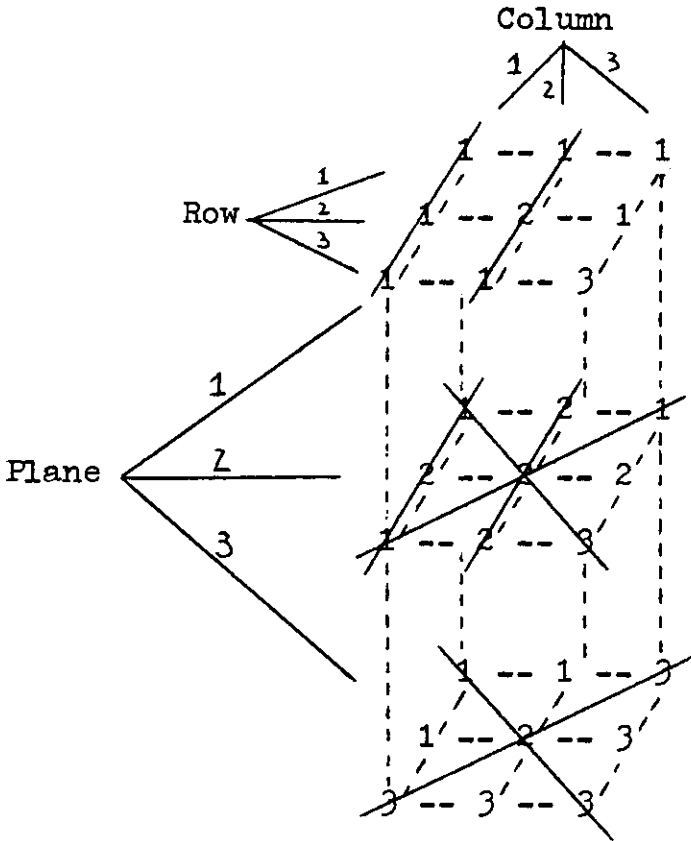


Figure 1: Original Outcome Matrix with the Dominated Strategies of Plane and Column Crossed out

strategy choice, and, as will be seen shortly, for the possible outcomes of the game.

The possible outcomes of this game,  $a_1$ ,  $a_2$ , and  $a_3$  are represented in the Figure 1 outcome matrix by the numbers 1, 2, and 3 respectively. They are assigned to the outcome matrix by a function defined by the decision rule discussed earlier. For example, the choice of "pursue  $a_1$ " by the Plane, Row, and

Column players results in the outcome  $a_1$  at the intersection of the first plane, first row, and first column.

To illustrate the subsequent analysis, assume that the players prefer the outcomes in the order listed:

Plane:	$(a_1, a_2, a_3)$
Row:	$(a_2, a_3, a_1)$
Column:	$(a_3, a_1, a_2)$

How, then, should the players select a strategy that ensures the best possible outcome for themselves? If information is *complete*, that is, if the players are informed about both the preferences of the other players and the decision rule, a *sophisticated* strategy is optimal for each player, provided that the other players are also sophisticated (Farquharson, 1969).

A sophisticated strategy requires each player to eliminate successively his *dominated* strategies. A strategy is dominated when another strategy available to a player produces at least as good a result for him in every contingency and a better result in one or more contingencies. A strategy which dominates all a player's other strategies is called *straightforward*. A straightforward strategy is a player's unconditionally best strategy.

In the game outlined above,  $a_3$  emerges as the "sophisticated" outcome, as may easily be demonstrated. From Figure 1 it can be seen that both Plane and Column have straightforward strategies. For Plane, the choice of his strategy "pursue  $a_1$ " (the first plane) is unconditionally best since it dominates both of his other two strategies, that is, no matter what choices are made by the other players, the outcomes resulting are either the same as or better than the outcomes resulting from the choice of either of his other two strategies, given his preference scale postulated earlier. Similarly, Column's choice of "pursue  $a_3$ " (the third column) is straightforward—it dominates both his first and second strategies.

In contrast, Row has no unconditionally best strategy. His second strategy dominates his first but not his third. Therefore, Row's choice of a best strategy depends upon the other two players' choices.

