

A Clash of Empires in East Asia: The Geneva Conference on Korea, 1954

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Introduction

This article focuses on the relationship between the 1954 Geneva Conference on Korea and the Geneva Conference on Indochina held immediately thereafter. The two conferences had the similar objective of achieving an armistice by diplomacy rather than by force, and ultimately stabilized the divisions in both countries. In fact, the Indochina situation became so critical that it resulted in the failure of the Korean phase of the conference, for the status quo was chosen as the best solution in both countries. The 1954 conferences brought about a shift in power in East Asia, from “old empires” such as Britain and France to the “new empire” of the United States.

The division of the “two Koreas” has endured since the end of the Korean War (1950-1953). Although the 1954 Geneva Conference was held to establish armistices for the Korean peninsula and Indochina, it instead reinforced the divisions of both Korea and Vietnam. However, whereas Vietnam would be reunified after the Second Indochina War (the Vietnam War, 1964-1973), Korea remained divided. For “the two Koreas,” the 1954 conference was the first and the last time all the countries that had participated militarily in the Korean War discussed the unification of the Korean peninsula. Therefore, by examining the

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conference we should be able to gain some clarification on the Korean unification problem. Some scholars, such as J.Y. Ra and Haruki Wada, have deemed the conference a failure,¹ but they have not illustrated why it could not make any progress, thus solidifying the division of Korea.

Although there are many studies on the origins of the Korean War,² most do not mention the 1954 Geneva Conference on Korea. In addition, works about this conference do not explore the events leading up to it or the development of negotiations during the conference.³ Studies of the Geneva Conference on Indochina also fail to refer to the conference on Korea.⁴ Although Robert F. Randle⁵ and Steven Hugh Lee⁶ have done research on the two conferences, they have not made the relationship between the two clear. Their research considers the Geneva Conference on Korea separately from the one on Indochina.

This article focuses on (1) the events from the Korean Armistice Agreement (July 27, 1953) to the 1954 Geneva Conference, and (2) the Geneva Conference on Korea and Indochina (April 26-July 27, 1954). I examine U.S. and South Korean primary sources, including *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS), *Hanguk Oegyo Munso* 한국외교문서 (Republic of Korea [ROK] Diplomatic Correspondence),⁷ and materials published in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK),⁸ resources that thus far other studies have yet to use.

The Korean Armistice Agreement led to the 1954 Geneva Conference on

1. J.Y. Ra, "The Politics of Conference: The Political Conference on Korea, 26 April- 15 June 1954," *Journal of Contemporary History* 34 (1999): 399; Haruki Wada, *Chosensensou Zenshi* (The Whole History of the Korean War), (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten), 468.

2. See, for example, Bruce Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1981); Kathryn Weatherby, *Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence from the Russian Archives* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center, 1993).

3. Ra, "The Politics of Conference"; Henry Brands, "The Dwight D. Eisenhower Administration, Syngman Rhee and the 'Other' Geneva Conference of 1954," *Pacific Historical Review* 56 (1987): 78-99.

4. Lawrence S. Kaplan, Denise Artaud, and Mark R. Rubin, eds., *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954-1955* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1990).

5. Robert F. Randle, *Geneva 1954: The Settlement of the Indochinese War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

6. Steven Hugh Lee, *Outposts of Empire: Korea, Vietnam, and the Origins of the Cold War in Asia, 1949-1954* (Montreal: McGill-Queen University Press, 1995).

7. In the 1990s, after a lapse of thirty years, the ROK government opened its diplomatic documents at the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, Seoul, Republic of Korea.

8. See, for example, *Chosun Jeonsa* 조선전사 (History of Korea), Vol. 28 (Pyongyang: Institute of Social Science, 1981).

Korea. Paragraph 60 of the agreement – signed by the United States, North Korea, and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on July 27, 1953 – stipulates a high-level political conference to negotiate the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the peninsula and a peaceful settlement between the two Koreas.⁹ On October 26, 1953, discussions among North Korean, Chinese, and U.S. authorities were held in Panmunjom 판문점. In January 1954, the foreign ministers of the Big Four (the U.S., France, Britain, and the Soviet Union) held the Berlin Conference to discuss questions concerning Korea, Indochina, Germany, Austria, European security, and disarmament.¹⁰ By examining the conferences that predate the Geneva Conference, the first part of this article shows how the superpowers tried to deal with the problems in East Asia – and how local administrations reacted to the superpowers’ agreements.

The second part of this article inspects the 1954 Geneva Conference on Korea, which was held while France was facing large-scale counterattacks in Indochina.¹¹ Here I analyze how the critical situation in Indochina influenced the conference on Korea. The Indochina phase started one day after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, the event that ended the First Indochina War. Conference participants agreed that there would be elections conducted in the whole of Vietnam. However, these unimplemented elections would eventually cause the division of Vietnam. I also illustrate the relationship between the Korean phase and the Indochina phase of the conference.

In conclusion, I mention the situation in East Asia after the 1954 Geneva Conference, when there was a shift from the “old empires,” such as Britain and France, to the “new empire” of the U.S. The conference also stabilized the divisions of the Korean peninsula and of Vietnam – an important factor in the Vietnam War of the 1960s.

