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Introduction by Seth Jacobs

**James Waite.** *The End of the First Indochina War: A Global History.* New York: Routledge, 2012. ISBN: 978-0-415-88684-0 (hardback, \$125.00).

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Introduction by Seth Jacobs, Boston College

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As I can attest from experience, it gets harder with each passing year to justify publication of yet another book on the Vietnam—or Indochina—Wars of the mid-twentieth century, especially if one’s agenda includes a dissection of the forces that drew America into its most divisive overseas conflict. Unless the historian employs a fresh category of analysis, as Robert Dean did with gender in his pioneering 2001 study *Imperial Brotherhood*, or brings to light critical, heretofore unexplored archival documents, as Jessica Chapman and Edward Miller do in their recent work on Ngo Dinh Diem’s regime, the ‘So what?’ question can prove an insuperable hurdle.<sup>1</sup>

According to the participants in this roundtable, James Waite’s *The End of the First Indochina War*, despite offering what Bevan Sewell calls “a wide-ranging and even-handed examination of the way that the peace [between France and the Viet Minh] was eventually forged,” fails to answer that question. The reviewers adopt different tones in their critiques: Kathryn Statler’s is quite harsh, Sewall’s lenient, and Christoph Giebel’s somewhere in between. Nonetheless, all three concur on the point, bluntly stated by Statler, that “readers conversant with the scholarship will not find much that is new here.” (Sewell softens the blow, musing, “I’m not sure how much the book tells us that is truly revelatory.”) Waite’s principal claims—that the outcome of the 1954 Dien Bien Phu crisis and subsequent Geneva Conference cannot be understood without taking into account the broader global context, that domestic factors as well as foreign-policy considerations influenced the behavior of statesmen at Geneva, that the western powers were unable to unite in a common military or diplomatic front against the Viet Minh and their Soviet and Chinese backers, and that the unsatisfactory agreement cobbled together by the Geneva conferees prepared the ground for future hostilities in Indochina—have been made before, often many times, in books and articles dating as far back as the 1960s. Indeed, a complaint raised by all reviewers (most emphatically by Statler) is that Waite does not engage with much of the voluminous literature produced by such distinguished historians as Christopher Goscha, Laurent Cesari, Steven Hugh Lee, and Keith W. Taylor.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Jessica Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> For some of their recent English-language publications, see Christopher E. Goscha, “Choosing between the Two Vietnams: 1950 and Southeast Asian Shifts in the International System” in *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1945-1962*, Christopher E. Goscha and Christian F. Ostermann, eds. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Laurent Cesari, “The Declining Value of Indochina: France and the Economics of Empire, 1950-1955” in *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*, Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Steven Hugh Lee, *Outposts of Empire: Korea, Vietnam, and the Origins of the Cold War in Asia, 1949-1954* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995); Keith W. Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

The reviewers nonetheless find elements to praise in *The End of the First Indochina War*. Giebel lauds Waite's archival legwork, noting that he draws on "an awe-inspiring array" of declassified materials "and a host of primary and media sources, document collection, and memoirs." Statler commends Waite for demonstrating that partition of Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel, easily the most combustible stipulation of the Geneva Accords, originated with the British and Chinese governments, and that British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden took principal responsibility for getting the other participants at Geneva to accept it, however begrudgingly. Eden "is brought to the forefront in a way few studies have captured," Statler observes. All reviewers are impressed by Waite's incorporation of Australian and New Zealand archival materials—these spotlight oft-overlooked tensions in the noncommunist camp and "enable [Waite] to really capture the nature of the diplomatic to-ing and fro-ing that was so redolent of this period," writes Sewell—although Statler remarks that "Canberra and Wellington played minor roles before and during Geneva" and ventures, "[I]t might have been better to have devoted the time and space spent on Australia and New Zealand to more in-depth analysis of the communist perspective."

This points up another shortcoming identified by the reviewers: Waite's comparative inattention to nonwestern actors in his drama. "Waite relies entirely on English and French language sources," Giebel notes. He has done no research in Vietnamese, Chinese, or Russian archives, and this results in a "lopsided" portrayal. Whereas key figures like Eden and French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault emerge from this study as complex, three-dimensional individuals, Pham Van Dong, Zhou Enlai, and Vyacheslav Molotov do not receive the same nuanced treatment, as Waite "mediate[s]" their frames of reference "through secondary works or through their own English and French public relations materials."

Having myself been taken to the woodshed by numerous critics for failing to bring "the other side" more fully into my work, I can empathize with Waite's presumptive objection to this demand that all diplomatic historians, save the most closed-door Americanists, possess protean, Erez Manela-esque language skills. (John Lewis Gaddis spoke for us mere mortals when he began *We Now Know* with the tongue-in-cheek mea culpa: "I wish I could say I had researched this book by slogging dutifully through archives in Moscow, Warsaw, Prague, Berlin, Budapest, Beijing, Hanoi, and Havana while simultaneously perfecting my already fluent Russian, Polish, Czech, German, Hungarian, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Spanish."<sup>3</sup>) Still, Waite leaves himself open to charges of archival imbalance by subtling his book "A Global History." "An International History," Sewall suggests, might have been more appropriate.

Sewell and Giebel would also like to have seen Waite utilize analytical categories typifying diplomatic history's so-called cultural turn, in particular race. Giebel's review is especially pointed on this point. By treating primary documents like President Eisenhower's April 1954 letter to a friend as though they "contain[ed] transparent meanings," he declares,

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<sup>3</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), vii.

Waite “embraces Western frames, terminologies, and viewpoints as normative” and misses “a great opportunity to critically examine . . . the President’s cultural assumptions about non-white peoples and the racial hierarchies they implied.” How could Eisenhower have sincerely proclaimed his opposition to colonialism and support of self-determination while at the same time subverting nationalist movements in decolonizing areas all over the world? Waite’s “uncritical use of sources,” a “throwback to conventional diplomatic history of an earlier generation,” prevents him from investigating, or even commenting upon, “the gulf between U.S. rhetoric and actions.” In addition, Giebel and Sewell consider Waite’s “emphasis on the multiple motivations and autonomous stances” at Geneva potentially misleading, in that it “could tend to exonerate the U.S. from the onus of having been the central player in preventing a more permanent settlement of the Indochina War.” Both reviewers find that implicit conclusion unpersuasive and fault Waite for letting Washington off the hook.

Finally, all contributors to this forum wish the book were more felicitously written. Waite’s prose is often clanking and difficult to follow, and the surfeit of typos suggests a light copyediting hand. The near-simultaneous publication of Fredrik Logevall’s prizewinning *Embers of War*, an elegantly wrought monograph that covers much of the same territory as *The End of the First Indochina War*, only serves to underscore this deficiency.<sup>4</sup>

Statler’s conclusion sums up the views of her colleagues’ views with characteristic frankness. “[W]hat we have here is the equivalent of an iPhone upgrade,” she asserts. “Yes, there are some new features, but nothing revolutionary.” This is not, I am sure, the kind of equivocal verdict a young scholar wants to hear after laboring to turn his dissertation into a book. It is, however, a reception he perhaps courts if he chooses to make his mark in an already overcrowded field.