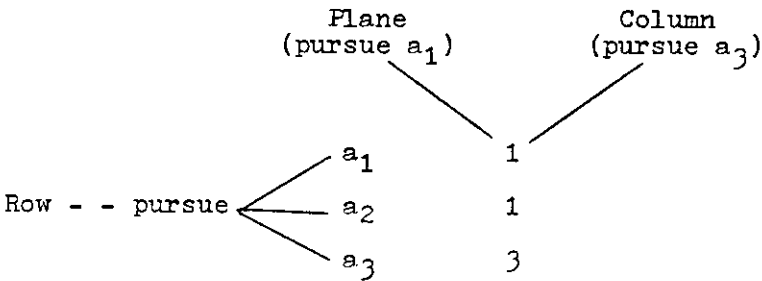


Figure 2: Reduced Outcome Matrix Given Complete Information

If complete information is assumed, each player will be able to determine those players with straightforward strategies. Since a player with a straightforward strategy cannot be hurt and may do better by choosing it, neither Plane nor Column would presumably choose either of their dominated strategies. Hence, one can eliminate these strategies from further consideration and, in Figure 1, they are crossed out.<sup>3</sup>

With these strategies eliminated, Figure 1 reduces to Figure 2 where one can easily see that only Row has more than one strategy choice left. Since Row clearly prefers the outcome associated with his third strategy,  $a_3$ , to the outcome associated with either of his other two strategies,  $a_1$ , Row's rational choice would be to "pursue  $a_3$ " and thereby bring about  $a_3$  as the sophisticated outcome.

The fact that  $a_3$  is the sophisticated outcome of this game is somewhat paradoxical. In the original outcome matrix, Plane can reach his first preference  $a_1$  in almost twice as many ways as he can reach either of the other two alternatives. Ostensibly, while Plane seems to be in the best tactical position, his worst outcome is adopted when all the players use sophisticated strategies.<sup>4</sup>

3. In this analysis, it is assumed that a player with a straightforward strategy adopts that strategy immediately. This simplification in Farquharson's (1969) reduction method is suggested by Brams (1975: 67-78).

4. Farquharson (1969: 50) calls a similar result with a slightly different decision rule "The Paradox of the Chairman's Vote."

It should be pointed out that this result occurs not because the sophisticated outcome in this example is in any sense "socially preferred." In fact, the configuration of preferences of the three players actually creates a paradox of voting situation and makes no alternative socially preferred, i.e., majorities are cyclical.

If information is complete, Plane has no recourse in this strategically unfavorable position. Sophisticated strategies are optimal when information is complete. However, as Brams and Zagare (1977) have shown, if Plane could conceal his true preferences and somehow announce a false preference order which Row and Column believe, two additional strategies become available. First, after this announcement, Plane could act as if this announcement were his true preferences in his play of the game. This type of deceptive strategy is called *tacit* deception since the other players cannot detect the deception unless they know the user's true preference order. A second option open to Plane also entails making a false announcement but acting in the play of the game consistently with his *true* preferences. Since other players can easily detect an action that contradicts the deceiver's announced preference order, this strategy is called *revealed* deception.

To illustrate how these deceptive strategies operate, assume that Plane announces his true preference order to be  $(a_2, a_1, a_3)$  instead of  $(a_1, a_2, a_3)$ . If Row and Column believe this (false) announcement, they perceive Plane's second strategy (rather than his first) to be straightforward. Since their preferences remain constant, Column continues to have a straightforward strategy (the third column) but Row does not.

After eliminating the (apparent) dominated strategies of Plane and the (actual) dominated strategy of Column from consideration, as before, Figure 1 reduces to Figure 3. This figure is remarkably similar to Figure 2 except that now there is a different outcome ( $a_2$ ) associated with Row's second strategy ("pursue  $a_2$ ").

Given Row's preference for  $a_2$  over  $a_1$  and  $a_3$ , his rational strategy, if he believes Plane's false announcement, is to "pursue

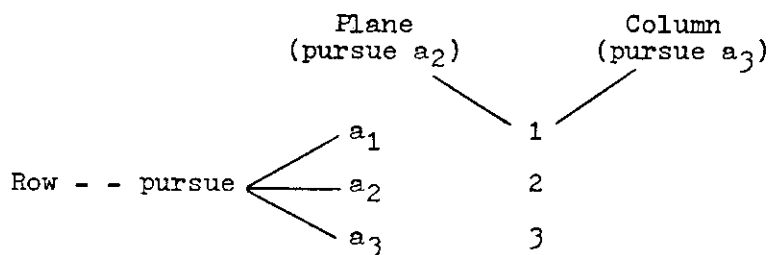


Figure 3: Reduced Outcome Matrix Given Plane's False Announcement

$a_2$ ." If Plane acts consistently with his announcement and also chooses to "pursue  $a_2$ ," the (manipulated) sophisticated outcome is  $a_2$ , which is a better outcome for Plane than the (unmanipulated) sophisticated outcome  $a_3$ . Thus, Plane has an incentive tacitly to deceive the other players in this game.

