

THE GENEVA CONFERENCE OF 1954 ON INDOCHINA

Also by James Cable

BRITAIN'S NAVAL FUTURE

DIPLOMACY AT SEA

GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY

GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY, 1919–1979

GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY, 1919–1991

INTERVENTION AT ABADAN

NAVIES IN VIOLENT PEACE

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND ISSUES IN BRITAIN

THE POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF NAVAL FORCE IN HISTORY

THE ROYAL NAVY AND THE SIEGE OF BILBAO

As Grant Hugo

APPEARANCE AND REALITY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

BRITAIN IN TOMORROW'S WORLD

The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina

James Cable





© Sir James Cable 1986, 2000

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 0LP.

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The author has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First edition 1986

Reprinted (with new preface and minor alterations) 2000

Published by
MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

ISBN 978-0-333-79000-7 ISBN 978-0-230-59925-3 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9780230599253

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library.

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and
made from fully managed and sustained forest sources.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
09 08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01 00

For Viveca, as always

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	ix
<i>Preface to the 2000 Reprint</i>	xi
<i>Introduction</i>	1
1 French Attitudes and British Expectations	14
2 Waiting upon Events	27
3 Changing Course	41
4 The Crisis of April	51
5 Geneva: Tuning Up	66
6 Prelude and Fugue	72
7 Restricted Sessions: Restricted Results	80
8 Phoenix from the Ashes	91
9 France Takes the Lead	102
10 Last Act	115
11 Myths	129
12 Epilogue	136
<i>Appendix 1: The Seven Points</i>	145
<i>Appendix 2: The Final Declaration</i>	146
<i>Notes and References</i>	149
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	164
<i>Index</i>	166

List of Illustrations

- 1 Opening Session. The Soviet and British delegations are in the foreground: Gromyko, Molotov, Troyanovsky; Allen, Eden and Reading in the front row. The author, laughing, is at right rear
Copyright: M. Gaston G. Vuarchex
- 2 Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland
Copyright: The Swiss National Tourist Office
- 3 Georges Bidault and the pipe-smoking Jean Chauvel
Copyright: Weltwoche Bildarchiv
- 4 Pham van Dong
Copyright: Weltwoche Bildarchiv
- 5 Eden's villa.
Copyright: Archives Gad Borel-Boissonas
- 6 Dulles, Churchill, Eisenhower and Eden at the White House in June 1954
Copyright: The Illustrated London News Picture Library
- 7 Mendès France reaches Geneva
Copyright: Weltwoche Bildarchiv
- 8 Les Ormeaux: Scene of the final drama
Copyright: Weltwoche Bildarchiv

Preface to the 2000 Reprint

Fourteen years have passed since the first appearance in 1986 of this account of the Geneva Agreements of 1954, that brief respite in the long agony of Indochina. For the inhabitants those were unlucky years, though perhaps less terrible than the previous fourteen. After the Americans abandoned the struggle in 1973, Indochina soon became a cockpit for the rivalry of China and the Soviet Union. China chose as her proxy the Khmer Rouge, ferocious Cambodian revolutionaries who had inflicted death and destruction on their fellow citizens to an extent that dwarfed the miseries of the French and American wars. Battle-hardened Vietnam was the Soviet client, losing 23 000 soldiers in the ten year occupation of Cambodia begun in 1979, skirmishing in Laos, clashing with Thailand, fiercely resisting Chinese military reprisals against her own territory. The last of these occurred in 1987, when Vietnam still had 140 000 troops in Cambodia and 50 000 in Laos.

The cue for change came from Moscow, where Mikhail Gorbachev, the last General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, proclaimed in 1986 the new doctrine of reasonable sufficiency in defence expenditure. Vietnam, which had been receiving Soviet military and economic assistance worth, by Pentagon estimates, well over one billion dollars a year, came under Soviet pressure to economise by mending her fences with the United States and China. Negotiations began in 1988 and Vietnamese troops were withdrawn from Cambodia in 1989, but sporadic fighting continued between the Cambodian clients of Vietnam and those of China. Years of tortuous bargaining as well as the temporary establishment of a United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia were needed before that unhappy country experienced anything approaching peace. By the end of 1993, however, elections had been held, a coalition government had been formed, most of the United Nations forces had left and King Norodom Sihanouk had resumed the throne of Cambodia he had abdicated in 1955 for an adventurous career of international and domestic intrigue. Sporadic

fighting with the dilapidated remnants of the Khmer Rouge continued.