### Participants:

**James Waite** is a New Zealand diplomat and has worked in a range of positions with a focus on political and security affairs in the Asia Pacific region. He is currently First Secretary in the New Zealand Embassy, Washington DC. He was posted to Jakarta, 2008 - 2011. Waite received his PhD in history from Ohio University in 2005. The views expressed in this response and in his book are his own.

**Seth Jacobs** is Associate Professor of history at Boston College and the author of *America’s Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia, 1950-1957* (2005), *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America’s War in Vietnam, 1950-1963* (2006), and *The Universe Unraveling: American Foreign Policy in Cold War Laos* (2012). The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations has honored him with two Stuart L. Bernath Prizes: for best article published in the field of U.S.

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<sup>4</sup> Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012).

diplomatic history (2002) and best book (2006). He also won the James P. Hanlan Book Award from the New England Historical Association (2013).

**Christoph Giebel** received his Ph.D. in Southeast Asian History in 1996 at Cornell University. He is an Associate Professor of International Studies and History at the University of Washington, Seattle, and author of *Imagined Ancestries of Vietnamese Communism: Ton Duc Thang and the Politics of History and Memory* (Seattle, Singapore: University of Washington Press and Singapore University Press, 2004). His teaching and research focus on 20<sup>th</sup> century Viet Nam.

**Bevan Sewell** is a Lecturer in American History at the University of Nottingham. He has published articles in *Diplomatic History*, the *English Historical Review*, *Intelligence and National Security*, and the *Journal of American Studies*. Presently, he is finishing a book on U.S. policy toward Latin America in the long-1950s and has just begun researching a biography of John Foster Dulles.

**Kathryn C. Statler** is Professor of History at the University of San Diego. She is the author of *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (2007) and co-editor of *The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the Globalization of the Cold War, 1953-1961* (2006). She is currently at work on a history of Franco-American cultural diplomacy.

Review by Christoph Giebel, University of Washington

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**A**rising from his doctoral dissertation, James Waite's book on the end of the First Indochina War (1946-1954) focuses in particular on the years 1953-1956, roughly from the point when the Korean War had settled into a stalemate and France's military position in Indochina turned increasingly dire, to the battle at Dien Bien Phu, the events before and during the Geneva Conference on Indochina, and, finally, to the stabilization of the Ngo Dinh Diem government in southern Viet Nam under U.S. tutelage that made what was meant to be a temporary military-administrative – but not political – partition of Vietnamese territory a seemingly permanent affair. Waite's work is based on an awe-inspiring array of archival research in Western Europe, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, and a host of primary and media sources, document collections, and memoirs, as well as an exhaustive body of secondary literature, all in English or French.

Waite seeks to present a global history of the period in which the strategic and geo-political prerogatives of the main actors at Geneva are continuously brought into dialogue with respective domestic concerns and restraints faced by the various governments. For example, French anxieties over the possibility of the establishment of a European Defense Community (EDC) and West German rearmament, Waite argues, influenced France's negotiation stances over Indochina in important ways, just as a desire for *détente* motivated a post-Stalin Soviet Union, or the Eisenhower administration's fear of exposing itself to domestic charges of being 'soft on communism.' In this regard, Waite is successful in providing greater depth and nuance to the motivations and objectives of the major powers in Geneva, particularly concerning Western nations. For diplomatic historians of the period, the multiple connections between domestic and foreign policy goals that Waite draws indeed add new insights and contribute to the existing historiography on the First Indochina War and the Geneva Conference, as does his inclusion of rarely considered sources from Australia and New Zealand.

I will focus my review on three areas of concern, however. The first one is more of a formal nature in that I found the book to be rather cumbersome to read. Indeed it reads more like a diligently sourced dissertation than a well-edited book with strong argumentative lines and narrative pull. Waite often tends towards minutiae where clarity of explanation would be called for. In a book where chapters at times may cover no more than a month of shifting negotiation stances, directing the reader towards the most important changes would have been advisable. Instead, the author has a habit of somewhat mechanically cycling through the roster of conference participants and explaining their strategies and thoughts at any given moment, usually starting with the Western countries, then moving on to Communist powers, and finally arriving at the Associated State of Viet Nam (ASVN) and the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRVN). This makes for far too many instances where the book sounds repetitive, with looping and convoluted arguments standing in the way of clearer insights. Sometimes authors become overwhelmed by their sources. This is not the case here, as Waite clearly has mastery of his archives, but he seems unwilling to more authoritatively marshal (and prune) his evidence towards the more important points. Much more editorial work would have been necessary to help his readers navigate through

the thicket of arguments and distinguish between subtle policy shifts, irrelevant sideshows and trajectories, and truly momentous initiatives or concessions.

Part of the reason for the book's tendency towards over-sourced minutiae may lie in the author's apparent desire to show that all of the sides at Geneva acted with a great amount of self-interest and under a plethora of domestic considerations and, hence, autonomy from even their closest allies within the Cold War blocs. Such an argument could tend to exonerate the U.S. from the onus of having been the central player in preventing a more permanent settlement of the Indochina War. And yet, at the end of Waite's book I came away with the strong sense that the one common denominator that still influenced all parties to Geneva, that they all were forced to take into consideration over and above (and even regardless of) their respective domestic interests, was indeed the American hostility towards any accommodation of Vietnamese revolutionary-nationalist objectives and unmitigated U.S. bellicosity. This is an argument Keith Taylor made a long time ago in a fine article that did not find inclusion into Waite's book.<sup>1</sup> Although his book's broader thrust would reinforce such a conclusion, James Waite in fact does not make this argument in any explicit way, perhaps because it stands in tension with his emphasis on the multiple motivations and autonomous stances that manifested themselves at the conference.

My second point concerns the author's use of sources. Here, Waite relies entirely on English and French language sources. In consequence, he analyses and represents Western governments through multiple layers of evidence, from public pronouncements, through internal policy documents and communications, to the private letters of certain leaders. By contrast, the positions of non-Western actors before and at the Geneva Conference are mediated through secondary works or through their own English or French public relations materials. The methodological pitfalls of analyzing conference participants through such a lopsided array of documents are clear, and yet I found no attempt by the author to openly address or mitigate this problem in a meaningful way.

More importantly still, Waite's reading of the archives is a throwback to conventional diplomatic history of an older generation. He usually treats his primary documents as containing transparent meaning and rarely if ever interrogates them in a critical fashion or subjects them to close readings of their textual conventions in ways that would reveal broader cultural assumptions beyond the political and ideological interests they express. A particularly striking example –out of many– is Waite's quotation from a letter U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower wrote in April 1954 to a friend. Waite claims that the president frequently had “emphasized Vietnamese independence as the fundamental American goal.” Indeed, it was his “long-held desire.” In the private letter, Eisenhower, recalling American pressure on the French to grant independence to the ASVN, felt that “to contemplate anything else is to lay ourselves open to imperialism and colonialism or –at the very least– of objectionable paternalism” (98).

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<sup>1</sup> Keith W. Taylor, “China and Vietnam: Looking for a New Version of an Old Relationship,” in: *The Vietnam War. Vietnamese and American Perspectives*. Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Huynh (eds.), (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 271-85.