It is important to note that the (manipulated) sophisticated outcome induced by Plane's tacit deception is not stable with respect to Plane's true preference order. By choosing his strategy "pursue  $a_1$ ," Plane could induce  $a_1$  as the (manipulated) sophisticated outcome which he prefers to the tacit outcome. However, Plane's choice of this strategy is inconsistent with his announced preference order. Since the other players can readily observe this inconsistency, Plane's action reveals his deception to them. Depending on the value Plane associates with his most-preferred alternative, it may or may not be rational for Plane to reveal his deception and risk the loss of his future credibility.

### *The Geneva Conference Game*

The structure of the game just discussed is strikingly similar to that of a game played at the Geneva Conference on Indochina in 1954. That game began to crystallize in late 1953. By the fall of that year, the Franco-Vietminh War was stalemated and pressures began to mount on the French government of Joseph Laniel

to negotiate a settlement with the Vietminh. The pressures came from three directions: the French left, the Soviet Union, and the Vietminh themselves.

In France, dissatisfaction with the war was growing, and the lack of domestic support made it difficult for the Laniel government to continue its policy of seeking a military solution to the conflict in Indochina. In the Soviet Union, where the new collective leadership dominated by Premier Georgi Malenkov was pursuing a policy of *détente* with the West, calls for a settlement made it difficult for the French to resist negotiations without risking a serious propaganda defeat (Randle, 1969: 18). Finally, "peace feelers" from the Vietminh intensified the forces that seemed to be compelling the French to negotiate.

### *THE STRUCTURE OF THE GAME*

Before 1953, the Franco-Vietminh war was essentially a two-person game. Each side received military aid from its allies, but for the most part the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China played passive roles. The prospect of a negotiated settlement, however, brought about a more active involvement by these other powers.

As the game progressed, the players began to cluster into three distinct coalitions: the Western Alliance; the Sino-Soviet bloc; and the single-member coalition, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (the DRV or Vietminh). The nature and composition of each of these coalitions make it possible to consider each one as a unit in the game that followed.

The first important cluster of nations, the Western Alliance, was the coalition that the United States led and dominated and included France, Great Britain, and the quasi-independent State of Vietnam (SVN). American domination rested on the limited ability of the other alliance members to influence the outcome of the negotiations. As Randle (1969: 126) has noted, "only the United States . . . was in a position to make the concessions that could permit a settlement at Geneva." The continuing deterioration of the French military position, symbolized by their defeat at



Dien Bien Phu the day before the Indochinese phase of the Geneva Conference opened, and the mounting domestic criticism of the war, limited French influence both within and outside this coalition (Devillers and Lacouture, 1969: 108). Because the British had no viable military threat, their influence was also circumscribed at Geneva. Finally, since the Western-supported State of Vietnam was internally weak and totally dependent on American aid, it could not play a substantive role in the negotiations.

Because of the diminished influence of the French, British, and South Vietnamese, the preferences and actions of the United States can, without distorting this analysis, be viewed as being tantamount to those of the group. Although differences in preferences among the members of this coalition sometimes threatened its cohesion, and sometimes even restricted the coalition's maneuverability, the members ironed out their differences before the critical stage of the conference, making their disagreements irrelevant for this analysis (Devillers and Lacouture, 1969: 268). Thus, in this essay, the Western Alliance will be viewed as an American-dominated coalition in which the roles played by other members were secondary.

The second important player in this game was the coalition resulting from a Sino-Soviet Alliance. Because of the coincidence of Soviet and Chinese interests, discussed below, and the Soviet desire to cooperate with the Chinese in order to enhance its power by demonstrating this alliance, the Soviets and the Chinese acted as a bloc at Geneva (Randle, 1969: 141).

The final coalition in this game was the single entity, the DRV. Vietminh control over a large portion of Vietnam gave them a measure of autonomy at Geneva. Moreover, as will be discussed below, their preferences differed from those of the Soviets and Chinese and marked the DRV as an independent player in this game.