The Cold War history of Northeast Asia and that of Southeast Asia tend to be treated separately. This article is a first step in linking the two through the Geneva Conference, which addressed the armistices both on the Korean peninsula and in Indochina. My analysis examines not only the superpowers during the Cold War¹² but the “two Koreas” and “two Vietnams.” A study of

9. U.S. Department of State, *American Foreign Policy 1950-1955*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S.G.P.O.), 724-750.

10. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1952-1954*, Vol. 16 (Washington, D.C.: U.S.G.P.O.), 414.

11. On December 19, 1946, Ho Chi Minh called for resistance to France, and the First Indochina War began.

12. Previous works on Cold War history tend to focus on the role of the superpowers; see, for example, John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Oxford

the interactions among the local states will deepen our understanding of the complex history of the Cold War in East Asia.

The Road to the 1954 Geneva Conference

The Korean Armistice Agreement (July 27, 1953)

Although the armistice talks of the Korean War initially began in July 1951, no progress was achieved at that time. Starting from February 1952, the United Nations began to more actively seek a peaceful settlement of the Korean War.¹³

Communist countries also began to look for a peaceful resolution in Asia. After Stalin's death on March 5, 1953, the Soviet Union switched its policy in the Far East from one of conflict to one of finding a diplomatic solution. Furthermore, the Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai proposed resuming the armistice negotiations on Korea and Indochina immediately, and nearly all the Communist countries endorsed Zhou's proposal, although the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) did not.¹⁴ The Panmunjom talks on the Korean armistice promptly resumed, and concluded the first agreement on the exchange of sick and wounded prisoners on April 11, 1953.¹⁵ Eventually, such policy changes in both East and West prompted the armistice on the Korean peninsula.

The horrific Korean War finally ended when the UN Command, North Korea, and China signed the Korean Armistice Agreement on July 27, 1953. In the months leading up to this, South Korean President Syngman Rhee had attempted to obstruct the armistice proceedings, promoting opposition to the UN forces in Korea and hinting repeatedly at the possibility of unilateral South Korean action against the Communist forces. U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles appealed to Rhee personally to approve the armistice agreement Dulles had made, with the security pact between the United States and South Korea conditional on Rhee's approval of the armistice.¹⁶ In the end, the ROK did not

University Press, 1998).

13. *American Foreign Policy 1950-1955*, 2:2643-2644.

14. Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam's independence and founded the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) on September 2, 1945.

15. King C. Chen, *Vietnam and China, 1938-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 280-283.

16. Brands, "The Dwight D. Eisenhower Administration," 61-62.

sign the Korean Armistice Agreement, although the U.S. and South Korea signed the Mutual Defense Treaty on October 1, 1953. Thus the Korean armistice was for all practical purposes concluded without South Korea even signing the cease-fire.

The Korean Armistice Agreement became sufficient grounds for the 1954 Geneva Conference. Paragraph 60 of the agreement reads:

In order to ensure the peaceful settlement of the Korean question, the military Commanders of both sides hereby recommend to the Governments of the countries concerned on both sides that, within three months after the Armistice Agreement is signed and becomes effective, a political conference of a higher level of both sides be held by representatives appointed respectively to settle through negotiation the questions of the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Korea, the peaceful settlement of the Korean question, etc.¹⁷

Hence both sides needed to hold a political conference on Korea within three months of the armistice agreement. China and the Soviet Union were favorably inclined toward signing the agreement, making the statement that international issues in addition to the Korean problem could also be settled peacefully.¹⁸ The Soviet Union called for a conference among the United States, Britain, China, France, and the Soviet Union.¹⁹

In September 1953, Dulles concurred that a political conference on Korea should be held, insisting that it would be possible to have a political conference on Indochina at the same time as the Korean conference.²⁰ Dulles's remarks encouraged French Prime Minister Joseph Laniel to seek peace with Ho Chi Minh.²¹ At the conclusion of the Korean Armistice Agreement in July 1953, Ho Chi Minh had commented that, the Vietnamese people were "boundlessly delighted" at the news of the end of the Korean War. Ho also stated, "This is a great victory of the Korean people, the Chinese Volunteer Army, and the world peace-democratic camp."²² Yet he never discussed the possibility of a peaceful settlement for the ongoing Indochina War. But because other Communist countries had changed their policies to détente, Ho Chi Minh was gradually forced to entertain the possibility of a peaceful resolution in Indochina and

17. *American Foreign Policy 1950-1955*, 1:724-750.

18. *Chen, Vietnam and China, 1938-1954*, 281.

19. *Ibid.*, 280-287.

20. U.S. Department of State, *Bulletin* 29 (September 14, 1953): 342-343.

21. *Chen, Vietnam and China, 1938-1954*, 286.

22. *Ibid.*, 285.

accept the offer of negotiations with France, despite the fact that he had led the struggle against France in order to make Vietnam an independent and unified nation.²³

Some differences of opinion still remained between East and West as to the composition of the Korean political conference, especially the inclusion of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and India. Although the U.S. did not reject Soviet participation in the conference, the ROK asked the U.S. to prevent the USSR from taking part.²⁴ In addition, the U.S. and ROK opposed the inclusion of India, whom they felt would be too close to the Communists.²⁵ The U.S. also asserted that the Korean question could be settled without the Republic of Korea.²⁶ Meanwhile, North Korean leader Kim Il Sung claimed that some neutral nations ought to attend the upcoming political conference on Korea.²⁷

Eventually, in accord with the Korean Armistice Agreement, China, the Soviet Union, the U.S., North Korea, and South Korea agreed to hold a political conference on Korea, despite the South Korean government's initial opposition to participating in such a conference (discussed in detail below).²⁸ Moreover, a political conference on Indochina was agreed on internationally, owing to Ho Chi Minh's grudging acceptance of the idea.

