

Vietnam and America:

A DOCUMENTED HISTORY

Revised and Enlarged Second Edition

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Two days later, on 2 September, before a crowd of over half a million assembled at the Ba Dinh square in Hanoi, President Ho Chi Minh introduced the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and read the Declaration of Independence, which states in part:

The French have fled, the Japanese have capitulated, Emperor Bao Dai has abdicated. Our people have broken the chains which for nearly a century have fettered us and have won independence for the Fatherland. . . .

The whole Vietnamese people, animated by a common purpose, are determined to fight to the bitter end against any attempt by the French colonialists to reconquer our country.

We are convinced that the Allied nations which at Tehran and San Francisco have acknowledged the principles of self-determination and equality of nations, will not refuse to acknowledge the independence of Vietnam. . . .

The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property, in order to safeguard their independence and freedom.

2. First Appeal to the United States (June 18, 1919)*

By Ho Chi Minh

During the Versailles Peace Conference in Paris, where a treaty was signed on June 28, 1919 between the Allies and Germany to end World War I, Ho Chi Minh wrote this polite appeal to the principles of Wilsonian self-determination. He avoids insisting on immediate independence for Vietnam but instead claims legal and political rights for which France presumably stands. At the same time, he is careful to hold full independence as the ultimate goal ("While waiting for the principle of national self-determination to pass from ideal to reality"). From the end of World War I through World War II and its aftermath, Ho Chi Minh would repeatedly call upon the Western democracies to live up to their announced principles. Reading 9 presents one of his appeals to President Truman in the fall of 1945.

*Translations of the French originals in the National Archives, Washington, D.C.

A. Letter of Nguyen Ai Quoc to the American Secretary of State

Paris, 18 June, 1919

To his Excellency, the Secretary of State of the Republic of the United States,
Delegate to the Peace Conference¹

Excellency,

We take the liberty of submitting to you the accompanying memorandum setting forth the claims of the Annamite people on the occasion of the Allied victory.

We count on your great kindness to honor our appeal by your support whenever the opportunity arises.

We beg your Excellency graciously to accept the expression of our profound respect.

FOR THE GROUP OF ANNAMITE PATRIOTS

[signed] *Nguyen Ai Quoc*²
56, rue Monsieur le Prince—Paris

B. Revendications du Peuple Annamite [Claims of the Annamite People]

Since the victory of the Allies, all the subject peoples are frantic with hope at the prospect of an era of right and justice which should begin for them by virtue of the formal and solemn engagements, made before the whole world by the various powers of the *entente*³ in the struggle of civilization against barbarism.

While waiting for the principle of national self-determination to pass from ideal to reality through the effective recognition of the sacred right of all peoples to decide their own destiny, the inhabitants of the ancient Empire of Annam, at the present time French Indochina, present to the noble Governments of the *entente* in general and in particular to the honorable French Government the following humble claims:

(1) General amnesty for all the native people who have been condemned for political activity.

1. The U.S. Secretary of State at the time was Robert Lansing.—eds.

2. Ho Chi Minh's pseudonym at the time.

3. The *entente*, or Allied powers during World War I, included France, England, and after 1917, the United States.—eds.

(2) Reform of Indochinese justice by granting to the native population the same judicial guarantees as the Europeans have, and the total suppression of the special courts which are the instruments of terrorization and oppression against the most responsible elements of the Annamite people.

(3) Freedom of press and speech.

(4) Freedom of association and assembly.

(5) Freedom to emigrate and to travel abroad.

(6) Freedom of education, and creation in every province of technical and professional schools for the native population.

(7) Replacement of the regime of arbitrary decrees by a regime of law.

(8) A permanent delegation of native people elected to attend the French parliament in order to keep the latter informed of their needs.

The Annamite people, in presenting these claims, count on the worldwide justice of all the Powers, and rely in particular on the goodwill of the noble French people who hold our destiny in their hands and who, as France is a republic, have taken us under their protection. In requesting the protection of the French people, the people of Annam, far from feeling humiliated, on the contrary consider themselves honored, because they know that the French people stand for liberty and justice and will never renounce their sublime ideal of universal brotherhood. Consequently, in giving heed to the voice of the oppressed, the French people will be doing their duty to France and to humanity.

IN THE NAME OF THE GROUP OF ANNAMITE PATRIOTS:

Nguyen Ai Quoc

3. "The Path Which Led Me to Leninism" (1960)*

By Ho Chi Minh

Ho Chi Minh's path to revolution mirrors that of many Asian nationalists of his generation. In much the same way, Professor Li Dazhou, stunned by the very fact of the Bolshevik Revolution, called on his Chinese students to join him in studying Marxism and Leninism and, a few years later, founded the Chinese Communist Party.¹ So, too, Li and the early

*Written in April 1960 for inclusion in the Soviet review *Problems of the East* on the occasion of the ninetieth anniversary of Lenin's birthday, in Ho Chi Minh, *Selected Works*, 4 vols. (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960-1962), 4: 448-450.

1. See Jacques Guillermaz, *A History of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921-1949* (New York: Random House, 1972), Chap. 1.

members of the Chinese party would move from an impassioned embrace of the Russian Revolution to an effort to spell out its meanings from their specific situation. In this autobiographical fragment, Ho describes, in a somewhat bemused fashion, his own faltering steps toward Leninism.