### *THE POSSIBLE OUTCOMES*

Three alternatives faced the participants at the Geneva Conference. The first was a stalemate that would result if the players

resisted a settlement of any kind. If this occurred, the status quo would prevail, the war continue, and the probability of American intervention would increase (Devillers and Lacouture, 1969: 192). A second possibility was proposed by the French, who wanted to limit the discussions at the conference to military matters and delay negotiating a political settlement, including the possibility of a future election, until after a cease-fire (Cameron, 1971: 257). The last alternative was proposed by DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong. Dong's position was that the conference could not separate military and political matters and should discuss them concurrently (Cameron, 1971: 261-262).

Two of the participants had different views of the consequences associated with the first outcome. Despite intelligence reports which predicted that "the over-all French Union position in Indochina [would] . . . deteriorate" by mid-1954, the United States believed that increased American aid and a political program designed "to win sufficient native support" would enable the French to reverse their disadvantageous military position (Pentagon Papers, 1971, 1: 405). In contrast, the DRV were convinced that they had broken the power of the French and that a continuation of the war would result in their hegemony over all of Vietnam.

All of the participants interpreted the French position as tantamount to a permanent partition of Vietnam, that a "temporary" partition, the only practical way of enforcing a cease-fire, would inevitably become permanent (Devillers and Lacouture, 1969: 154).<sup>5</sup> The third alternative, proposed by the DRV, was viewed by each of the participants to imply an immediate French withdrawal from Vietnam, followed by a general election.

5. Why, then, would the French hold out the possibility of a future election? The prospect of a distant election, especially one contingent on negotiations between the Vietminh and the SVN after a cease-fire had been implemented, offered certain advantages. To begin with, it could be used to counter Vietminh demands for an immediate election. In addition, it would leave open Western options. There was, of course, the possibility that a pro-Western Vietnamese nationalist might emerge as a legitimate challenger to Ho Chi Minh. In this case, an election could work to the advantage of the Western powers. If not, the SVN, which eventually refused to associate itself with the agreements reached at the conference, could resist by claiming that they were not bound by a document negotiated by the French.

As the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded, this alternative "would be attended by almost certain loss of the Associated States to Communist control" (Pentagon Papers, 1971, 1: 449).

### *THE PREFERENCES OF THE PLAYERS*

In light of the preceding analysis, let us adopt the following notation for the set of alternatives  $A = \{a_1, a_2, a_3\}$ , where:

- $a_1$ : the status quo, a continuation of the conflict;
- $a_2$ : a military solution<sup>6</sup> probably resulting in a permanent partition of Vietnam; and
- $a_3$ : a military *and* political solution probably resulting in Ho Chi Minh's victory in a general election.

Shortly before the Geneva Conference opened, the preference order of the Western Alliance (United States) was ( $a_1, a_2, a_3$ ). Continuing American support of all French military operations, especially the Navarre Plan (Devilleurs and Lacouture, 1969: 34), and American reluctance to negotiate until forced to, sustain the contention that the United States preferred the status quo—a continuation of the conflict—to either of the two other alternatives (Pentagon Papers, 1971, 1: 115-118, 177; Randle, 1969: 193). Given this preference, it is not unreasonable to assume that the Americans would have preferred  $a_2$  to  $a_3$ . Partition would give the Vietminh only part of Vietnam, while it was feared that a free general election would give them total control (Devilleurs and Lacouture, 1969: 112).

The Sino-Soviet preference order was ( $a_2, a_3, a_1$ ). Because continuing the war raised the risk of a nuclear confrontation with the United States, this coalition ranked war last. Any settlement, even  $a_2$ , which was unfavorable to the Vietminh, reduced the risk of war and was therefore preferred by both the Soviets and the

6. In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, the term "military" solution was used as a euphemism for a military victory in Vietnam. It should be emphasized that, as used here, the term does not have this connotation but rather is meant to imply an outcome based on the settlement of military matters at Geneva prior to the negotiation of political issues.

Chinese (Pentagon Papers: 1971, 1: 171). The Sino-Soviet bloc, was by no means indifferent to all possible settlements, however; in fact, both nations preferred  $a_2$ , a "temporary" partition, to  $a_3$ , a free election.

For the Chinese, a united Vietnam, which in all probability would also dominate Cambodia and Laos, would pose a problem: It would place a potential power at her underbelly. In contrast, a partitioned Vietnam would pose no serious threat (Randle, 1969: 195). As Le Thi Tuyet (1974: 147) indicated, it was China's preference "for a 'permanent temporary partition'" which, after Geneva, led it to afford special status to the National Liberation Front and to favor a long, protracted guerrilla war.