Preparatory Talks at Panmunjom (October 26-December 12, 1953)

On October 26, 1953, discussions among all the countries that had signed the Korean Armistice Agreement, which included North Korean, Chinese, and U.S. authorities,²⁹ were held in Panmunjom. The participants discussed proposals for

23. Tomotaka Shoji, "Daiichiji Indoshina Sensoujino Betonam no Taichuu Shisei" (The Vietnamese Attitude toward the People's Republic of China during the First Indochina War), *Ajia Keizai* (Asian Economy) 42, no. 3 (2001): 36-38.

24. *FRUS 1952-1954*, 15:1466-1473.

25. Kyung-su Kim 김경수, *Indo Wa Han'guk Jeon Jaeng* 인도와 한국 전쟁 (India and the Korean War), (Seoul: Korean Studies Information, 2006), 183-185.

26. U.S. Department of State, *Bulletin* 29 (September 14, 1953): 339-342.

27. *Chosun Jeonsa*, Vol. 28, 380.

28. Before the conclusion of the Mutual Defense Treaty between the U.S. and ROK, Secretary of State Dulles visited Seoul. The Joint Statement that Dulles and Rhee released on August 7, 1953, mentioned that a political conference would be convened within three months – that is, prior to October 27, 1953; U.S. Department of State, *Bulletin* 29 (August 17, 1953): 203. Thus it seems that the ROK was not against having a political conference itself.

29. The representatives of the three countries were Arthur H. Dean (Deputy Chairman for the Secretary of State, the United States), Hua Huang (Counselor in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China), and Sok Pok Ki (North Korea).

the date, place, and agenda of the conference but were unable to reach an agreement. The Chinese and North Koreans emphasized the importance of neutral participants, such as the Soviet Union, India, Indonesia, Burma, and Pakistan.³⁰

The U.S. resisted the attendance of neutral states at the conference, though it was not opposed to Soviet participation.³¹ The U.S. put priority on a place and a date, and insisted that South Korea and the sixteen UN nations (including the U.S.) that had fought in the Korean War should participate.³² The U.S. delegate to the Panmunjom Conference, Arthur H. Dean, consulted with Syngman Rhee during the conference. Rhee was against the participation of the Soviet Union and India.³³ Thus the two sides were unable to reach any agreement on the composition of a political conference.³⁴

*The Berlin Conference (January 25-February 18, 1954)
and the U.S. Policy Change toward Southeast Asia*

The foreign ministers of the Big Four (the U.S., France, Britain, and the Soviet Union) held the Berlin Conference from January 25 to February 18, 1954 to discuss matters concerning Korea, Indochina, Germany, Austria, European security, and disarmament.³⁵ At the Berlin Conference, Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav M. Molotov expressed the hope that the U.S., France, Britain, the Soviet Union, and China would hold a conference to discuss not only Asian problems but also broader international problems. Britain and France agreed to Molotov's proposal since they were also beginning to open negotiations with the Communists. The U.S., however, refused, because it was against Chinese involvement in the conference, with the exception of discussions on the Korean armistice problem.

Ultimately, the British and French prevailed on the Americans to attend the conference on Korea and Indochina³⁶ in order to maintain the unity of the three

30. *Chosun Jeonsa*, Vol. 28, 383.

31. *American Foreign Policy 1950-1955*, 2: 2678-2679.

32. Insu Hwang, "Han'guk jeon ihu jaejeom kwa Geneva hyeopjeong" (Issues in Dispute and the Geneva Conference after the Korean War), *Korean Journal of Citizen Politics* 3 (2000): 88.

33. *FRUS 1952-1954*, 15:1649-1651. The reason South Korea opposed Indian participation is that it wanted to avoid any British influence at the conference; *ibid.*, 15:1468.

34. Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Documents on International Affairs 1954* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 341.

35. *FRUS 1952-1954*, 16:414.

36. Qiang Zhai, "China and the Geneva Conference of 1954," *The China Quarterly* 129 (1992):

countries, and especially to promote European security in the effort to contain communism. Britain recognized that the Indochina crisis would damage its own chief interests in the Malay peninsula.³⁷ British Foreign Minister Sir Anthony Eden succeeded in convincing Dulles to have a conference among the five countries, as Molotov had suggested. In addition, French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault proposed to Dulles that the conference on the Korean problem include Indochina on the agenda. Increasing Chinese influence over the Vietminh had pushed France to recognize the necessity of negotiating with China.³⁸ Bidault added that if the U.S. did not accept the French proposal, France would renounce the proposed draft of the European Defense Community (EDC), which the U.S. was eagerly seeking to establish at the time.³⁹ For France, domestic political pressure strengthened critics' arguments that the Laniel government should solve the Indochina problem as soon as possible. Eventually, the U.S. consented to hold a joint conference on Korea and Indochina, for it regarded unity among Western countries as essential in containing the threat of communism.⁴⁰