After World War I, I made my living in Paris, now as a retoucher at a photographer's, now as a painter of "Chinese antiquities" (made in France!). I would distribute leaflets denouncing the crimes committed by the French colonialists in Vietnam.

At that time, I supported the October Revolution only instinctively, not yet grasping all its historic importance. I loved and admired Lenin because he was a great patriot who liberated his compatriots; until then, I had read none of his books.

The reason for my joining the French Socialist Party was that these "ladies and gentlemen"—as I called my comrades at that moment—had shown their sympathy toward me, toward the struggle of the oppressed peoples. But I understood neither what was a party, a trade-union, nor what was Socialism nor Communism.

Heated discussions were then taking place in the branches of the Socialist Party, about the question whether the Socialist Party should remain in the Second International, should a Second-and-a-half International be founded or should the Socialist Party join Lenin's Third International? I attended the meetings regularly, twice or three times a week and attentively listened to the discussion. First, I could not understand thoroughly. Why were the discussions so heated? Either with the Second, Second-and-a-half or Third International, the revolution could be waged. What was the use of arguing then? As for the First International, what had become of it?

What I wanted most to know—and this precisely was not debated in the meetings—was: Which International sides with the peoples of colonial countries?

I raised the question—the most important in my opinion—in a meeting. Some comrades answered: It is the Third, not the Second International. And a comrade gave me Lenin's "Thesis on the National and Colonial Questions" published by *l'Humanité* to read.

There were political terms difficult to understand in this thesis. But by dint of reading it again and again, finally I could grasp the main part of it. What emotion, enthusiasm, clear-sightedness, and confidence it instilled in me! I was overjoyed to tears. Though sitting alone in my room, I shouted aloud as if addressing large crowds: "Dear martyrs, compatriots! This is what we need, this is what we need, this is the path to our liberation!"

After that, I had entire confidence in Lenin, in the Third International.

Formerly, during the meetings of the Party branch, I had only listened to the discussion; I had a vague belief that all were logical, and could not differentiate as to who were right and who were wrong. But from then on, I also plunged into the debates and discussed with fervor. Though I was still lacking French words to express all my thoughts, I smashed the allegations attacking Lenin and the Third

International with no less vigor. My only argument was: "If you do not condemn colonialism, if you do not side with colonial people, what kind of revolution are you waging?"

Not only did I take part in the meetings of my own Party branch, but I also went to other Party branches to lay down "my position." Now I must tell again that Comrades Marcel Cachin, Vaillant Couturier, Monmousseau, and many others helped me to broaden my knowledge. Finally, at the Tours Congress, I voted with them for our joining the Third International.

At first, patriotism, not yet Communism, led me to have confidence in Lenin, in the Third International. Step by step, along the struggle, by studying Marxism-Leninism parallel with participation in practical activities, I gradually came upon the fact that only Socialism and Communism can liberate the oppressed nations and the working people throughout the world from slavery.

There is a legend, in our country as well as in China, on the miraculous "Book of the Wise." When facing great difficulties, one opens it and finds a way out. Leninism is not only a miraculous "Book of the Wise," a compass for us Vietnamese revolutionaries and people; it is also the radiant sun illuminating our path to final victory, to Socialism and Communism.

4. Founding of the Doc-Lap Dong Minh Hoi (June 1941)*

By Ho Chi Minh

In the northern village of Pac Bo, Cao Bang province, on the Sino-Vietnamese border, the Viet Minh was founded and with it the beginnings of a territorial base and an armed force. As one historian has put it, the Viet Minh united what "proved to be an unstoppable combination of Vietnamese nationalism and communism."¹ Here, as in his famous "Letter from Abroad," written a few weeks after this founding document, Ho appealed to the "common cause" of the entire Vietnamese people and called forth centuries of heroes to join in the struggle: "The sacred call of the fatherland is resounding in your ears; the blood of our heroic predecessors . . . is stirring in your hearts! The fighting spirit of the people is displayed

*Revolutionary League for the Independence of Vietnam (Viet Minh). The selection is from a letter dated June 6, 1941, of Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh), in Ho Chi Minh, *Selected Works*, 4 Vols. (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960-1962), 2: 151-154.

1. James Pinckney Harrison, *The Endless War: Fifty Years of Struggle in Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1982), p. 83.

everywhere before you!" It is important to add that this was not to be a national victory alone, but a revolutionary one, too: "the Vietnamese revolution will certainly triumph. The world revolution will certainly triumph."² The Viet Minh itself, in Ho's conception, was to be an umbrella organization representing all classes of Vietnamese society.³

Elders! Prominent personalities! Intellectuals, peasants, workers, traders, and soldiers! Dear compatriots!

Since the French were defeated by the Germans, their forces have been completely disintegrated. However, with regard to our people, they continue to plunder us pitilessly, suck all our blood, and carry out a barbarous policy of all-out terrorism and massacre. Concerning their foreign policy, they bow their heads and kneel down, shamelessly cutting our land for Siam;⁴ without a single word of protest, they heartlessly offer our interests to Japan. As a result, our people suffer under a double yoke: they serve not only as buffaloes and horses to the French invaders but also as slaves to the Japanese plunderers. Alas! What sin have our people committed to be doomed to such a wretched plight!