Waite suggests that Eisenhower was “firm and consistent” in “this anticolonial sentiment” (98) which is certainly reasonable, but he also makes no further attempt to critically examine this very problematic statement. The document is used instead in seemingly self-evident ways, as another, ostensibly neutral primary source in an archive.. But the letter would immediately raise several questions and suggest avenues of inquiry: what about the United States’s long-standing history of hostility to the independence of, and serial interventions in, Central and southern American nations? Was it not Eisenhower who had engineered, in the CIA’s 1953 Operation Ajax, the overthrow of the democratically legitimated Iranian government of Mohammad Mosaddeq? Was the president not involved, at the very moment he wrote the letter, in final planning stages for the CIA’s Operation PBSUCCESS that would overthrow the democratically legitimated Guatemalan government of Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán in June of 1954? And what about Vietnamese independence? Had it not been declared under the DRVN already in September 1945, with overwhelming popular support in Tonkin, strong support in Annam, and even considerable, though contested popular acclaim in Cochinchina?

Against the well-documented multiple instances of U.S. imperialist interventions in non-Western, non-white nations, Eisenhower’s letter with its self-congratulatory rejection of imperialist or colonialist motivations should have made for a great opportunity to critically examine the self-conceit of American exceptionalist nationalism, the President’s cultural assumptions about non-white peoples and the racial hierarchies they implied, or the gulf between U.S. rhetoric and actions, to name a few. Yet Waite leaves the letter uncommented upon. He concedes that Eisenhower only contemplated independence for the French-created ASVN, with the President seeing Viet Nam “as a generic colonial territory that needed to be rescued from colonialism by strong non-communist nationalist forces” (98). But if Eisenhower already had determined as a matter of U.S. policy that Vietnamese people could only be *granted* independence by the French and through the ASVN, refusing to recognize the –arguably far greater– legitimacy of the Vietnamese population *declaring/taking* independence in 1945 through the DRVN, then his ‘objections’ to paternalism would have to be critically examined as well. Why was a U.S. president whose very actions practically oozed paternalism, in the most generous reading possible, thinking of himself and his government, perhaps genuinely, as being opposed to paternalism? We do not learn Waite’s thoughts on this; instead, he simply claims that Eisenhower had this ‘anti-colonial sentiment’ and wanted independence for the Vietnamese, and uses the President’s private letter as transparent evidence.

As a result of the nature and rather uncritical use of sources, therefore, Waite’s book overall establishes and embraces Western frames, terminologies, and viewpoints as normative. Against this Western, Cold War-era normativity, other parties’ positions and perspectives are far less likely to get a reading that would understand them on their own terms. This applies most obviously to the DRVN.

My final comment thus concerns Waite’s treatment of the DRVN. I must admit to being surprised early on by the use of the jarring term “oligarchy” to describe the leadership of the revolutionary state (8). The author does not elaborate on his odd and unconvincing

choice of terminology that is usually applied to the autocratic rule of a few, wealthy families (cf. the Philippines, Cochinchina). This early passage set the tone for what I sensed throughout the book as its lack of serious and unbiased engagement with the DRVN. Waite uses “DRVN” to refer to the revolutionary state far less than his preference to name the Viet Minh instead, the political umbrella organization that dominated the DRVN until 1951. By frequently calling the Vietnamese revolutionary party to the 1954 Geneva negotiations “Viet Minh,” the book once again adopts Western Cold War-era norms and terminology that sought to portray the Viet Minh as communist ‘rebels’ and delegitimize the DRVN, its government, and its People’s Army (PAVN). All too often, the author’s arguments are rather dismissive of the DRVN’s position. For example, in several instances the public pronouncements of the DRVN leaders are labeled “propaganda” (e.g., 60, 63, 185, 194) and there is an implication that the revolutionary leaders used obfuscations ostensibly to hide their true intents from their supporters. (195: “The Vietminh thus faced the difficult task of defending the Geneva settlement while denying that they had divided the country at the peace-table.” 205: “All over Vietnam, nationalist groups condemned the partition of their country, while the Vietminh denied that partition had occurred.”)

Waite makes no real attempt to explain to his readers the origins of the DRVN, its political and territorial claims, and the considerable resonance of these claims with core precepts of modern Vietnamese nationalism. To the DRVN, partition of Viet Nam, as clearly defined by the accords as merely the *temporary establishment of two military and administrative zones*, was inextricably linked to the accords’ explicit affirmation of the territorial unity of the country and its rejection of the temporary DMZ as a political dividing line, as well as to the promise of country-wide reunification elections. I can see no evidence that the DRVN ever deviated from such an interpretation of the Geneva Accords that was consistent with its own political-spatial claims to authority since 1945. And yet, Waite repeatedly refers to DRVN pronouncements as “denying that they had divided the country,” “den[ying] that partition had occurred,” or (226) “[r]efusing to acknowledge their country’s partition.” In his incomplete treatment of the Vietnamese revolutionary nationalists, Waite does a disservice to his own claim to writing a ‘global history.’

In sum, James Waite’s *The End of the First Indochina War* contains a trove of insights and new sources for the specialist reader, but it misses an opportunity to participate in the long overdue project of extricating diplomatic history from Cold War intellectual constraints and of opening its conventional methodologies to more critical readings of the archives.

When teaching the end of the first Indochina War to final-year undergraduates, I have often asked them to take on the role of one of the major participants at the Geneva Conference in 1954 and to determine what their interests were, and what sort of deal they would settle for, before trying to create a situation whereby they hammer out a deal with their classmates. Aside from one or two glib remarks regarding the use of military force that one can occasionally expect from a student eager to be recognised as a wit, the session typically ends in one overarching conclusion: that they can quite see how an acceptable deal could be reached between Britain, France, China, the Soviet Union and even, with the eye of faith, Ho Chi Minh's Vietminh, but that they cannot see how any such deal would be acceptable to the United States or the States of Vietnam. A similar finding underpins James Waite's new study of the events leading up to the end of the French war in Indochina. Rather than this being a story of an irascible Washington replacing an increasingly apathetic France, he tells us, it was instead the culmination of a wide-ranging international political process, which saw the binary constructs of the Cold War—and the domestic political constraints evident in Britain, France and the United States—shaping the 1954 settlement and setting the scene for a second war in the region a decade later.

In making this case, Waite provides a detailed account of the peace process—taking us from the Berlin Conference in January, through the fraught and bloody fighting at Dienbienphu, to the events surrounding the Geneva Conference in the spring and early summer. He does so, moreover, while incorporating an impressive range of sources from British, U.S. and, in particular, French archives, all of which enable him to really capture the nature of the diplomatic to-ing and fro-ing that was so redolent of this period. And, where possible, he factors in findings from Australia, New Zealand, the Soviet Union, China and Vietnam that add a further layer of richness to his account. What results is a wide-ranging and even-handed examination of the way that the peace was eventually forged, and the way that the decision to divide Vietnam in two came about. In doing this, Waite neatly weaves together a number of different stories and, in particular, provides extensive detail on the French side that makes it quite clear just how important France's role was.