The Soviets also favored a cease-fire and a partition to an immediate election, partly because their recognizing China's interests would promote harmony within the Communist bloc. A more important reason, however, was that a free and supervised election raised more problems for the Soviets than it would solve, producing pressures on them to cooperate in bringing about elections in Germany and other Soviet bloc states in Eastern Europe (Le Thi Tuyet, 1974: 147). Thus, like the Chinese, the Soviet preference order was ( $a_2, a_3, a_1$ ).

By the time of the Geneva Conference, the Vietminh preferred to hold an immediate election rather than to continue the war. They were afraid that both the Chinese and the Americans might intervene if they defeated the French. Besides, their military resources were thin, and a cease-fire would allow them to regroup and would increase the probability of their eventually taking over the whole country if the war resumed. Since both of these alternatives would, in their eyes, result in their eventual control of Indochina, they preferred them to the third alternative, the partition of Vietnam. Thus, the Vietminh preference order was ( $a_3, a_1, a_2$ ).

In summary, then, the analysis has so far revealed the following configuration of players and preferences:

- (1) the Western Alliance with preference order ( $a_1, a_2, a_3$ );
- (2) the Sino-Soviet bloc with preference order ( $a_2, a_3, a_1$ ); and
- (3) the Vietminh with preference order ( $a_3, a_1, a_2$ ).

*THE DECISION RULE*

In the Geneva Conference game, the power relationships dictated that decisions could be binding only by unanimous consent (a coalition of all three players) or by a coalition of two of the three players. Since it is obvious that a grand coalition could control the outcome of this game, I shall consider only the other three possible winning coalitions:

- (1) a coalition of the Western Alliance and the Sino-Soviet bloc;
- (2) a coalition of the Sino-Soviet bloc and the DRV; and
- (3) a coalition of the Western Alliance and the DRV.

It is not hard to see that if the Western Alliance and the Sino-Soviet bloc coalesced, they could effectively dictate an outcome. The Vietminh, while they held *de facto* control in Indochina, could continue to do so only with Soviet or Chinese aid or with Western acquiescence. Otherwise the DRV could not maintain its position of power.

Similarly, a Sino-Soviet coalition with the DRV was also a winning coalition. Given its formation, the Western Alliance would have been unable to block any of the three possible outcomes. The dominant military position of the Vietminh and a continuing flow of aid from the Sino-Soviet bloc would assure that the war would continue. Sino-Soviet insistence on elections would have made it very difficult for the West to prevent them without suffering a serious propaganda loss. And, as Le Thi Tuyet (1974: 134) has pointed out, although "Washington did not like the idea of a partition, it could not effectively prevent it."

Finally, because a coalition between the DRV and the Western Alliance would contain the major belligerents in the war, such a coalition could undoubtedly control the outcome of the negotiations. However, given the preference orders of the West and the Vietminh, the likelihood of an alliance between the two players was small.

### THE DYNAMICS OF PLAY

The structural similarities between the hypothetical example used to illustrate the deception model and that of the Geneva Conference game should be obvious. The number of players and alternatives, the configuration of preferences among the players, and the decision rule are the same in both games. Indeed, the hypothetical game is nothing more than an abstract version of the game played at Geneva.

From the discussion of the abstract game, it should be clear that if the Geneva Conference game were played as a game of complete information, and if the players were sophisticated in their choice of strategies, the outcome would have been  $a_3$ , the military and political solution, probably resulting in a Communist takeover of all of South Vietnam. It will be recalled that this was the least-preferred alternative of the player preferring the status quo, i.e., the Western Alliance.

However, as was demonstrated, the disadvantaged player (the Western Alliance) was not without recourse in this game. By withholding its true preference order from the other players and by making a false announcement of its preferences, it was able to induce its second-most-preferred alternative,  $a_2$ , by tacit deception, or its most-preferred alternative,  $a_1$ , by revealed deception.

It will now be shown how contradictory American announcements at the Geneva Conference can be interpreted as an instance of tacit deception. Specifically, in order to avoid its least-preferred alternative,  $a_3$ , an all-Communist Vietnam, and to induce its second-most-preferred alternative,  $a_2$ , a partitioned Vietnam, the United States tacitly deceived the Sino-Soviet bloc and the DRV into believing that its true preference order was ( $a_2, a_1, a_3$ ).