Now, the opportunity has come for our liberation. France itself is unable to dominate our country. As to the Japanese, on the one hand they are bogged in China, on the other, they are hamstrung by the British and American forces, and certainly cannot use all their forces to contend with us. If our entire people are united and single-minded, we are certainly able to smash the picked French and Japanese armies.

Some hundreds of years ago, when our country was endangered by the Mongolian invasion, our elders under the Tran dynasty rose up indignantly and called on their sons and daughters throughout the country to rise as one in order to kill the enemy. Finally they saved their people from danger, and their good name will be carried into posterity for all time. The elders and prominent personalities of our country should follow the example set by our forefathers in the glorious task of national salvation.

Rich people, soldiers, workers, peasants, intellectuals, employees, traders, youth, and women who warmly love your country! At present time national lib-

2. Ho Chi Minh, *Selected Writings* (Hanoi, 1977), pp. 44-46.

3. See David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 400-412, for a discussion of the many elements of Vietnamese tradition and Marxist-Leninist practice that went into the theory and functioning of the Viet Minh.

4. Taking advantage of the French defeat in Europe, Siam (Thailand) raised ancient claims to French territory in Indochina, backing up these claims with military moves that the French could halt only with the aid of a Japanese fleet. By negotiations carried out through 1941, France was obliged to cede considerable territory to Siam. See Donald Lancaster, *The Emancipation of French Indochina* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 94-95.—eds.

6. Vietnam Declaration of Independence (September 2, 1945)*

Throughout the period of Japanese occupation, the Viet Minh had been organizing for eventual armed uprising and independence. Formation of youth groups, women's and peasants' associations, a literacy campaign, and self-defense training had all been part of the Viet Minh effort during the war years. These activities continued after the Japanese seized power in March 1945 until the moment was considered ripe for a general insurrection. In August 1945, the Japanese surrendered unconditionally; in the same month, the Vietnamese August Revolution began. It was, David Marr writes, "in the first instance a giant, spontaneous outpouring of emotion, and secondarily a well-organized Leninist seizure of power."¹ By September, a functioning government, calling itself the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, was a reality, well established before the arrangements made for Vietnam by the powers at Potsdam could begin.²

Archimedes Patti, an American OSS agent who was in Vietnam at the time, expressed surprise when he was read a draft text of the declaration of independence Ho Chi Minh had prepared. Hearing the words of the American declaration quoted, he "turned to Ho in amazement and asked if he really intended to use it in his declaration. I don't know why it nettled me—perhaps a feeling of proprietary right, or something equally inane. . . . Ho sat back in his chair, his palms together with fingertips touching his lips ever so lightly, as though meditating. Then with a gentle smile he asked softly, 'Should I not use it?'" On the first Sunday in September, before a vast crowd in Hanoi's Ba Dinh square, Ho Chi Minh began to read the declaration. After the opening lines, he paused, looked out at the crowd, and asked: "Do you hear me distinctly, fellow countrymen?" The crowd roared back: "YES!"³

"All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the

*From Ho Chi Minh, *Selected Works*, 4 vols (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960–1962), 3: 17–21.

1. David G. Marr, *The Vietnamese Tradition on Trial: 1920–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 408.

2. In their last wartime conference, the leaders of the United States (Harry Truman), the Soviet Union (Joseph Stalin), and Britain (Winston Churchill and then Clement Attlee after Churchill was defeated in British elections) met in Potsdam, near Berlin, from July 17 to August 2, 1945.

3. Archimedes L. A. Patti, *Why Vietnam? Prelude to America's Albatross* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 223, 250. The OSS was the Office of Strategic Services, forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency.

United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, this means: All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free.

The Declaration of the French Revolution made in 1791 on the Rights of Man and the Citizen also states: "All men are born free and with equal rights, and must always remain free and have equal rights."

Those are undeniable truths.

Nevertheless, for more than eighty years, the French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, have violated our Fatherland and oppressed our fellow-citizens. They have acted contrary to the ideals of humanity and justice.

In the field of politics, they have deprived our people of every democratic liberty.

They have enforced inhuman laws; they have set up three distinct political regimes in the North, the Center and the South of Vietnam in order to wreck our national unity and prevent our people from being united.

They have built more prisons than schools. They have mercilessly slain our patriots; they have drowned our uprisings in rivers of blood.

They have fettered public opinion; they have practised obscurantism against our people.

To weaken our race they have forced us to use opium and alcohol.

In the field of economics, they have fleeced us to the backbone, impoverished our people, and devastated our land.

They have robbed us of our rice fields, our mines, our forests, and our raw materials. They have monopolized the issuing of bank-notes and the export trade.

They have invented numerous unjustifiable taxes and reduced our people, especially our peasantry, to a state of extreme poverty.

They have hampered the prospering of our national bourgeoisie; they have mercilessly exploited our workers.

In the autumn of 1940, when the Japanese Fascists violated Indochina's territory to establish new bases in their fight against the Allies, the French imperialists went down on their bended knees and handed over our country to them.