As the anecdote that opens this review suggests, however, I'm not sure how much the book tells us that is truly revelatory. Much work on the international dimensions of the first Indochina War has already been done, and while the book adds a great deal in terms of the level of detail that it provides on this era, it is less transformative when it comes to explaining why events turned out as they did. Situating the eventual peace at Geneva alongside other international events in this era, meanwhile, is not uncommon. The bottom line here, as it is for my students, is essentially unchanged: that the peace hammered out in Geneva was a result of extensive international cooperation and had a far greater chance of enduring if the United States could somehow have supported the agreements or, instead, have kept out of the discussions altogether. Waite's spin on this—that "global competition over the conclusion of the First Indochina War reflected competing visions of how the Cold War ought to be fought" and that "peace in 1954 thus contributed to the *détente* of the 1950s"—is an intriguing one with much to commend it (226). Ultimately, though, I'm not

sure that this quite holds up. I agree that the process of fostering peace in Southeast Asia was part of a period of what Waite calls “uneasy détente” (2) in the 1950s; yet it begs the question of whether there were any real alternatives for the major participants at Geneva. For all their talk of roll-back and liberation, President Dwight Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles consistently proved far less bellicose in terms of action.

Psychological warfare and propaganda, as Ken Osgood has shown, provided the blueprint for how the Eisenhower administration felt that success could be achieved (even if, at times, this required the use of nuclear brinksmanship).<sup>1</sup> Nor was there any desire among the post-Stalin leadership in the Soviet Union to militarise the east-west struggle; they, too, believed that there was more to be gained by public relations and propaganda than outright hostility. Britain and France, for their part, wanted to limit Cold War tensions, while the Chinese, though eager to expand their influence, wanted to try and ensure that their first involvement on the international stage would be deemed a success and that America’s presence in Asia was as limited as possible. Amid all this, Ho Chi Minh’s Vietminh were compelled to accept a political deal far worse than their position on the battlefield warranted. In their actions at Geneva, then, the main participants prioritised their wider strategic interests, a tale that is oft-told and familiar.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, it might be possible to reverse Waite’s conclusion and argue instead that international discussions over peace in 1954 *reflected* rather than *shaped* the détente that was swiftly becoming so evident. Admittedly, my view on this is shaped in large part by the fact that I find the prospect of the Eisenhower administration intervening militarily in Indochina in 1954 to have been unlikely. Plenty of other scholars would disagree, and it is this perennial debate, among others, that continues to bring historians back to the topic.<sup>3</sup>

It is on the key issue of whether the book successfully manages to frame the end of the first Indochina War in a global context, however, that I went to dwell. For while one could argue

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2006); Robert McMahon, “US National Security Policy from Eisenhower to Kennedy,” in Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Volume I Origins* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 288-303; for the argument that Eisenhower’s position was essentially a gamble, Evan Thomas, *Ike’s Bluff: President Eisenhower’s Secret Battle to Save the World* (New York: Little Brown & Company, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> For a good discussion of these issues, particularly in relation to Geneva, George Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* Fourth Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 45-51; Mark Atwood Lawrence, *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 47-53; Qiang Zhai, *China & the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 49-63.

<sup>3</sup>For the argument that Eisenhower and Dulles were always wary and unlikely to use U.S. military force in Indochina in 1954, Richard Immerman, “‘Dealing With a Government of Madmen’: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Ngo Dinh Diem,” in David Anderson (eds), *The Columbia History of the Vietnam War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 120-7; ; Matthew Jones, *After Hiroshima: The United States, Race and Nuclear Weapons in Asia, 1945-1965* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 233-4; for a powerful counter-argument, Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012), 454-549; Kathryn Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 85-95.

that this is essentially a matter of semantics—sub-titling the book an ‘international history,’ after all, would have perhaps removed the point of contention—Waite’s argument regarding the global scope of the Cold War and its impact on the peace process is deeply interesting and raises questions about how this framework could have been extended. In particular, I wonder whether the book could have engaged more with two key issues that are both evident implicitly but never tackled in a sustained way. The first of these is the issue of race; the second, building from that, is the work being done by scholars considering the importance of the Afro-Asian conference at Bandung in 1955. Race crops up in several places in the narrative. For example, Waite cites one French commander who noted in 1953 that the U.S. government was “clearly looking for a success by white men in the Far East” (37). Similarly, he later quotes Eisenhower’s concern over Anthony Eden’s plan for a five-power mutual security arrangement, noting the president’s firm belief that the “US will not agree to a ‘white man’s party’ to determine the problems of the South East Asian nations” (99). Eden, the book subsequently explains, did indeed seek to create a multi-racial collective security pact (albeit with limited success).

The recurrent nature of these sentiments, however, offers a suggestion as to how the analysis could have been taken further. For if the Western powers had their own perceptions as to the importance and appearance of race in the region, the Asian nations themselves—particularly those like India which was becoming a leading force in the emerging non-aligned movement—also had clear views on the importance of race as a tool of understanding. Indian observers, as Andrew Rotter has noted, believed that it was race that “explained the otherwise incomprehensible support the United States gave France in Indochina.”<sup>4</sup> From as early as 1947, meanwhile, Indian leaders framed the French war in Indochina as part of a broader clash between Asian nationalism and Western colonialism and adopted policies to aid Vietminh fighters in their struggle against the French.<sup>5</sup> And, in 1954, Nehru and his advisors drew parallels between American nuclear testing in Asia, growing signs of Western supremacy in the region, and a lack of concern over the potential loss of Asian lives. “It was of great concern to us,” Nehru suggested in one speech, “that Asia and her peoples appear to be always nearer these occurrences and experiments, actual or potential.” Soon afterwards, the Indian Ambassador in Washington noted that many Asians believed that U.S. policy “lacked a moral basis” “because the atom bomb was dropped on Asians, and the H-bomb was tested in Asian waters, which made people in Asia feel we did not value colored people’s lives as we did white people’s.”<sup>6</sup> These were images only made worse by John Foster Dulles’s outright refusal to shake the hand of Chinese Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Zhou Enlai, in Geneva—a point which Zhou would later tell Richard Nixon was “perfectly understandable” given the context of the time, but which Henry

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947-1964* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 169.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Atwood Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 162-5.

<sup>6</sup> Nehru and Indian Ambassador quoted in Jones, *After Hiroshima...*, 203-4.

Kissinger maintains nevertheless “rankled” with the Chinese and which one historian, comparing it with Dulles’s greeting of the Soviet delegation, has argued conveyed the image of inherent racism in U.S. policy.<sup>7</sup>

Together, these contrasting perceptions of race suggest a further outcome: the growing force of the non-aligned movement—as exemplified at the Bandung Conference in Indonesia in April 1955—could, at least in part, be argued to have drawn some of its impetus from the events at Dienbienphu and the international agreement to carve up Indochina. To Jason Parker’s extension of Tim Borstelmann’s description of the process as “*Brown-Bandung-Montgomery*” to “*Brown-Bandung-Montgomery-Suez-Ghana-Little Rock-All African Peoples’ Congress*”, in fact, we might also include Dienbienphu and Geneva and argue for a 1954-1958 chronology of “neutralism-nonalignment’s potential racial dimension”.<sup>8</sup> Situating the peace process that took place in Geneva within this wider context, then, offers an opportunity to consider the way that superpower tensions not only brought the Cold War to Southeast Asia, but also to trace the impact that they had on the swiftly-developing global race revolution that would have such an effect on the world map in the 1950s and 1960s. The emergence of an increasingly visible non-aligned movement, moreover, could also be seen to have had an impact on the Vietnamese struggle for self-determination that would, ultimately, compel the United States to consider whether or not it was prepared to go to war in Southeast Asia.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>See Zhou’s recollection of the event, see Memorandum of Conversation between American and Chinese Delegations, Great Hall of the People, Peking, February 21 1972, *National Security Archive* [http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/publications/DOC\\_readers/kissinger/nixzhou/11-01.htm](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/publications/DOC_readers/kissinger/nixzhou/11-01.htm) (March 22 2013); for Kissinger’s recollection, Henry Kissinger, “The China Challenge,” *Wall St Journal*, May 14 2011; for the comparison with the Soviets, Robeson Taj Frazier, “The Assault of the Monkey King on the Hosts of Heaven: The Black Freedom Struggle and China—The New Center of Revolution,” in Michael Clemons (eds), *African-Americans in Global Affairs: Contemporary Perspectives* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2010), 320.