The first formal statement of the American (Western) position was framed by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles on March 29, 1954. Speaking before the Overseas Press Club of America, Dulles remarked that the United States felt that the imposition of a Communist political system on Southeast Asia "should not be passively accepted, but should be met with united action" (Cameron, 1971: 233).

These words were less resolute than those of Dulles's previous language. Earlier, Dulles promised that Communist "aggression *could not* occur without grave consequences" (Cameron, 1971: 205, italics mine); now he merely stated that aggression "should not" be tolerated. Moreover, his remarks were ambiguous. He did not spell out the precise limits of American tolerance, and only hinted at the nature of possible American responses (Randle, 1969: 60-61).

Randle (1969: 68) has suggested that Dulles intended this vagueness to deter the Soviets and the Chinese from pushing for a military victory in Indochina. However, his ambiguity and the slight alteration of the American position indicated another, more important, dimension of the speech. They suggested an American willingness to compromise. If either a political or military victory seemed to be ruled out, other outcomes were not. The use of American force, previously promised, was now predicated upon the type of outcome reached at Geneva. Thus, Dulles's remarks implied that the preference order of the United States was ( $a_2$ ,  $a_1$ ,  $a_3$ ).

Dulles's remarks, however, were too ambiguous to convey the Western position accurately. After his statement, not only were the Soviets, the Chinese, and the Communist Vietnamese confused, but the French and British were also unsure of American intentions. In fact, "by mid-April, neither the American public, the press, nor the best informed Washington observers knew what the administration would do about Indochina" (Randle, 1969: 91).

To clarify the American position, President Eisenhower addressed the U.S. Chamber of Commerce on April 29, 1954. In that speech, Eisenhower hinted that the United States would be willing to negotiate a settlement at Geneva and reach a *modus vivendi* with the Communists (Randle, 1969: 106). The President's statement could only tend to reinforce the conciliatory implications of Dulles's remarks.

About a week later, Dulles addressed the nation on radio and television, reiterated the President's position, and made one more important concession. Referring to Indochina, he remarked that "the present conditions there do not provide a suitable basis for

the United States to participate with her armed forces" (Cameron, 1971: 256).

Taken together, Dulles's speech before the Overseas Press Club, Eisenhower's address to the Chamber of Commerce, and Dulles's television statement left the strong impression that the United States favored a "temporary" partition. Indeed, during the first week of May, several Saigon dailies and the New York *Herald Tribune* reported that the American government was willing to accept the partition of Indochina under satisfactory conditions. On May 6, the New York *Times* stated that the United States had decided to seek a "protracted armistice" at Geneva (Randle, 1969: 178). The Sino-Soviet bloc and the Vietminh could hardly have missed the hint.

Despite appearances, however, the American position had not changed. These statements did not reflect true American sentiments as can be seen by turning to British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden's account of a meeting he had with Dulles and Lord Reading, British Parliamentary Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. At that meeting, the participants discussed the possibility of Chinese intervention and the need to train an indigenous force to defend Vietnam. When Reading asked Dulles what his reaction was to the fact that it would take at least two years to train an all-Vietnamese army with the capability of defeating the Vietminh, Dulles remarked that "they would have to hold some sort of bridgehead, as had been done in Korea until the Inchon landings could be carried out." When Lord Reading commented that this approach would mean that the present stalemate would have to continue for several years, Dulles replied that "this would be a very good thing" (Eden, 1960, 113). In other words, at a time that the President and the Secretary of State were publicly declaring that they were willing to reach a peaceful solution to the affair in Indochina, Dulles privately confessed to the British that he would prefer to continue the conflict.

The American hints of compromise, however, lost some credibility when the New York *Herald Tribune* published a list of seven conditions Dulles had set for American intervention in



Vietnam (Randle, 1969: 221). The Department of State probably drew up these conditions in response to a French request that the United States clarify the American position. They were laid down in private Franco-American talks and not intended to be made public.<sup>7</sup> Eden reports that Bedell Smith was indignant when he learned that this information had been published. Perhaps one reason was that Smith felt that this disclosure would compromise Dulles's remark that intervention was unlikely. Eden himself believed that talk of American intervention would destroy any chance of an agreement. He was probably right: A two-week deadlock in the negotiations followed this leak (Eden, 1960: 119).

To get the negotiations moving again, Dulles reiterated his previous position at a news conference on June 8, stating that "the United States has no intention of dealing with the Indochina situation unilaterally, certainly not unless the whole nature of the aggression should change." In addition, he remarked that the practicality of intervention had changed because of altering political conditions. "What was practical a year ago is less practical today. The situation has, I am afraid, been deteriorating" (Cameron, 1971: 272).