Thus, from that date, our people were subjected to the double yoke of the French and the Japanese. Their sufferings and miseries increased. The result was that from the end of last year to the beginning of this year, from Quang Tri province to the North of Vietnam, more than two million of our fellow-citizens died from starvation. On March 9, the French troops were disarmed by the Japanese. The French colonialists either fled or surrendered showing that not only were they incapable of "protecting" us, but that, in the span of five years, they had twice sold our country to the Japanese.

On several occasions before March 9, the Vietminh League urged the French to ally themselves with it against the Japanese. Instead of agreeing to this proposal, the French colonialists so intensified their terrorist activities against the

Vietminh members that before fleeing they massacred a great number of our political prisoners detained at Yen Bay and Caobang.

Notwithstanding all this, our fellow-citizens have always manifested toward the French a tolerant and humane attitude. Even after the Japanese putsch of March 1945, the Vietminh League helped many Frenchmen to cross the frontier, rescued some of them from Japanese jails, and protected French lives and property.

From the autumn of 1940, our country had in fact ceased to be a French colony and had become a Japanese possession.

After the Japanese had surrendered to the Allies, our whole people rose to regain our national sovereignty and to found the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

The truth is that we have wrested our independence from the Japanese and not from the French.

The French have fled, the Japanese have capitulated, Emperor Bao Dai has abdicated. Our people have broken the chains which for nearly a century have fettered them and have won independence for the Fatherland. Our people at the same time have overthrown the monarchic regime that has reigned supreme for dozens of centuries. In its place has been established the present Democratic Republic.

For these reasons, we, members of the Provisional Government, representing the whole Vietnamese people, declare that from now on we break off all relations of a colonial character with France; we repeal all the international obligation that France has so far subscribed to on behalf of Vietnam and we abolish all the special rights the French have unlawfully acquired in our Fatherland.

The whole Vietnamese people, animated by a common purpose, are determined to fight to the bitter end against any attempt by the French colonialists to reconquer their country.

We are convinced that the Allied nations which at Tehran and San Francisco⁴ have acknowledged the principles of self-determination and equality of nations, will not refuse to acknowledge the independence of Vietnam.

A people who have courageously opposed French domination for more than eight years, a people who have fought side by side with the Allies against the Fascists during these last years, such a people must be free and independent.

For these reasons, we, members of the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, solemnly declare to the world that Vietnam has the right to be a free and independent country—and in fact is so already. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property in order to safeguard their independence and liberty.

4. At the Tehran Conference, from November 28 to December 1, 1943, the Big Three (US President Franklin Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin) agreed on broad principles of operation for what became the United Nations. At the San Francisco Conference, from April 25 to June 26, 1945, representatives from fifty nations adopted the UN Charter.

Part II

The War with France

ises to Vietnam and the part she has to play in the defense of the free world. Not since the Crusades has France undertaken such disinterested action."⁵

After four years of war, the French, like the Japanese in March 1945, desperately sought a Vietnamese puppet ruler who would give their occupation some semblance of legitimacy. They found the same man the Japanese had installed—Bao Dai, a figurehead whom the French had first installed as “Emperor” in 1933 and whom they now reinstalled in 1949 as nominal ruler of the “State of Vietnam.” The Eisenhower Administration quickly recognized this artifact as the legitimate government of the entire country.

Meanwhile, the Vietnamese adversaries of the French were developing the strategy and tactics of a revolutionary people’s war. When Vo Nguyen Giap, a principal organizer of the resistance war against the Japanese, formulated the theory of “people’s war,” it was dismissed by Kennedy Administration advisers like Roger Hilsman as “Communist fantasies.”⁶ In the last reading of this section, Vo Nguyen Giap explains how “people’s war” led to the final defeat of France in the climactic 1954 battle of Dien Bien Phu.

7. The Franco-Vietnamese War, 1945–1954: Origins of US Involvement*

By Ngo Vinh Long

Historian Ngo Vinh Long here continues the history from Reading 1, analyzing events from the end of World War II, in August 1945, to the defeat of France by the Vietnamese independence forces, in May 1954. In March 1945, the beleaguered Japanese authorities in Vietnam, challenged by the Viet Minh and facing imminent defeat, had turned nominal power over to Bao Dai, whom they proclaimed Emperor of an independent Vietnam. Japan surrendered on August 15, and the isolated Japanese troops and administrators in Vietnam seemed about to be mopped up by the Viet Minh.

France, however—now officially represented solely by the Free French regime allied with

5. Buttinger, p. 669.

6. See Roger Hilsman’s foreword to the American edition of Vo Nguyen Giap’s *People’s War, People’s Army* (subtitled *The Viet Cong Insurrection Manual for Underdeveloped Countries* by its American publisher; New York: Bantam Books, 1967).

*From Ngo Vinh Long, “Vietnam,” in Douglas Allen and Ngo Vinh Long, eds., *Coming to Terms: Indochina, the United States, and the War* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 21–27. By permission.