In parallel with the Berlin Conference, the U.S. government revised its policy toward Southeast Asia through the National Security Council (NSC) document 5405, which considered exclusive direct involvement in Southeast Asia in January 1954,⁴¹ meaning that the U.S. was willing to solve the Indochina problem by armed force. The U.S. had sent aid to France for the Indochina conflict since 1950.⁴² After the outbreak of the Korean War, the U.S. increased its aid for France and the Associated States in Indochina.⁴³ However, NSC 5405 was the first time that the U.S. government examined the possibility of direct American military commitment, even without the involvement of allies such as Britain and France – that is, solving the Indochina problem by force rather than by diplomacy.

The communiqué presented on February 18, 1954, at the end of the Berlin Conference, declared that the problem of restoring peace in Indochina would

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37. Ra, "The Politics of Conference," 409; Anthony Eden, *Full Circle* (London: Cassell, 1960), 97-98.

38. *FRUS 1952-1954*, 7:790-791.

39. James Cable, *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 44.

40. *FRUS 1952-1954*, 7:1224.

41. *FRUS 1952-1954*, 12:366-381.

42. U.S. Department of State, *Bulletin* 22 (May 22, 1950): 791.

43. *FRUS 1950*, 7:202-203.

also be discussed at the conference later that year, to which representatives of the United States, France, the United Kingdom, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the People's Republic of China, and other interested states would be invited. But the last sentence of the communiqué stated that neither an invitation to nor the holding of such a conference should be taken to imply diplomatic recognition in any case where it had not already been accorded.⁴⁴ This sentence was added to the document because U.S. did not want to recognize Communist China.⁴⁵

Eventually, the U.S. Department of State sent fifteen UN participant nations⁴⁶ letters of invitation to the Geneva Conference.⁴⁷ However, South Korea, still opposed to the cease-fire in the Korean War, maintained its opposition to a political conference on Korea. There were two reasons for this. First, since the Communists were united but the West was fragmented in its views and policies, South Korea considered the situation dangerous. In other words, South Korea worried about Communist influence in the international arena. Second, from the South Korean point of view, the conference would improve the position of the Communists, because it would give them a voice at the international conference. Therefore, South Korea did not officially agree to participate at the outset.⁴⁸ The U.S. persuaded South Korea to take part by suggesting that the U.S. would support South Korea's military buildup and other common policies to be pursued during the conference. With these assurances, South Korea decided to attend the Geneva Conference.⁴⁹ At almost the same time, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower asked President Rhee not to invade North Korea,⁵⁰ since it was crucial that the U.S. deter a unilateral South Korean attack.

Thus the U.S. agreed to hold a political conference on both the Korea and

44. *FRUS 1952-1954*, 16:415; *American Foreign Policy 1950-1955*, 2:2685.

45. U.S. Department of State, *Bulletin* 30 (March 8, 1954): 347.

46. Sixteen UN nations – Australia, Belgium, Canada, Columbia, Ethiopia, France, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, Turkey, the Union of South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. – had been involved in the Korean War. However, South Africa had voiced its intention not to attend a conference at the end of 1953; *American Foreign Policy 1950-1955*, 2:2678.

47. U.S. Department of State, *Bulletin* 30 (March 8, 1954): 347.

48. Ra, "The Politics of Conference," 402-403.

49. *FRUS 1952-1954*, 16:103-105, 111-113.

50. For instance, during U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon's trip to Seoul, Eisenhower wanted Nixon to get Rhee to guarantee that he would not launch an invasion of North Korea; Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 322. Meanwhile, Rhee proposed renewing the war to unify Korea by force; *Hanguk oegyo munso* (ROK Diplomatic Correspondence) D-0001, No. 130.

Indochina situations. However, the U.S. was not necessarily actively seeking to solve the armistice problems in East Asia through diplomacy, especially with regard to the conflict in Indochina. The biggest factor in the U.S. acceptance of the Geneva Conference was the importance of establishing close relations with its Western allies who sought a peaceful settlement in East Asia.

The Geneva Conference on Korea and Indochina

The Korean Phase (April 26-June 15, 1954) and the Crisis of Dien Bien Phu

South Korea, North Korea, fifteen of the sixteen UN nations that had participated in the Korean War, the Soviet Union, and China held the Geneva Conference on Korea from April 26 to June 15, 1954. The elections on the Korean peninsula and the question of the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the peninsula were the two major issues at the conference.

The U.S. and its allies believed that the United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK), established by the UN General Assembly resolution of October 7, 1950 as a successor to the former UN Commission on Korea (UNCOK, 1948-1950), would fulfill its main role of conducting elections in the Korean peninsula. However, there was a vast difference among the Western countries' opinions on the elections in Korea. Only the U.S.⁵¹ and South Korea⁵² suggested that an election be held only in the northern part of Korea because the free election conducted under UN supervision in 1948 in the southern half of Korea was already valid. The U.S. proposal in the Korean phase of the conference was grounded in U.S. policy toward the Korean peninsula, which was closely connected with its policy toward Japan. After the end of World War II, Japan became an important economic base for the U.S. in its efforts to contain communism. To strengthen the Japanese economy, the U.S. urged Japan and South Korea discuss normalization of diplomatic relations between the two nations.⁵³ In other words, South Korea was recognized as crucial for the Japanese economy. Thus it was necessary for the U.S. to maintain a "free country" on the Korean peninsula, and

51. Kenneth T. Young, ed., *The 1954 Geneva Conference: Indo-China and Korea* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 9-14.