<sup>8</sup> For Borstelmann’s view, Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 93; Jason Parker, “Ideology, Race and Nonalignment in US Cold War Foreign Relations: or, How the Cold War Racialized Neutralism Without Neutralizing Race,” in Bevan Sewell and Scott Lucas (eds), *Challenging US Foreign Policy: America and the World in the Long Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 85-6.

<sup>9</sup> For an assessment of the complex and debated issue of self-determination, which meant very different things to U.S. and Vietnamese officials, Brad Simpson, “The United States and the Curious History of Self-Determination,” *Diplomatic History*, Volume 36, No 4 (September 2012), 686.

*An Updated Look at the Geneva Conference*

James Waite has produced a fine study of the 1954 Geneva Conference and its worldwide reverberations. *The End of the First Indochina War: A Global History* details the intense pre-Geneva negotiations and the intricate diplomacy conducted at the conference as all the major participants -- Paris, Hanoi, Washington, London, Moscow, Beijing, and Saigon -- sought to end the eight-year Franco-Vietminh War on their own terms. Waite's main goal is to place the Geneva Conference within an international context, and he largely succeeds in proving his argument that "the end of the First Indochina War was a product of global Cold War forces and itself produced global consequences." Specifically, he suggests that Geneva contributed to the "uneasy" *détente* of the 1950s while simultaneously creating conditions "for future turmoil and conflict in Indochina" (2). Geneva was thus a Janus-faced coin in the Cold War slot machine.

In Part I Waite explains how the major communist and non-communist powers became increasingly involved in Indochina from March 1953 through May 1954. Although his first two chapters provide a good overview of the Cold War's growing presence in Vietnam, culminating in the crisis at Dien Bien Phu, the challenge here, and throughout the rest of this brief book, lies in trying to elucidate multiple perspectives. Waite examines both the local and global considerations that led each country to Geneva but there is a clear imbalance in coverage, with western decision-making receiving the most attention. Regarding Dien Bien Phu, others have covered the battle, possible American military intervention (both multilateral in the form of 'United Action' and unilateral in the guise of 'Operation Vulture'), and the battle's significance in much greater detail.<sup>1</sup> Engagement with this literature is somewhat lacking, but Waite's analysis of why the French decided to occupy and defend Dien Bien Phu is effective.

His next chapter is much stronger as Waite examines the Vietnamese perspective of rising Cold War tensions and their impact. He notes that fear of "Vietnam's embroilment in the

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<sup>1</sup> There are many full-length treatments of the battle in French and English, a number of which Waite does not address, including Ted Morgan, *Valley of Death: The Tragedy at Dien Bien Phu that Led America into the Vietnam War* (New York: Random House, 2010); Pierre Journoud and Hugues Tertrais, *1954-2004: La bataille de Dien Bien Phu entre histoire et mémoire* (Paris: Société française d'histoire d'outre-mer, 2004); Pierre Journoud, Hugues Tertrais, eds., *Paroles de Dien Bien Phu: Les survivants témoignent* (Paris: Tallandier, 2004); Howard Simpson, *Dien Bien Phu: The Epic Battle America Forgot* (Washington: Brassey's, 1994); Pierre Langlais, *Dien Bien Phu* (Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1963); and Henri Navarre, *Agonie de L'Indochine, 1953-1954* (Paris: Plon, 1956). For other detailed accounts that Waite does discuss, see Jules Roy, *The Battle of Dienbienphu* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965); Martin Windrow, *The Last Valley: Dien Bien Phu and the French Defeat in Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004); Bernard Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu* (New York: Pall Mall Press, 1966); Vo Nguyen Giap, *Dien Bien Phu* (Hanoi: Quan Doi Nhan Dan, 1979); and John Prados, *The Sky Would Fall: Operation Vulture: The U.S. Bombing Mission in Indochina, 1954* (New York: Dial Press, 1983). Another recent and detailed account of the battle is Fredrik Logevall's *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012).

Cold War equally troubled communist and anti-communist nationalists because bipolar, global confrontation threatened to swamp their nationalist aspirations” (64). Waite thus does justice to an under-studied viewpoint.<sup>2</sup> He then turns his attention to the already well-examined western disunity as the Geneva Conference approached, although Waite provides a more in-depth assessment of Congressional constraints (perhaps the critical factor in stopping American military intervention) on U.S. decision-making than most other works have done.<sup>3</sup> He also offers a first-rate analysis of British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden’s motivations and decisions regarding Geneva, viewing him as the father of the Indochina peace process. In summing up the British perspective, Waite writes that “the Geneva Conference provided an opportunity to pull French chestnuts out of the fire, pour water on any American scheme to broaden the war, stabilize Southeast Asia, and improve east-west relations” (73). He also paints a clear portrait of French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault’s and French Prime Minister Pierre Mendès France’s differing attitudes toward negotiations.

The most important chapter, in this reviewer’s opinion, is chapter 5. Here we see Waite’s most original claim, where he argues that “Partition, coupled with the failure to reunite Vietnam in 1956, provided an important cause for the conflict’s second phase, which culminated with US entry into the war as a belligerent” (81). He provides excellent analysis on how the concept of partition originated with the British and Chinese and how Eden worked to convince other leaders that partition was the best option for resolving the conflict before the Geneva Conference began. He also includes the Australian and New Zealander perspective. While Canberra and Wellington played minor roles before and during Geneva, they certainly had a stake in the outcome, and their perspective adds nuance and detail to the problems within the non-communist bloc. In particular, it is interesting to watch them try to balance between British insistence on negotiations and American insistence on considering the military option, especially United Action. Having said this, it might have been better to have devoted the time and space spent on Australia and New Zealand to more in-depth analysis of the communist perspectives. That approach would have helped address the disparity in East-West coverage. In the next chapter Waite analyzes the probability of United Action, arguing that the French saw internationalization as a bluff and were unwilling to consider seriously American military intervention. This is a debatable conclusion. The Joseph Laniel/Bidault government did seriously consider such action, as Dien Bien Phu appeared about to topple. This chapter is very much focused on western disunity rather than a global perspective of the events immediately prior to Geneva.

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<sup>2</sup> It would have been useful to see some engagement with Christopher Goscha’s, *Vietnam: Un Etat né de la Guerre, 1945-1954* (Paris: Armand Collin, 2011), which illuminates Hanoi’s perspective during this period.