*the United States and Britain—was determined to take back its Indochinese colonies. Washington supported this French move for a variety of motives, mainly linked to the emerging Cold War. And during the First Indochina War—between France and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam—the United States was the bulwark of the French effort. When the war ended with the defeat of France, in 1954, the stage was set for direct US intervention in Vietnam.*¹

As stated in the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence,² the new leaders of Vietnam were concerned not only about the prospect of a French reconquest of Vietnam but also about intervention by certain Allied nations. These countries were understood to be the United States and Great Britain, although their names were not specifically mentioned in the Declaration of Independence because the Vietnamese were still hoping that they could be persuaded otherwise. According to the Vietnamese analysis at the time, Vietnam was the first colonial country to become independent after World War II under the leadership of a Communist party and was also becoming a socialist and anti-imperialist country; therefore it was only logical that colonial and imperial powers would try to destroy it.³

However, in his massively researched book on the origins of the U.S. intervention, George McT. Kahin concludes that

the American policies that so heavily shaped the course of Vietnamese history for three full decades after World War II were never intrinsically Vietnamese in orientation: they were always primarily directed by considerations transcending that country. For at least the first three years after the war, because of France’s position as the keystone of U.S. European policies, American priorities in Europe—not Asia—brought U.S. power indirectly, but nevertheless heavily, to bear in Vietnam. Insofar as communism was then an issue, it was primarily its potential in France that shaped American policy toward Vietnam.⁴

While the Vietnamese leaders were wrong about the real reasons for a possible U.S. intervention in Vietnam, they were certainly right in their fear that the

1. See Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars: 1945–1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), pp. 44–54.

2. See Reading 6.—eds.

3. Van Tao et al., *Lịch sử cách mạng tháng tám* (History of the August Revolution) (Hanoi: Su Hoc, 1960), pp. 149–181. For the most detailed first-hand account of the August Revolution and subsequent developments by an American, see Archimedes L. A. Patti, *Why Vietnam? Prelude to America’s Albatross* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). Patti was the head of the Indochina mission of the Office of Strategic Services and a special envoy sent by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to Vietnam to meet and cooperate with Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh.

4. George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1987), p. 27.

United States and other Allied nations would support the French in their colonial reconquest of Vietnam. Again, according to Kahin,

a badly ravaged postwar France possessed neither the military equipment nor the financial resources to mount a major military effort in Indochina. It was thanks to the United States that she was able to marshal the crucial elements of power which she began to apply there within a few months of the war's end. . . . Moreover, within two months of Japan's surrender, American ships in large numbers were carrying French forces to Vietnam, and Washington provided Paris with credits to help it purchase seventy-five U.S. troop transports. Thereafter the United States supplied Paris with a large quantity of modern weaponry—ostensibly for the defense of France and Western Europe, but with the understanding that a substantial part could be used for the military campaign in Indochina.⁵

French Colonial Reconquest

Armed with U.S. weapons and supported by British troops, the French began an all-out attack on Saigon on the evening of 22 September 1945. A war of colonial reconquest thus began, as Joseph Buttinger sums it up: "The aim of the French, who at this time had not yet begun to talk about stopping Communism, was made clear by General Jean Leclerc, who, on September 30, 1945, stated in Saigon: 'I did not come back to Indochina to give it back to the Indochinese.'" ⁶

For the next fourteen months, because of the need to solve the problem of famine as well as a host of other problems, such as the withdrawal of 200,000 of Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese troops that had entered the northern part of the country ostensibly to disarm Japanese troops under the Allied plan, the new Vietnamese government tried to avoid going to war with France by making every effort to accommodate the French through negotiations in Vietnam and Paris. But French troops multiplied their provocations throughout the country, and French reinforcements kept coming as the French government actively prepared for the reconquest of Indochina. The rest of this episode is summarized by Joseph Buttinger as follows:

But not until November 1946 did the French feel strong enough—behind a screen of lies about events in the port-city of Haiphong—to start military action against the North. An incident over customs control, which

5. Kahin, pp. 7–8.

6. Buttinger, *Vietnam: The Unforgettable Tragedy* (New York: Horizon Press, 1977), p. 20. For a more detailed account of the maneuvers to bring the French back into power in the southern part, see Kahin, pp. 8–26.

the French tried to take away from the Hanoi government, served as a pretext for extending the war to the North. On November 23, 1946, the French killed, according to their own admission, over six thousand civilians in Haiphong. . . .

Less than four weeks later, the French were ready to take decisive action in Hanoi as well. On December 19 they issued an ultimatum demanding that the Viet Minh government dissolve its para-military and police forces and let the French army assume control of the capital. Recognizing this as a declaration of war which left him only the choice of resistance or capitulation, Ho Chi Minh acted more as a nationalist than a Communist when he called on his people to defend Vietnamese national independence.⁷

According to French propaganda, the Vietnamese decision to resist unprovoked French military intervention was the beginning of the First Indochina War. This resistance was soon denounced in the West as "Communist aggression."⁸ As Joseph Buttinger has pointed out, this was a lie invented to justify the U.S. support for the French colonial war because without that support "the First Indochina War would then have never taken place, and without the First there would certainly never have been a Second Indochina War. But long before the United States financed 78 percent of the cost of the French Indochina war in 1953/54, their war had to some extent also become America's war."⁹ The compilers of the *Pentagon Papers*, the official secret study of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam that was disclosed in mid-1971, concluded that because the United States backed the French from the very beginning, it ignored repeated appeals from Ho Chi Minh (eight messages from Ho between October 1945 and February 1946 received no reply). The United States also regarded as irrelevant the consistent and repeated reports by its own intelligence and other sources that reached the highest levels of government in Washington that Ho Chi Minh was first and foremost a nationalist, that there was great mass support for his government, that there was no alternative to this government and no hope of crushing the determination of Vietnamese people to safeguard their independence. By April 1946 the United States acknowledged French control of Indochina and "thereafter, the problems of U.S. policy toward Vietnam were dealt with in the context of the U.S. relationship with France."¹⁰