52. Ibid., 1-4; ROK Department of Foreign Affairs, *Han'guk oegyo 40 nyeon: 1948-1988* (Forty Years of Korean Diplomacy: 1948-1988), 85.

53. Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: Norton, 1997), 209-210.

the U.S. accordingly insisted on post-armistice elections only in the northern part of the peninsula, whose population was smaller than that of the south.

In contrast, other Western and non-Communist-bloc countries, such as Australia,⁵⁴ Thailand,⁵⁵ Britain,⁵⁶ and France,⁵⁷ insisted that the elections should be conducted throughout the Korean peninsula. These countries had sent troops to the Korean War, but their interests in the Korean peninsula were not as significant as those of the U.S.⁵⁸ They expected that Syngman Rhee would win even if the election were held throughout the peninsula.⁵⁹ Also, they did not have a containment policy toward the Communists, so they tried to negotiate with each other.

North Korea,⁶⁰ China,⁶¹ and the Soviet Union⁶² affirmed this same point regarding the elections on the Korean peninsula. The Communists, however, expected the neutral nations to act as supervisory committees. North Korea proposed setting up an all-Korean commission that would supersede the 1948 ROK elections by establishing a coalition between the South and North Korean people, and withdrawing all foreign troops from the Korean peninsula within six months. China and the Soviet Union supported the North Korean proposal, exhibiting a unified front of the Communist East. However, when it came to withdrawal of all the foreign troops in Korea, the U.S. government opposed withdrawal of both Chinese Communist and UN forces because such a move would probably cripple the Korean armistice.⁶³

All efforts to negotiate a compromise between West and East in the Korean phase of the conference were in vain. For instance, U.S. delegate Walter Bell Smith had an informal meeting with Molotov to discuss the composition of a body to supervise the Korean elections. Smith insisted on the principles of free elections and UN supervision, but Molotov rejected them, so they were unable to reach any agreement.⁶⁴

54. *Hanguk oegyo munso*, D-0001, No. 206.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Documents on International Affairs 1954*, 346-350.

57. Young, ed., *The 1954 Geneva Conference*, 49-51.

58. Yoichi Kibata, *Teikoku no Tasogare: Reisenka no Igirisu to Asia* (The Twilight of the Empire: British Policy toward Japan and Malaya, 1947-1955), (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1996), 238.

59. Lee, *Outposts of Empire*, 213.

60. Young, ed., *The 1954 Geneva Conference*, 4-5.

61. *Ibid.*, 14-21.

62. *Ibid.*, 24-29.

63. *FRUS 1952-1954*, 16:209.

The gulfs of opinion among Western countries grew so large that it seemed increasingly difficult to solve the Korean problem by diplomacy. In particular, disputes still remained about the elections on the Korean peninsula. South Korea did not intend to resolve the issue through negotiations, hoping instead to wrap up the Korean phase as soon as possible.⁶⁵ British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden wrote in his diary on May 20, 1954, that South Korea's idea was too far from the British point of view to permit a final agreement.⁶⁶ Britain had sought negotiations with the Communist countries through the conference on Korea; however, it could not help moving toward an agreement on a *modus vivendi*.

Moreover, the situation in Indochina eventually affected the result of the Geneva Conference on Korea. As mentioned above, the U.S. government had already begun to seek more direct involvement in the Indochina conflict before the Korean phase of the conference began. The French government, which was facing a dire crisis at their key fortress, Dien Bien Phu, had dispatched General Paul Ely to ask for direct American involvement at the end of March 1954. General Ely had revealed to the U.S. government that there was only a 50 percent likelihood that France could win the conflict in Indochina.⁶⁷ The U.S. government, greatly concerned about the crisis at Dien Bien Phu, had made an appeal for multilateral military action in Indochina – the so-called united action proposed by Dulles, who was U.S. Secretary of State at the time.⁶⁸ But Britain, the States' most reliable ally, had rejected "united action," assuming that the Indochina problem would be solved by diplomacy.⁶⁹ France had also been against the internationalization of the First Indochina War prior to the Geneva Conference on Indochina.⁷⁰ The U.S. finally decided not to intervene in Indochina directly without other allies' cooperation, and instead established an anti-Communist regional organization with Britain, France, the Associated States in Indochina, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, and the Philippines.⁷¹ In 1954, therefore, "united action" in the First Indochina War was never realized.

64. Ibid., 16:357-358.

65. Ibid., 16:359.

66. Yuichi Hosoya, *Sensou Niyoru Heiwa: Anthony Eden to 21 Seiki no Kokusaiseiji* (Diplomacy and the Search for Peace: Anthony Eden, the Cold War, and the Origins of Détente), (Tokyo: Yuhikaku, 2005), 208-209.

67. *FRUS 1952-1954*, 13:1169-1173.