<sup>3</sup> The exception being William Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part I: 1945-1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), which is not cited.

Part II tackles the actual Conference, which Waite cleverly breaks into the Bidault and the Mendès France phase. Aside from the effective organizational approach, which highlights Bidault's ambivalent attitude toward the conference and Mendès France's determination to negotiate a speedy end to the conflict, readers conversant with the scholarship will not find much that is new here. Waite reaches familiar conclusions on the problems within the western alliance, the stronger united front that the communists presented at Geneva, the uncertain nature of Diem's rise to power, and Mendès France's insistence that he did not make a deal with the Soviets (an end to French support of the controversial European Defense Community for peace in Indochina). He does provide an updated narrative of events, making good use of French and British archival sources, and draws attention to how Bidault's inertia not only stalemated the conference but also helped prompt a no confidence vote in the Laniel government. In particular, Waite highlights the coordination among Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, Eden, and Mendès-France that created the conditions for partition to occur, such as ensuring Cambodia and Laos became neutralized 'buffer' areas between China and the rest of Southeast Asia. Thus, "contact between Zhou Enlai, Mendès France, and Eden established a concrete basis for agreement" (161). Equally valuable is Waite's attention to the Congressional pressure and strong domestic current of anti-communism that placed serious pressure on Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to avoid a deal with the 'Reds' during the conference.

In Part III, Waite gives us two concise chapters on Geneva's short-term consequences. He skims through the 1954-56 period, giving brief assessments of where each interested power stood after Geneva, offering snippets of Diem's struggle for consolidation of power, Franco-American tensions in South Vietnam, the refugee crisis, and Diem's battles with the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao politico-religious sects and the Binh Xuyen mafia. His detailing of immediate reactions to Geneva in North and South Vietnam highlights an often overlooked aspect in the scholarship, reminding readers of the post-Geneva effects on the ground. Again, there is a good deal of focus on British concerns, especially about the upcoming 1956 elections stipulated at Geneva, but I would have expected more detail on how each power dealt with the 1956 elections issue given Waite's earlier emphasis on partition.

The last chapter is a bit odd, as Waite examines the global implications of Geneva. Mostly this chapter argues that Geneva had a serious impact on how the Americans, British, and French handled the Taiwan Straits Crisis, Malaya, and Algeria, respectively, without ever establishing clear causal links (211-218). Waite argues that setbacks in Indochina "contributed to the US decision to go to the brink in the Straits" just as "the diplomatic experiences of 1954 helped inspire a potential way out of the crisis. Dulles hoped that he could internationalize the issue, much as Indochina had been internationalized at Geneva against US wishes" (213). Dulles did draw some analogies between the two situations but without additional evidence it is difficult to see how Geneva is directly linked. Moreover, in defending Quemoy and Matsu, the United States risked direct and immediate war with China, not a continued propping up of a French military effort if Geneva had failed. In Malaya, according to Waite, the British sought to improve security after the Viet Minh victories, but this point also needs much elaboration. And finally, Waite claims that failures in Indochina "contributed to the ferocity of French tactics in Algeria" and influenced the

Eisenhower administration's "guarded response" to the Algerian insurgency but provides little evidence of how this is so (217-218).

Waite's "epilogue," curiously titled as it is much more of a conclusion, reminds the reader of the importance of looking at the "domestic political pressures" and "strategic requirements" that drove each participant (223). Waite concludes that "global competition over the conclusion of the First Indochina War reflected competing visions of how the Cold War ought to be fought. Peace in 1954 thus contributed to the *détente* of the 1950s as all sides sanctioned compromise at Geneva." Yet, at the same time, by "internationalizing the provisional peace of 1954, the Geneva Conference paved the way for future global competition in Vietnam" (223-227). This conclusion is somewhat repetitive and a missed opportunity that would have been more effective as an actual epilogue. For example, Waite could have discussed the many longer-term consequences of partition in the late 1950s through the 1960s such as North and South Vietnam's application to the United Nations in 1957, periodic calls for a return to Geneva by the communists to start the unification process, French and British concern about how to respond to such calls, the International Control Commission's woes in trying to deal with the partition issue, and how North and South Vietnam attempted to forge themselves into nations.

In assessing the book's contributions to the literature, Waite overstates his claims that he has presented a "new" and "wider" look (11) at the Eisenhower administration's policy toward Indochina, that his treatment of Dien Bien Phu and the U.S. attempt to enter the conflict "differs noticeably from earlier explanations," (3) and that historians have overlooked the "full scope" of United Action and the Geneva Conference (5). It is thus difficult to view *The End of the First Indochina War* as a 'new' global history since the Geneva Conference has already been placed within a global/transnational/international context by a number of scholars, as have the complexities of intra-alliance competition.<sup>4</sup> In fact, a major shortcoming of the book is Waite's failure to engage seriously with the substantial secondary literature that has also benefited from declassified documents in French, British and American archives. For example, although I appreciate that he sees my book, *Replacing France*, "complementing" his own research (239, fn 10), I would much

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<sup>4</sup> What follows is by no means an exhaustive list of works that examine the conference from a variety of perspectives and emphasize its international dimension: James Cable, *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina* (New York: St. Martins, 1986); Robert Randle, *Geneva 1954: The Settlement of the Indochinese War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); François Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine, Genève 1954* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1979); Richard Immerman, "The United States and the Geneva Conference of 1954: A New Look." *Diplomatic History* 14 (Winter 1990): 43-66; the dated but still lively Philippe Devillers and Jean Lacouture, *End of a War: Indochina, 1954* (New York: Praeger, 1969); Lucia Rather, "The Geneva Conference of 1954: Problems in Allied Unity," (Diss. George Washington University, 1994); Zhai Qiang, "China and the Geneva Conference of 1954," *China Quarterly* 129 (March 1992): 103-23.; Ilya Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2003), 28-53; Arthur Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 230-54; Mark Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall, eds., *The First Indochina War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007): 240-262; Kathryn Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), chp 3, and Logevall, *Embers of War* 549-616.

prefer actual interaction with my arguments since we cover a lot of similar ground—western disunity before and during the conference, planning for a post-conflict Vietnamese state among the western allies, the Diem regime, and the failure of attempts to reunify Vietnam in 1955 and 1956.<sup>5</sup> He also makes little to no use of Lucia Rather’s analysis of Anglo-American disharmony, Pierre Journoud and Laurent Cesari’s authoritative works, which cover in great detail the topics Waite discusses, Stephen Hugh Lee’s carefully researched assessment of American, British, and Canadian decision-making during this period, and Seth Jacobs’ excellent work on Diem’s relationship with the Eisenhower administration.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, the title of the book is misleading because Waite’s primary focus is on the Western perspective. He does not engage in primary research in Russian, Chinese, or Vietnamese archives, but relies on scholars who have when assessing events from Moscow, Beijing, Hanoi, or Saigon.<sup>7</sup> It is perhaps unfortunate for Waite that his book was published within months of Fredrik Logevall’s *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam*, as both place Geneva within an international framework. Waite’s is stronger in terms of archival research, but Logevall has done an excellent job dealing with the voluminous secondary literature and his book is so engagingly written that *Embers of War* will undoubtedly receive the lion’s share of attention. Finally, a word about style. As is usual in these cases, the metamorphosis from dissertation to manuscript is not quite complete. There are a glaring number of typos, the writing style, while quite appealing in

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<sup>5</sup> See Statler, chapters 3-5 for an in-depth analysis of these events.