7. Buttinger, pp. 21–22.

8. Buttinger, p. 22.

9. Buttinger, p. 24.

10. See the Senator Gravel edition of *The Pentagon Papers*, (5 vols. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 1: 30. This will be referred to hereinafter simply as the *Pentagon Papers*. Officially the *History of the U.S. Decision Making Process on Vietnam Policy*, this 47-volume top-secret inquiry into U.S. involvement in Indochina was commissioned by [U.S. Secretary of Defense] Robert McNamara and headed by Leslie Gelb. It was completed in January 1969 and 43 volumes of it were made public in June and July 1971 by the *New York Times*.

Four Phases of the First Indochina War

The First Indochina War, or as the Vietnamese called it, the Nine-Year National Resistance, has been treated in detail elsewhere. What should be added here is that the war could be divided into four phases, each of which ended with ever-worsening French military defeats and ever-increasing U.S. intervention. The first phase began with the armed struggle that spread throughout the country in response to the calls of the government of the DRV and ended in the winter of 1947 after the greatest military offensive of the French up to that time, the "Lea" operation, resulted in almost complete disaster.

The second phase of the war lasted for about two and a half years, from the spring of 1948 to the fall of 1950. Compelled to wage a protracted war, the French put into effect a "pacification" program and a "Vietnamization" program. This called for the setting up of a puppet administration and a "national army" composed of Vietnamese draftees. With increased U.S. aid, which totaled about \$1.5 billion by the end of 1949, the puppet army was supposedly to be built up to about 100,000 men and entrusted with the task of "pacifying the occupied regions." From these occupied regions the French launched "mopping-up operations" (comparable to the later U.S. "search-and-destroy" missions) into the countryside, especially in the southern half of the country.

The United States also twisted the arms of the French to install a puppet regime in Saigon headed by the former monarch Bao Dai. As summarized by Kahin:

A full year before the French Parliament finally, in February 1950, agreed to ratify the Élysée Agreement that was to be the charter of Bao Dai's rule, the United States had taken steps toward recognition of his yet-to-be-formed government. . . .

On June 21, 1949—still some seven months before action was to be taken by the French legislature—the State Department publicly endorsed Bao Dai's "new unified States of Vietnam," announcing that its emergence "should serve to hasten . . . the attainment of Vietnam's rightful place in the family of nations," with Bao Dai's efforts to unite "all truly nationalistic elements" providing "the basis for the progressive realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Vietnamese people." It was thereby made very clear that the United States saw Bao Dai's putative regime as the legitimate representative of the Vietnamese people. . . . Ho Chi Minh's actually functioning government, it should be noted, had as yet received no similar promise of recognition from either Moscow or Peking.¹¹

11. Kahin, pp. 34–35.

In spite of all the U.S. efforts, political and military initiative had passed into the hands of the Viet Minh by 1949. In the occupied areas the French met not only with increasingly intense guerrilla war but also with strong popular opposition. In the countryside, self-defense forces were organized. "Resistance villages" (comparable to "combat villages" during the 1960s and 1970s) were built everywhere. French storage depots, strategic and economic centers, and communication lines were under constant attacks. The war was even brought to the hearts of big cities such as Hanoi, Saigon, Hue, and Haiphong, where the French had thought they were secure. Hand in hand with the guerrilla force, during the 1949–1950 period the People's Army launched a series of campaigns over the entire country, destroying more than 200 fortified positions, killing more than 10,000 colonial troops, and liberating large territories.¹²

All this and the victory of the Chinese revolution caused great concern to France and the United States. In order to prevent Chinese military assistance, which the French asserted for the first time in April 1950 was forthcoming as a result of an alleged agreement between the Viet Minh and the Chinese Communists, the French tried to seal off the Sino-Vietnamese border as well as to encircle the Viet Bac region where the central organs of the Vietnamese Resistance were located. On the evening of 16 September 1950 the Vietnamese attacked the French positions. After six weeks of fierce fighting, all the strongly defended French garrisons in the region fell. According to the French military historian Bernard Fall: "When the smoke cleared, the French had suffered their greatest colonial defeat since Montcalm had died at Quebec. They had lost 6,000 troops, 13 artillery pieces and 125 mortars, 450 trucks and three armored platoons, 940 machine guns and more than 8,000 rifles. Their abandoned stocks alone suffice for the equipment of a whole additional Viet Minh division."¹³

The great victory of the Vietnamese in the fall of 1950 created disarray among the French. Martial law was proclaimed in Hanoi, and French nationals received orders to prepare for evacuation from Vietnam. In Paris some political parties called for the abandonment of Indochina in order to reinforce the defense of North Africa and other colonies, while others called for more troop reinforcements and more direct U.S. intervention in Indochina.