68. U.S. Department of State, *Bulletin* 30 (April 12, 1954): 539-542.

69. Hosoya, *Sensou Niyoru Heiwa*, 208-209.

70. Hiroshi Matsuoka, *Daresu Gaikou to Indoshina* (Dulles's Diplomacy and Indochina), (Tokyo: Doubunkan, 1988), 66-74; Lee, *Outposts of Empire*, 239.

71. *FRUS 1952-1954*, 13:1250-1265.

Shortly afterward, Dulles outlined the new U.S. policies toward East Asia in a document entitled “United States Strategy for Development of a Position of Military Strength in the Far East” (NSC 5416). In this strategy, the U.S. planned to develop and organize military forces in the non-Communist countries in the Far East.⁷² The U.S. continued to seek allied cooperation in order to deal with the Indochina crisis, since it seemed difficult to obtain national and congressional support without first securing cooperation not only from European allies but from East Asian nations such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, as well.⁷³ Later, in February 1955, this idea of “united action” was developed into SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organization), which consisted of the U.S., Britain, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand. Later still, in the 1960s, on the initiative of the U.S., eight countries (the U.S., South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, and Spain) organized to take cooperative military action under the rubric of “Free World Military Assistances Forces” (FWMAF) in the Second Indochina War.

The Indochina problem became more pressing than the Korean one after the French were decisively defeated at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954. In addition, due to the entrenched and widely divergent stances of the U.S. and ROK on the Korean problem, Britain thought it would be worth sacrificing “young and poor” Korea if the Indochina problem could be solved.⁷⁴ As Eden conveyed to Molotov, Britain “thought continuation of *status quo* in Korea [was] not too bad.”⁷⁵ Three factors behind the Britain’s decision can be assumed. First, the British interest in Korea was not all that strong, even though Britain had sent troops to support the U.S. in the Korean War.⁷⁶ Second, since Britain retained Hong Kong as a colonial possession, it was invested in keeping channels open with China – a diplomatic stance critically different from the containment policy of the U.S.⁷⁷ Third, Britain believed that the Indochina situation demanded a much more immediate resolution than the Korean problem because Indochina was contiguous with Malaya, the British colony in Southeast Asia at the time. Furthermore, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov agreed with Eden’s idea of

72. Ibid., 12:411-421.

73. U.S. Secretary of State Dulles proposed organizing a collective security arrangement in Northeast Asia to be called NEATO (North East Asia Treaty Organization); *New York Times*, August 8, 1954. NEATO was never realized because the relationship between South Korea and Japan worsened.

74. Hosoya, *Sensou Niyoru Heiwa*, 209.

75. *FRUS 1952-1954*, 16:210.

76. Kibata, *Teikoku no Tasogare*, 238.

77. Lee, *Outposts of Empire*, 192-193.

maintaining the status quo in the Korean peninsula.⁷⁸ These agreements among superpowers resulted in the stabilization of the division of the Korean peninsula, which remains to the present day.

In the end, the Geneva Conference on Korea concluded without the signing of a declaration by all the participating countries. The only agreement achieved was a consensus that the participants not restart the war in the Korean peninsula. On June 15, 1954, fifteen UN nations and South Korea presented a communiqué stating that an election in the Korean peninsula should be implemented under UN supervision, but the communiqué received no support from the Communist East.⁷⁹

In the communiqué, no reference was made to whether the election should be conducted only in the northern part or in the entire Korean peninsula, a distinction that had been one of the biggest issues at the conference. Eventually, the Geneva Conference broke off because West and East could not reach any agreement. Up to the present day, elections under UN supervision in the Korean peninsula have not yet taken place, and the peninsula remains politically divided.

The Korean phase ended without any fruitful results for two reasons. First, there was a great gap in the opinions of participants from East and West, as well as among Western countries. Dealing with Rhee's adamant opposition to the armistice and also to the Geneva Conference was also a large stumbling block for the Western nations. Second, the crisis in Indochina made the Korean problem appear less urgent, which resulted in the maintenance of the division on the Korean peninsula.

The Indochina Phase (May 8-July 21, 1954)

It was on May 7, 1954, during the Geneva Conference on Korea, that Dien Bien Phu was taken by the Vietminh Army. The next day, after this crucial turning point, the Geneva Conference on Indochina opened.⁸⁰ A few days earlier, the primary U.S. delegate in Geneva had switched from U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith. This turnover indicates that Dulles had never planned on solving the Indochina problem through negotiations.⁸¹

78. *FRUS 1952-1954*, 16:210.

79. *American Foreign Policy 1950-1955*, 2:2692-2693.

80. France, Britain, the United States, Cambodia, Laos, the State of Vietnam, China, the Soviet Union, and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam were represented at the Indochina phase.

81. Matsuoka, *Daresu Gaikou*, 116-117.

Not surprisingly, there were differences of opinion between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and France in the Indochina phase. Pham Van Dong, the head of the DRV delegation, insisted on three points: (1) the sovereignty and independence of Vietnam, Khmer, and Pathet Lao, (2) the withdrawal of all foreign troops, and (3) free general elections to be organized in Vietnam, Khmer, and Pathet Lao.⁸² In contrast, the French Foreign Minister, Georges Bidault, referred only to an immediate armistice in Indochina and disarmament of the army, saying little about political issues.⁸³

Though the Indochina phase also reached a deadlock, the informal meetings among Eden, Molotov, and Zhou Enlai played a key role in mediating conflict at the conference. In addition, French Prime Minister Laniel resigned, as a sign of taking responsibility for the lack of progress at the Geneva Conference on Indochina. Pierre Mendes-France, who had appealed for a French armistice with the Vietminh, took the oath of office as the new French prime minister and foreign minister on June 18, 1954. Mendes-France took part in the Geneva Conference on Indochina.⁸⁴ These two events moved the Indochina phase toward reaching a consensus.