<sup>6</sup> See Rather; Pierre Journoud, “Les relations franco-américaines à l’épreuve du Vietnam entre 1954 et 1975” (Ph.D. diss, Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2007); Laurent Cesari, “la France, Les Etats-Unis, et L’Indochine, 1945-1957” (Ph.D. diss, Université de Nanterre, 1991); Stephen Hugh Lee, *Outposts of Empire: Korea, Vietnam, and the Origins of the Cold War in Asia, 1949-1954* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995); Seth Jacobs, *America’s Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia, 1950-57* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); and Seth Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America’s War in Vietnam, 1950-1963* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> See, especially Chen Jian, “China and the Indochina Settlement at the Geneva Conference of 1954,” in *The First Vietnam War, 240-262*; Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars: 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Ilya Gaiduk’s *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954-1963* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press 2003); Robert Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF’s Foreign Relations and the Vietnam War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press); William Duiker, *Sacred War: Nationalism and Revolution in a Divided Vietnam* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1995); Jessica Chapman, “Staging Democracy: South Vietnam’s 1955 Referendum to Depose Bao Dai,” *Diplomatic History* 30:4 (September 2006): 671-703; and Edward Miller, “Vision, Power and Agency: The Ascent of Ngo Dinh Diem, 1945-54,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35 (October 2004). For elaboration on the last two, see Jessica Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013) and Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of Vietnam* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2013).

some places, especially in the author's portraits of Eden, Bidault, and Mendès France, is often dense, with many awkward or overly detailed sentences.<sup>8</sup>

I would argue that what we have here is the equivalent of an iPhone upgrade. Yes, there are some new features but nothing revolutionary. The book's major contribution is its intense focus on how partition originated and came to be accepted at Geneva. Waite's argument that territorial division is Geneva's most important legacy is provocative, as is his conclusion that South Vietnam was "the child of the western allies' competing objectives, as well as the direct result of a compromise between the French government and the Vietminh" (5). In continuing this line of reasoning, it would have been useful to have returned to the original partition discussion, found in the March 6, 1946 agreements (never implemented) between Ho Chi Minh and the French politician Jean Sainteny that guaranteed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's (DRV) independence as a free state within the French Union and allowed Cochin China to vote in a referendum on whether to remain part of France or reunite with the DRV. And of course a type of partition occurred much earlier when the French drew the artificial boundaries of Tonkin, Annam, and Cochin China. The book's other major contribution to the literature lies in its updated assessment of British decision-making at and following the Geneva Conference. Eden's role in particular is brought to the forefront in a way few studies have captured.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Waite's use of primary sources from American, French, British, Australian, and New Zealand archives is excellent.

In sum, Waite gives us an updated version of the Geneva Conference and some of its consequences in one convenient volume. He has carefully explained the dual nature of Geneva in both furthering détente in the 1950s and internationalizing and intensifying competition in Indochina. *The End of the First Indochina War* thus provides a modest but welcome contribution to the existing scholarship.

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<sup>8</sup> See Logevall, *Embers of War*, 480-509, 549-581 for an assessment of Eden, Bidault, and Mendès France that reaches similar conclusions.

<sup>9</sup> Exceptions include Eden's own memoir, Anthony Eden, *Full Circle: The Memoirs of Anthony Eden* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960) and Cable, *The Geneva Conference of 1954*.

**Author's Response by James Waite, New Zealand Embassy, Washington D.C.**

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I would like to thank Christoph Giebel, Bevan Sewell, and Kathryn Statler for considering my study and for their thoughtful and robust insights. Thanks also to Thomas Maddux and H-Diplo for arranging the roundtable and to Seth Jacobs for his introduction.

The reviewers correctly describe the book as a history of the negotiation that divided Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel and allowed France to exit Indochina. I am pleased to have “provided greater depth and nuance to the motivations and objectives of the major powers,” as Giebel describes my study, and especially to have contributed to our understanding of the period by re-examining the issue of partition – the critical outcome of the 1954 Geneva Conference and the French withdrawal. The study is global not in the sense that it gives equal weighting to all of the countries involved, but rather because it describes the global forces that influenced leaders’ decision making and explores the regional and global consequences that reverberated after the armistice.

The reviewers point out that others have focused on this period, especially the battle at Dien Bien Phu and the prospect of allied intervention, the emergence of Ngo Dinh Diem, and deepening U.S. engagement in Vietnam. Most historians, however, gloss over the negotiations in Geneva. My study is unique as a book-length account, based on a wide array of sources, with a particular focus on the Geneva Conference. No other recent published book or article has quite the same focus on the negotiations at Geneva and the events that surrounded it, although many other writers have considered the diverse interests at play and have taken an international or global perspective in examining elements of the Indochina War’s conclusion. I make no bold claims that the book employs any new category of analysis. Nor have I asserted that the study radically transforms our understanding of the period.

The book is biased towards western perspectives – partly because of limited access to sources – but partly also because of the fact that most of the contention resided within the western alliance. The secondary works and Chinese and Soviet primary sources that I had access to suggest that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) leadership had, as early as March 1954, accepted the position of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Soviet Union that temporary partition was the best basis for a ceasefire – several months before the fall of Dien Bien Phu and opening of the Geneva Conference.<sup>1</sup> Nothing in the archival record that I have seen suggests that the communist bloc’s unified negotiating position wavered.

This contrasted with the dynamic situation within the western alliance. Each of the three major powers held different positions: the United States sought a continuation of the war with France carrying the burden on land; France struggled towards advocating an armistice that

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<sup>1</sup> The study makes use of Soviet and Chinese primary sources available online at the Harvard Project on Cold War Studies Online Archive: <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~hpcws/documents.htm> and documents available at the Wilson Center, published as part of the Cold War International History Project: <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/7/geneva-conference-of-1954>; Waite, *End of the First Indochina War*, 83-85.

left French-Union and DRV troops scattered across Vietnam; and Britain favoured a ‘clean’ partition and worked across Cold War divisions in favour of a formula that enabled an armistice and avoided the internationalisation of the war. Substantive negotiations involved the western allies more than at the conference table in Geneva; hence my study focuses on this side of the story - though I do consider Vietnamese, Chinese, and Soviet perspectives using both secondary and primary sources. That I rely entirely on western sources is not accurate, although the Vietnamese material I examined comprised French language sources held in U.S. and French archives. The book also draws on some Russian and Chinese documents that are available online as well as works by I.V. Gaiduk, Chris Goscha, Chen Jian, among others.

The study, at its heart, is the anatomy of a negotiation. I make no apology for offering a detailed interpretation of the negotiations that addressed the most significant immediate security challenge of the post-Korean War period. Giebel is correct in observing that I seek “to show that all sides at Geneva acted with a great amount of self-interest and under a plethora of domestic considerations.”