The fall of the Laniel government on June 12 posed a new problem for the United States. The new French Prime Minister, Pierre Mendes-France, had a reputation for advocating direct Franco-Vietminh negotiations and for favoring a quick French withdrawal from Indochina. Dulles was afraid that the French would negotiate a settlement that would set the scene for an eventual Vietminh takeover. This fear led Dulles to try to disassociate the United States from the final settlement at Geneva by downgrading the stature of its delegation to the Conference.<sup>8</sup>

7. At least this was Eden's (1960: 119) opinion. For a contrary view, see Randle (1969: 246).

8. One could view the American decision to downgrade the stature of its delegation as an attempt to sabotage the Conference, and hence as a statement that its preference order was (a<sub>1</sub>, a<sub>2</sub>, a<sub>3</sub>). However, in light of the circumstances in which this decision was made, it seems more reasonable to interpret this action solely as a statement of extreme displeasure with the prospect of French capitulation, that is, a<sub>3</sub>. This interpretation, which is consistent with other American announcements at Geneva, is reinforced by the fact that the United States did send Bedell Smith back to Geneva when they became convinced that Mendes-France could not settle for less than a partitioned Vietnam.

Accordingly, on June 15, Bedell Smith, the chief United States negotiator, announced that he would leave Geneva at the end of the week. Since Smith's announcement coincided with the decision of the 16 non-communist states to conclude the Korean phase of the conference, it had a salutary effect. It shocked the Chinese and Soviets, who also wanted a settlement, and induced them to make concessions that broke the logjam that had followed the *Herald Tribune* "leak" (Devillers and Lacouture, 1969: 239).

After the fall of the Laniel government and the American announcement that Bedell Smith planned to leave Geneva, the conference recessed. During this period, British Prime Minister Churchill and Foreign Secretary Eden met with Eisenhower and Dulles in Washington and drafted a joint position paper which called for free elections, but only if there was no risk of losing "the retained area to communist control" (Randle, 1969: 297). In other words, the United States was willing to accept a partition of Vietnam but would not sanction a total Communist takeover.

In the meantime, talks continued between the French and Vietminh military commissions. On June 23, Premier Chou En-lai of China told Mendes-France that the military commissions would have to reach an agreement by the second week in July when the Conference reconvened. Since Mendes-France had promised to resign if he did not negotiate a final settlement by July 20, Chou's timetable for settlement of the military issues was a subtle form of pressure on Mendes-France (Devillers and Lacouture, 1969: 254). Chou hoped that Mendes-France, rather than resign, would make concessions regarding the line of demarcation dividing the Vietminh from the SVN. However, when Mendes-France refused to be intimidated, it was the Vietminh, under pressure from both the Soviets and Chinese, who yielded on the line of demarcation.<sup>9</sup>

On July 13, Mendes-France, Dulles, and Eden met in Paris. At the meeting, Mendès-France was able to convince Dulles that

9. Despite this concession, the Vietminh were still playing their straightforward strategy, "pursue a3." This is evidenced by Pham Van Dong's attempt to trade this and other concessions on the line of demarcation for an election scheduled within six months of the agreement at Geneva (Devillers and Lacouture, 1969: 293).

he would not agree to a settlement that did not conform to the British and American joint position paper. Mendes-France and Eden also convinced Dulles to send Bedell Smith back to Geneva, arguing that only the presence of a high-ranking American would ensure a settlement and that too much American secrecy would make the Sino-Soviet bloc intransigent (Devillers and Lacouture, 1969: 272-273). To allay any possible Soviet or Chinese fears, Eden returned to Geneva the next day and assured Soviet Foreign Secretary Vyacheslav Molotov that nothing agreed upon in Paris would hamper the proceedings at Geneva (Randle, 1969: 332).

With the stage so set, the participants ironed out an agreement in the short span of a week. The important provisions of the final settlement were:

- (1) an immediate cease-fire, accompanied by a separation of the French and Vietminh forces at about the 17th parallel;
- (2) representatives of the DRV and the SVN were to meet in a year to discuss details of general all-Vietnamese elections to be held in July 1956; and
- (3) the formation of an International Supervisory Commission (ISC) to oversee the armistice and the troop withdrawals.