The third stage of the war began in December 1950 when Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, one of the most capable French generals, was sent to Indochina as high commissioner and commander-in-chief to try to turn the tide. According to the *Pentagon Papers*, "de Lattre electrified the discouraged French forces like General Ridgway later enheartened U.S. forces in Korea. . . . He calculated that he could win a decisive victory within fifteen months in Vietnam, and 'save it from Peking

12. Nguyen Khac Vien, *The Long Resistance* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1975), pp. 128–133; Joseph Starobin, *Eyewitness in Indo-China* (New York: Cameron and Khan, 1954), pp. 10–102; Kahin, pp. 35–39.

13. Bernard Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis* (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 111.

and Moscow.' . . . Moreover, de Lattre was convinced that the Vietnamese had to be brought into the fight."¹⁴

Basically, the de Lattre strategy was to obtain more U.S. military aid (especially aircraft), increase reinforcements from France, reorganize the "national army" and make them intensify the mopping-up operations, strengthen the defense of the Red River Delta by creating a "white belt" around it in which all dwellings were destroyed, and extend the pacification program over the entire country. In other words, escalate the war on all fronts. Thanks to the fantastic amounts of U.S. aid that came pouring in, air raids of the liberated areas became more frequent and destructive. Irrigation works and dikes were intentionally destroyed in order to create famine in the liberated areas. "Sweep-and-clean" operations by re-equipped mobile units were launched more often, causing widespread devastation and deaths to the civilian population.¹⁵

In spite of all these efforts, de Lattre met with one military defeat after another and was replaced by General Raoul Salan in the spring of 1952. Salan immediately declared a "total war" against the Vietnamese, ordering mopping-up operations that involved 15 to 18 battalions in each operation and were supported by massive air strikes. But counterattacks by the Vietnamese guerrillas and regional forces in coordination with the regular army inflicted heavy losses on the French and liberated large areas in all regions of the country. Citing French official sources, Kahin concludes:

Maintaining the military initiative in most areas, the Vietminh had, by the spring of 1953, extended their authority over more than two-thirds of the area of Tonkin. . . . In central and southern areas, the Vietminh held most of the coastal regions all the way down to the outskirts of Saigon, apart from the enclaves around Hue, Danang, and a few other towns; and about half of the Mekong Delta was firmly in Vietminh hands.¹⁶

Worse French Defeats, Deeper U.S. Intervention

In the summer of 1953 the war entered its final stage. In May 1953 General Henri Navarre replaced Salan as commander-in-chief of the French armed forces in Indochina and proposed a so-called "Navarre Plan" which—worked out in conformity with U.S. instructions—aimed at annihilating the Vietnamese forces and completely pacifying the country in eighteen months in three stages. At this time the Republican administration in Washington was fully committed to the

14. *Pentagon Papers*, 1: 67.

15. Nguyen Khac Vien, pp. 134–136.

16. Kahin, pp. 38–39.

defense of Indochina against "communist imperialism." John Foster Dulles, according to the *Pentagon Papers*, spoke of Korea and Indochina as two flanks, with the principal enemy—Red China—in the center. A special study mission headed by Representative Walter Judd, a recognized Republican spokesman on Asia, surveyed the Far East and reported on the mission's view of the high stakes involved: "The area of Indochina is immensely wealthy in rice, rubber, coal, and iron ore. Its position makes it a strategic key to the rest of Southeast Asia. If Indochina should fall, Thailand and Burma would be in extreme danger, Malaya, Singapore and even Indonesia would become more vulnerable to the Communist drive. . . . The Communists must be prevented from achieving their objectives in Indochina."¹⁷

Because of the tremendous importance that was now attached to Indochina, the United States stepped up its military supplies to the French and pressured them to attempt a military victory. The French government was under mounting public pressure to bring an end to the war, and hence it was ready to go to the negotiating table with the Viet Minh. The United States, however, consistently steered the French away from it. In the words of the *Pentagon Papers*, "In general, the U.S. sought to convince the French that military victory was the only guarantee of diplomatic success."¹⁸ The Navarre Plan was thus adopted, and the United States became heavily involved in the conduct of the war. U.S. aid accounted for close to 80 percent of the French war expenditure for the 1953–1954 period, and airlifts were organized from France, the Philippines, and Japan for supplies to the French. Besides that, U.S. military advisers arrived on the scene, two aircraft carriers of the Seventh Fleet were dispatched to the Gulf of Tonkin, and 250 U.S. pilots took direct part in the fighting. In spite of this aid and in spite of the fact that General Navarre now had over half a million troops under his command, victory was still elusive. In Kahin's words:

At the end of 1953, when it had become clear to Navarre that his central objective of recovering the initiative in Tonkin's Red River Delta was failing, he decided to put his chips on pinning down the Vietminh to do battle in surroundings where he believed his superior fire power and control of the air would ensure success. For this confrontation he chose the village of Dienbienphu, in a valley of northwestern Tonkin astride a major route into Laos, taking the "calculated risk" of garrisoning it with his "best units and reserves in the Tonkin Delta." Initially he had broad support for this tactic from Americans, including [President Dwight D.] Eisenhower, who was now taking a direct interest in French military efforts.¹⁹

17. *Pentagon Papers*, 1: 85.

18. *Pentagon Papers*, 1: 96.