In the official talks between Zhou and French Foreign Minister Bidault, Zhou indicated that China would be willing to recognize two governments in Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh in the north, Bao Dai in the south). Zhou made the same proposal to Eden. Zhou's suggestion was the complete opposite of the aforementioned DPV position; however, the DPV delegate, Pham Vang Dong, had no choice but to accept it because Zhou's approach had been approved by the Soviet Communist Party, the Chinese Communist Party, and the Worker's Party of Vietnam.⁸⁵ Therefore, the fact that France, Britain, and China accepted the division was a decisive event for the later fortunes of Vietnam. The compromises among these superpowers stemmed from their desire to reach an armistice in the First Indochina War, and to exercise their influence over Vietnam. In particular, Britain had ambitions to make its presence felt in Malaya.

Eventually, East and West signed an agreement on July 21, 1954, which determined that Vietnam would be divided into south and north at the 17th parallel and that a demilitarized zone would be built in both parts. The agreement also specified that elections in South and North Vietnam would be

82. Young, ed., *The 1954 Geneva Conference*, 116-120.

83. Ibid., 107-111.

84. Matsuoka, *Daresu Gaikou*, 129.

85. Ibid., 130-131; Shoji, "Daiichiji Indoshina Sensoujino Betonam no Taichuu Shisei," 38-39.

conducted within two years, which meant by July 1956. Additionally, the International Supervisory Committee, composed of Canada, India, and Poland, was to inspect the armistice in Vietnam.⁸⁶ The fact that the conference participants had not been able to reach any agreement in the Korean phase compelled the conclusion of the agreement in the Indochina phase. However, Bao Dai, the head of the State of Vietnam, which the French had created in 1948, was against the division of Vietnam, so the delegation of the State of Vietnam did not sign the agreement. Thus Vietnam became another divided country, similar to the “two Koreas.”

The planned elections were never implemented because both the U.S. and South Vietnam rejected the 1956 elections proposed at the conference. North Vietnam, which had called for the elections, continued to receive aid from China and the Soviet Union. Thus the agreement reached at the Geneva conference on Indochina became a dead letter within two years, stabilizing the division of Vietnam. Vietnam would finally be reunified after the long and bloody Second Indochina War, which broke out roughly ten years after the 1954 Geneva Conference.

Conclusion

The results of the 1954 Geneva Conference on Korea and on Indochina led to the division of two areas in East Asia. In addition, a large shift of hegemony took place from “old empires” to “new empire” in East Asia. The conference on both Korea and Indochina was the final chance for former empires such as Britain and France to exercise their imperial powers in East Asia. The U.S. had also exerted a large influence in Northeast Asia since the beginning of the Cold War, by giving economic and military assistance and concluding bilateral security treaties. However, the hotter the Cold War in East Asia became, the greater U.S. commitment became, not only in Northeast Asia but also in Southeast Asia. In this sense, the Geneva Conference was the decisive opportunity for the U.S. to act as a new “empire” in all of East Asia, replacing Britain and France. Indeed, the Geneva conference was the last time an independent British policy exercised significant influence in the resolution of a major international crisis.⁸⁷

Some common points and influences can be found between the Korean and

86. Further Documents Relating to the Discussion of Indo-China at the Geneva Conference; Young, ed., *The 1954 Geneva Conference*, 9-40.

87. Cable, *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina*, 3.

the Indochina phases of the conference. First, withdrawal of all foreign troops and elections for political unification were the major issues in both phases. Second, not only the superpowers' interests but also some parties' opposition to the armistices in those areas eventually resulted in maintenance of the status quo – namely, the divisions of Korea and Vietnam.

In addition, the situations in Korea and Indochina influenced each other. During the Korean phase, the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu hindered the solution of the Korean problem at the Geneva Conference. In contrast, participants in the Indochina phase, such as the Soviet Union, China, and Britain, made great efforts not to provoke “another” Korean phase, which ended without any agreement between East and West. Thus they agreed on a cease-fire in Indochina and a timetable for elections, even though this declaration became for most intents and purposes invalid soon after the conference ended.