In Vietnam Soviet withdrawal from Cam Ranh Bay, the forward base of the Pacific Fleet, began in 1990 and Soviet influence declined in step with the Soviet economic assistance which had earlier lent substance to Vietnamese hopes of regional dominance in Indochina. The policy of economic liberalisation introduced by the Vietnamese Communist Party in 1986 offered some compensation and living conditions improved in the nineties. Those years also saw Vietnamese agreements with China and an exchange of State visits. The talks that had started in 1990 with the United States culminated in the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1995, when the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was also admitted to the respectable Association of South East Asian Nations. The People's Democratic Republic of Laos followed suit in 1997, but consideration of Cambodia's application in the same year was suspended when a *coup d'état* split that country's coalition government.

In 1998 it would be premature to speak of peace, but the peoples of Indochina did seem to be experiencing a lull in the fighting and to have some faint cause for hope. Might that state of affairs have been achieved earlier, and with fewer than two million violent deaths, if each government represented at the original Geneva Conference had tried to honour the undertaking in Article 12 of the Final Declaration of 21 July 1954 'to respect the sovereignty, the independence, the unity and the territorial integrity' of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam and to refrain from any interference in their internal affairs'? Did those who followed a different course gain anything even for themselves?

* * *

Preface apart, the text of this second edition differs from the first only in its correction of some printer's errors.

Transcripts of Crown-copyright records in the Public Record Office – the main source of this book – appear by permission of the Controller of HM Stationery Office and all otherwise unidentified references in the notes are to the files in which such documents are classified in the Public Record Office.

Sir Denis Allen, Mr R.A. Burrows, Lord Carr, Mr John Cloake, Sir John Figgess, Mr Terence Grady, Sir Donald Maitland, Sir Con O'Neill, Sir Anthony Nutting Bt, Mr John Priestman, Sir Evelyn

Shuckburgh and Sir Andrew Stark were kind enough to assist the author with information and advice. Sir Denis Allen, Mr Burrows and Sir Evelyn Shuckburgh also read various chapters in typescript. Unless directly quoted none of them bears any responsibility for the book's opinions or statements of fact.

Mr Michael Brown, HM Consul General at Geneva, helped the author to track down contemporary photographs and many of the copyright owners who granted permission for their reproduction were kind enough to make this possible by reducing their normal charges.

The author's debt to the writers of works previously published is severally acknowledged in the notes and bibliography, but is throughout great. So it is to those librarians who helped him find them.

Last but not least, especial thanks are due to Mr T M Farmiloe who, when all the learned foundations had fled, persuaded the publishers to advance the money without which neither research nor book would ever have been possible.

Thanks thus too concisely concluded, a couple of explanations are needed.

Persons mentioned in the book are named as they were known to the author at the time, subsequent changes of style being briefly indicated in the index. Names, not only of people but of places, presented a further problem which has been summarily resolved. Reproduction of all the variant spellings to be found in contemporary documents would have been needlessly confusing to the reader and intolerably vexatious to the editor and proof-readers. Most contemporaries, for instance, gave Mendès France the hyphen his biographer assures us to have been incorrect. Oriental names exhibit even greater variety. Vietnam was, and still is, spelt in many different ways: as one word or two, with or without hyphens and diacritics. Since 1954 an entirely different method of transliterating Chinese characters into the Roman alphabet has emerged and, though still not universally adopted, has made many familiar names unrecognisable to the ordinary reader.

The principle followed in this book is to use a single spelling throughout for all proper names without regard to the idiosyncrasies of the writers cited. The only exception has been for passages quoted in French (translated in endnotes), where such variants as Genève or Londres have naturally been retained. The single spelling chosen is the simplest version familiar to English readers at

the time, eliminating hyphens and the like and taking no account of subsequent changes: Cambodia, Chou en Lai, Formosa, Indochina, Pham van Dong, Siam, Vietnam.

JAMES CAI