

The gathering in Geneva had another important consequence for Canadian foreign policy. During the first few months of the year, the Communist-led insurgency against France in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam enjoyed a string of victories, culminating in the siege of French troops at Dien Bien Phu. Canada watched with concern as morale collapsed in Paris, and Washington tried to stiffen French resolve with promises of “united action” (Documents 714 to 722). The American failure led to a second Geneva conference on Indochina where France, Great Britain, and the People’s Republic of China engineered an end to the fighting. To Ottawa’s surprise, Canada suddenly found itself, with Poland and India, part of the international supervisory machinery established to oversee the cease-fire (Chapter 7, Section 1). Within a year, 160 Canadian military and diplomatic personnel were scattered on duty throughout Southeast Asia.³ Canada’s participation on the three commissions — one each for Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam — would have profound implications for Canada’s foreign policy over the next two decades. This volume includes a generous selection of material chronicling the department’s first experiences in this part of Asia.

Despite signs of increased stability and decreased tension in Asia, in central Europe and at the United Nations, the terrifying possibility of thermonuclear war — by accident or by design — remained. Pearson was dismayed by Dulles’s announcement in January that the United States would rely for its defence on “massive retaliatory power” applied “instantly, by means and at places of our own choosing.”⁴ Pearson rebuked Dulles in a speech to the National Press Club in Washington, reminding him “that the ‘our’ in this statement should mean those who have agreed, particularly in NATO, to work together and by collective action to prevent war or, if that should fail, to win it.”⁵ Some of the rationale behind Pearson’s public statements on this issue is documented in this volume (Documents 443 to 445).

Pearson and the Minister of National Defence, Brooke Claxton, were also distressed to discover that NATO’s military planners had based their latest strategic considerations on the assumption that theatre commanders would have automatic recourse to nuclear weapons in the event of war (Documents 356 to 380). Their fear that Canada might be drawn into a nuclear confrontation without forewarning or prior discussion was not entirely misplaced. Late in the year, nuclear war ominously loomed when the People’s Republic of China and the United States squared off over a handful of small islands in the Straits of Formosa. This crisis, which reached its climax in 1955, will be covered in Volume 21.

The increasingly public nature of nuclear diplomacy in 1954 had an unsettling impact on opinion in Canada and, more important, the United States. Public and Congressional pressure in the United States encouraged officials in both countries

³ Canada, Department of External Affairs, *Annual Report 1954* (Ottawa, 1955) p. iii.

⁴ John Foster Dulles, “The Evolution of Foreign Policy,” United States Department of State, *Bulletin*, Volume XXX, No. 761, January 25, 1954, pp. 107-110.

⁵ L.B. Pearson, “A Look at the ‘New Look’,” Text of Address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs to the National Press Club, Washington, D.C., March 15, 1954, *Statements and Speeches*, No. 54/16.