The 1954 Geneva Conference on Korea and Indochina was the crucial event that entrenched the divisions of two regions. After the conference, the U.S. strengthened the anti-Communist bloc in East Asia. The 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty between the U.S. and the Republic of Korea allowed the U.S. Army to stay in South Korea after the Korean War. Also, The U.S. Army retained operational control of the ROK Army by signing a draft soon after the 1954 conference.⁸⁸ One instance of connecting the non-Communist states in East Asia is the military exchange between South Korea and the Republic of Vietnam. After the Geneva Conference, the U.S. government promoted military cooperation with other anti-Communist Asian countries (NSC 5416). At the beginning of 1954, when the U.S. changed in its policy toward Southeast Asia, South Korean President Syngman Rhee proposed dispatching his army to Indochina⁸⁹ to save “the free world.” The U.S. government discussed Rhee’s proposal at a high governmental level, since as we have seen, it had already begun to examine the possibility of direct intervention in Indochina. The Department of State,⁹⁰ Department of Defense,⁹¹ and Central Intelligence

88. This document is entitled “Draft Agreed Minutes Between the Governments of the United States and the Republic of Korea Based on the Conferences Held Between President Eisenhower and President Rhee and Their Advisers in Washington, July 27-30, 1954 and Subsequent Discussions in Washington Between Representatives of the Two Governments”; *FRUS 1952-1954*, 15 (part 2): 1876-1882.

89. Accurately, Rhee proposed sending his army to Laos, since Dien Bien Phu is near Laos, though apparently he meant to send his army for the First Indochina War, so in this paper “Indochina” rather than “Laos” is used.

90. Memorandum, Proposed ROK Offer of Troops to Laos, Executive Secretary, NSC, March 2, 1954, “P” (Procedure) Files, *Documents of the National Security Council, Fourth Supplement* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America), microfilm, Reel 6, 11-17.

Agency⁹² each compiled reports on sending Korean troops to Indochina. Eventually, as mentioned above, the U.S. abandoned the idea of direct involvement by the U.S. and Korea in the Indochina conflict during the mid-1950s, though this did not preclude the possibility of future involvement. Even though South Korean troops were not dispatched to Indochina at that time, military exchanges between South Korea and the Republic of Vietnam began in 1954. This fact indicates that South Korea had become an important Asian ally in the U.S. drive to contain the Communists in Indochina. By the 1960s, South Korea would become the second largest contributor of troops to the Second Indochina War.

In contrast, North Korea followed the approach of *Juche* (self-reliance) in its domestic and foreign policies, rejecting influences from Japanese colonialism, the Soviet Union, and China. The Chinese military left North Korea in 1958. The Sino-Soviet conflict of the mid-1950s encouraged North Korea to strengthen its *Juche* policy. Concurrently with the close relations between South Korea and the Republic of Vietnam, the North Korea-North Vietnamese relationship also deepened. Significantly, there is speculation that North Korea also sent a small number of pilots to Vietnam to participate in combat.⁹³ It was yet another tragedy that the soldiers of South Korea and North Korea would meet to fight again in the Second Indochina War. The strained and militarized conflicts between the two Koreas lasted from the end of the Geneva conference in 1954 to the direct talks between the two nations in 1972.

In this article, due to length constraints, I could not delve deeply into the Soviet Union and China's policies toward the Korean Peninsula, though both powers had a large influence on the building of North Korea. Further study on their policies through the use of Russian and Chinese primary sources is necessary to answer the question of whether they, too, sought to establish new empires in East Asia. In addition, it is essential to study more precisely the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference.

However, I would point out that the failure of the Geneva Conference led to

91. Memorandum, Consideration of the ROK Offer to Send a Division to Indochina, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, for the Secretary of Defense, March 1, 1954, "P" (Procedure) Files, *Documents of the National Security Council, Fourth Supplement*, microfilm, Reel 6, 18-22; *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, Book 9, 259-263.

92. Memorandum, CIA Assessment of Reactions to ROK Participation in the Indochina War, March 1954, "P" (Procedure) Files, *Documents of the National Security Council, Fourth Supplement*, microfilm, Reel 6, 23-27.

93. Byung Chul Koh, *The Foreign Policy of North Korea* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), 184-189.

the former colonies holding the Asia-African Conference in order to remain independent of the former colonial powers and of the influence of the Cold War. In June 1954, on the way home from Geneva to China, Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai visited New Delhi and Rangoon and formed agreements with India and Burma, officially dubbed the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.”⁹⁴ These “Five Principles” were born of the failure in Geneva and became an influential movement in the whole of Asia in the 1950s. “Nationalism” in East Asia was closely connected with communism.⁹⁵ The U.S. had recognized such Third World expansion as enlargement of communism and such awareness became one cause of the U.S. military intervention in Vietnam in the 1960s.

It is very difficult to say what we should learn from the 1954 Geneva Conference on Korea vis-à-vis the future of Korean unification. However, it seems clear that all the countries concerned with the Korean peninsula should try to solve the problems not by force of arms but by diplomacy, in order to avoid a Second Korean War, which would produce countless casualties. Six Party Talks among Russia, the U.S., China, Japan, North Korea, and South Korea have continued on the issue of North Korean nuclear weapons production. In addition, the “two Koreas” have started to discuss political, economic, and military questions since the establishment of the “Sunshine Policy” by South Korean President Kim Daejung. I would like to point out that the “two Koreas” should cooperate with negotiations not only between the “two Koreas” but also among other countries concerning the Korean peninsula. If armistice talks are opened again in the future, the lessons of the 1954 Geneva Conference will be helpful, despite the fact that no one can forecast when the renewal of armistice talks or Korean unification will come to fruition.

94. Zhai, “China and the Geneva Conference of 1954,” 107.

95. William Macmahon Ball, *Nationalism and Communism in East Asia* (New York: AMS Press, 1978).