In short, the agreement mirrored the original French proposal which called for a military settlement first, to be followed by future negotiations over the political future of Vietnam. As is well known, the election scheduled for July 1956 was never held, with the result being that Vietnam was partitioned until subsequent events rendered the effects of the Geneva Conference moot.<sup>10</sup>

10. The fact that the election was not held does not bear on the interpretation of the final outcome offered here. As will be recalled, both the French proposal, a<sub>2</sub>, and the Vietminh proposal, a<sub>3</sub>, admitted the possibility of a future election. However, the French wanted to delay negotiating the mechanics of the election until after a cease-fire had been finalized, and although they would have preferred not to set a specific date for the election, they would have accepted an agreement calling for elections within 18 months. By contrast, the Vietminh proposal called for concurrent military and political negotiations culminating in an election within six months of an agreement. It seems safe to interpret the actual settlement as falling well within the limits of the French proposal.

### *Summary and Conclusion*

This article interprets the Geneva Conference game as a game of incomplete information vulnerable to tacit deception by the United States (Western Alliance). It contends that if this game were played as a game of complete information, the sophisticated outcome would have been a withdrawal of French forces from Vietnam, followed immediately by an election whose probable winner would have been Ho Chi Minh. For the Western Alliance, this outcome was the least-preferred of the three possible outcomes. According to the interpretation offered here, however, the United States (Western Alliance) made a false announcement of its preferences and was able tacitly to deceive the Soviets, Chinese, and the Vietminh into believing its misrepresentations. Hence, it was able to induce its second-most-preferred alternative, a partition of Vietnam, as the (manipulated) sophisticated outcome of the game.

To be sure, I have abstracted and condensed many of the historical machinations of the negotiating process at Geneva in order that its underlying structure might be revealed. What was found was a series of announcements indicating an American preference order different from its postulated true preference order. It was also found that serendipitous events that contradicted the American announcements, e.g., the *Herald Tribune* leak, led to Communist intransigence and a deadlock in the negotiations. The interpretation offered in this work explains why Randle (1969: 192) found that as early as the end of April 1954, "the official American policy had been *publicly* reconciled to negotiations" even though there "was little support in Washington for a negotiated settlement" (*italics in original*).

Of course, there are other possible explanations for the inconsistencies in American policy statements during this period. For example, one might claim that this was less a case of tacit deception than an illustration of what Howard (1971: 148, 199-210) has called a "deterioration" of the Western preference order, i.e., Eisenhower and Dulles might merely have adjusted their preferences downward in response to the strategically unfavorable

position in which they found themselves. However, the fact that a simultaneous discrepancy was found between the public and private statements of Secretary of State Dulles leads me to believe that this was indeed a case of tacit deception in which the United States misrepresented its preferences for strategic reasons. Coincidentally, the Sino-Soviet bloc was induced into a compromise that resulted in a more-preferred outcome for the Soviets and the Chinese as well as for members of the Western Alliance.

One might also claim that the discrepancies found reflect reservations that Dulles might have had with official American policy. This is not an easy argument to refute, especially since tacit deceptions, by their very nature, are difficult to verify.<sup>11</sup> However, Bedell Smith's ire with the *Herald Tribune* leak, and Eden's concern that an American hard line would destroy the chances of a favorable settlement indicate that other actors, at least, may have been aware of the strategic consequences associated with American belligerence. Moreover, only the interpretation offered here is consistent with the summary evaluation of the outcome of the Geneva Conference found in *The Pentagon Papers* (1971, 1: 177-178):

The conclusion that emerges from the obvious contrast between the public and private comments of Administration officials and organs is that where American diplomacy fell down was not at the Conference but during the Indochina crisis as a whole. Nearly all the revised American negotiatory *principles* had emerged unscathed; but American *objectives* in Indochina—the elimination of the Viet Minh threat, preservation of the strategically vital Tonkin Delta, and obstruction of Communist political and military expansionist policies in the region . . . had still been defeated.

In conclusion, it should be noted that this work is intended as an example of how an abstract model can be operationalized and used to analyze complex political events,<sup>12</sup> as well as an

11. For a more detailed discussion of the problem of identifying tacit deception, see Zagare (1977a).

12. For another example, see Zagare (1977b).

empirical illustration of Brams and Zagare's (1977) deception model. All too often, such models are left untested or are illustrated with hypothetical examples that lead one to question their real-life relevancy. Since there have not been many attempts to utilize abstract models to explain historical events, it is hoped that this essay will encourage more work in this direction.

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