The book is not definitive, however, and there is certainly more to be made of sources from China, Russia, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia – if they exist or become more easily accessible. In particular, it would be useful to see further interpretations that examine the DRV experience in obtaining support for operations at Dien Bien Phu and PRC calculations in providing assistance during this period, including Chinese considerations with respect to possible allied intervention. Soviet views on the challenge of German rearmament, which were closely linked to shifting French domestic politics, offer another theme that could be enriched by access to Russian archives.<sup>2</sup>

My study also sacrificed historiography in favour of the story – and some may see that as a shortcoming. While heavily pruning my discussion of the literature, I attempted to acknowledge those works that I found most helpful in the acknowledgements and through citations. There are, however, studies that I did not access, especially some published in French. I acknowledge this shortcoming.

The reviewers generally agreed that my assessment of domestic political considerations contributes to our understanding of the period. Curiously, Giebel suggest that I should have made this explicit. In fact, I do so throughout the book and in the conclusion (223, for one example). In the introduction I state that my “analysis of domestic political forces adds another dimension” (4). But for all of the conference participants, strategic considerations and political challenges often blurred and became deeply intertwined. French justifications for persisting in Vietnam in the post-war period are an interesting study in terms of the intersection of purported strategic requirements and a political project.

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<sup>2</sup> On PRC military support to the DRV, I found the following article useful: Christopher Goscha, “Building force: Asia origins of twentieth century military science in Vietnam (1900-1954),” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 34, 3, 2013, 535-560.

Interestingly, none of the reviewers picked up on a more obvious opportunity missed in my book's bias towards disunity within the western alliance – deliberations on the political futures of Laos and Cambodia. While this issue was peripheral to the conflict in Vietnam and was patently not an immediate concern for the great powers, the story is nonetheless important. Geneva helped lay the foundation for full independence for two other countries – besides establishing the DRV and State of Vietnam as effective governments. I would like to see a colleague drill into Cambodian and Lao perspectives on the Geneva Conference and its aftermath.

Sewell questions whether my interpretation and narrative of the negotiations is truly revelatory, whether the bottom line is unchanged. I argue that it is and that there was nothing inevitable about the outcome in July 1954 – the telling of the details of negotiations, negotiating tactics, and political considerations is important because it accounts for the close-run outcome at Geneva. Contemporary observers remained uncertain about the possibility of an agreement up until the eve of the deadline.

Giebel's review has little patience for "over sourced minutiae" and "thickets of arguments". My response is simply that the Geneva Conference is a pivotal moment in Vietnamese history and history of the Cold War. My contribution addresses the fact that the literature lacked an updated account of these complex negotiations, heavily emphasizing the preparations for the conference, the meetings in Geneva, and the immediate aftermath of the armistice and partition. I am deeply interested in how diplomatic and political negotiations proceeded during the Cold War period and regard this as an important and legitimate field for historians – although others may consider my focus on diplomatic and leaders-level transactions as a throwback to an older style.

'United Action' – the threat of allied intervention in the sea and air – was one wild card that could easily have derailed negotiations. This is also a topic of a considerable amount of high quality scholarship but little consensus. The reviewers are divided on the issue. I come down firmly on the side that President Dwight D. Eisenhower supported the internationalisation of the war in Indochina, but not Operation Vulture's improvised airstrikes to rescue the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu. The Eisenhower Administration applied intense pressure on Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. I found no evidence that Canberra, Wellington, or London doubted the sincerity with which United Action was proposed – although it was acknowledged that the threat of U.S. intervention was also a negotiating tool or alternatively a ploy to disrupt the Geneva Conference, as French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault believed.<sup>3</sup> What if Australia and New Zealand had responded positively to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles' direct lobbying in March and April 1954? Eisenhower and Dulles were demonstrably disappointed that they failed to secure the necessary international support that would have made intervention politically more palatable. The primary sources do not suggest that Eisenhower and Dulles were in any way disingenuous in seeking internationalisation.

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<sup>3</sup> Logevall, *Embers of War*, 488.

Statler observes that I discuss French policymakers' dismissal of United Action as a U.S. bluff. This is correct, and I agree with her that the French appeals for U.S. air strikes at Dien Bien Phu (Operation Vulture) were genuine – especially the final French request, immediately before DRV forces overwhelmed French positions. The important point here is that United Action and Operation Vulture should not be conflated, as historians have tended to. It is hard to see how the Australian and New Zealand naval assets that the U.S. sought would have helped to relieve France at Dien Bien Phu. . Moreover, U.S. leaders became increasingly sceptical that much could be done to save the French garrison and even attempted to downplay the strategic significance of the battle. United Action always had more to do with building a wider multilateral constituency for the war's continuation and creating political space for France to persist than narrowing the odds at Dien Bien Phu.

In this respect I stand by my contention that I have some new things to say about the well-worn issue of internationalisation.

This is why the details matter. The negotiations of 1954 cannot be explained without exploring the evolution of United Action, Operation Vulture, discussions in Geneva, and other potential game changers, including highly contingent and unpredictable political developments in France.

Sewell suggests that we should consider the racial dimensions of the Cold War and the process of decolonisation. In a similar vein, Giebel would have liked me to deconstruct western documents, looking for imperialist and paternalistic biases in a more “critical” fashion. In particular, he suggests that I do not unpick the contradictions inherent in purported U.S. anti-colonialism. This methodological criticism is easy to make, but without real substance. I completely agree that racial views, religion, paternalism, and interventionist aspects of U.S. containment tactics complicate the anti-colonialism features of U.S. foreign policy during this period – and these themes make for interesting history. But the anticolonial bias was nonetheless a strong feature of U.S. policy towards Vietnam, beginning in the 1940s, as many historians have shown.<sup>4</sup>

As for “letting the United States off the hook,” I’m not especially interested in ‘absolving’ any of the interested parties. My focus was on why, ‘how,’ and ‘so what’ regarding the deal between France and the DRV, which ended a destructive war and the application of colonialism in Indochina.

I was pleased that Statler saw merits in my third chapter, which explores Vietnamese perspectives on the Cold War and the primacy of nationalist aspirations among communist and non-communist leaders, but surprised that neither Giebel nor Sewell discussed this important section.

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<sup>4</sup> Logevall, 54, 316, 338-340.

The reviewers' critiques of the book's category of analysis raises an interesting question – the purpose of this style of international or diplomatic history. Does the diplomatic to-ing and fro-ing over events sixty years ago have any relevance in today's world?

Since 2005 I have worked as a diplomat with the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to a large extent have focused on the security sector and political cooperation in East Asia. The region's security situation today is vastly different from the dark days of the 1950s, although tensions persist. Strikingly, the basics of diplomacy have not changed all that much – the escalating cycle of officials-level consultations, bilateral discussions between ministers, and plenary meetings persist much as they did in previous decades. The main elements of international negotiations have evolved gradually and processes from as long ago as the 1940s and 1950s are familiar and comparable with present practices. Travel is more comfortable, communications are easier, and the media cycle is faster.

This is to say that there is a place for studies that focus on transactional diplomatic processes, including the dead ends and wrong turns, considered against the backdrop of national or domestic political developments. Such studies demonstrate how to negotiate and compromise – to prevent, de-escalate, or settle international disputes.

As for the typos in the book, I still can't find any. But that's always a struggle for the author!

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