19. Kahin, p. 45.

In February 1954 Admiral Arthur W. Radford told the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Subcommittee that the Navarre Plan was "a broad strategic concept which within a few months should insure a favorable turn in the course of the war."²⁰ The French government, however, already saw the writing on the wall and desired to seek a negotiated settlement to end the war. At the quadripartite foreign ministers' meeting in February 1954 in Berlin, the French used whatever leverage they had to have the Indochina problem placed on the agenda for the Geneva Conference that had been called to work out a political settlement for the Korean War. Although the United States had to agree to this demand partly as a result of the French threat to withdraw from the European Defense Community, the National Security Council ordered that "the U.S. should employ every feasible means to influence the French Government against concluding the struggle on terms inconsistent with the basic U.S. objectives. . . . A nominally non-communist coalition regime would eventually turn the country over to Ho Chi Minh with no opportunity for the replacement of the French by the United States or the United Kingdom" [emphasis added].²¹

It was in the same month that the Viet Minh forces started to surround Dien Bien Phu . . . and on 16 March launched their attack against the French garrison. Although most French mobile units had been defending the Red River Delta, this attack forced the French to move them to Dien Bien Phu and other fronts. In April, President Eisenhower wrote to Winston Churchill saying that France must grant "unequivocal independence" to Bao Dai's Vietnam "so that U.S. entry into Indochina would not have the taint of colonialism." Eisenhower said that the Western allies, particularly Great Britain, should indicate their willingness to become militarily involved along with the United States in its direct intervention because this "would lend real moral standing to a venture that otherwise would be made to appear as a brutal example of imperialism."²² Hand in hand with pressures on its allies, the United States also made actual preparations for direct armed intervention.²³ On 7 May 1954, after fifty-five days of fierce fighting, General Christian M. F. de la Croix de Castries, the field commander at Dien Bien Phu, surrendered with his remaining 16,200 men. At the same time, French military forces throughout the country were severely routed by the various revolutionary forces. Thus, in spite of last-minute maneuvers Washington was faced with a fait accompli: the First Indochina War was over.

20. *Pentagon Papers*, 1: 96.

21. *Pentagon Papers*, 1: 87, 442.

22. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change: The White House Years, 1953-1956* (New York: Signet, 1963), p. 412.

23. *Congressional Record* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 9 July 1954), 100: 1037; Sir Anthony Eden, *Full Circle* (London: Cassell, 1953), p. 143; Kahin, pp. 45-50.

8. The French Return: Two State Department Views (April 1945)*

*In Southeast Asia, as elsewhere in the world, the postwar disposition of disputed territory was of constant concern to the Allies. For Charles de Gaulle, leader of the anti-Vichy Free French forces, participation in the "liberation" of Indochina from Japanese control was crucial if France was to reclaim its colonial empire after the war; the British were less devoted to Gaullist ambition than they were to the principle of continued colonial control as such; and the United States, anxious to create a world in what historian William Appleman Williams calls its "anticolonial imperialist" image, sought to constrain the French. As President Roosevelt wrote to Secretary of State Cordell Hull in January 1944, Indochina should be administered by an international trusteeship: "France has had the country . . . for nearly one hundred years, and the people are worse off than they were at the beginning. . . . The people of Indochina are entitled to something better than that."*¹

By March 1945, Roosevelt's position had softened. In the face of British and French resistance, he now spoke only of limiting French control rather than of establishing an international trusteeship. Moreover, the State Department, in both its Far Eastern and European divisions, was more concerned with the postwar strength of France than with that country's record of colonial exploitation. To be sure, some aspects of former French control would have to be modified—its policy of "commercial exclusiveness," for example. The problem, as one State Department memo made abundantly clear, was this: "It is to the interest of the United States to dissociate itself in every feasible way from the imperialism of the European powers in the Far East."² The issue, of course, lay in how the word "feasible" would be interpreted.

Some indication of what was and was not feasible is given in the two readings below, one a memorandum on Indochina policy from the European Division of the State Department, the other a rival memorandum from the Far Eastern Division. Both were responding to an urgent State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee request for policy clarification. The revisions by the Far Eastern Division (in the direction of pressuring the French to make reforms) so deeply disturbed Assistant Secretary of State James C. Dunn that he left an angry message for Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew, arguing that no memorandum be sent to the President rather than the one drafted by the Far Eastern Division. The United States might, if it chose, use its influence to urge France to improve conditions in Indochina. But now was

*A: Excerpt from memorandum for the President, Division of European Affairs, April 20, 1945, in *U.S.-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967: The Pentagon Papers* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office), Bk. 8, V.B. 2, pp. 7-8. Hereafter *The Pentagon Papers* (GPO ed.). B: Excerpt from memorandum for the President, Far Eastern Division, April 21, 1945, *ibid.*, pp. 13-15.

1. President Franklin D. Roosevelt to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, January 24, 1944, in *The Pentagon Papers* (GPO ed.), Bk. 1, V.B. 1, p. A-14.

2. Draft memorandum by G. H. Blakeslee, Far Eastern Division, Department of State, April 1945, in Gareth Porter, ed., *Vietnam: A History in Documents* (New York: New American Library, 1981), p. 15.

the time "for us to cooperate wholeheartedly with France." In a conversation with French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault, Dunn remarked, "[T]he latter stressed his fears for western civilization as a result of the dominance of Russia in Europe."³ The message ends in this apparent non sequitur. But its internal logic—the link between support for French colonialism and the defense of "western civilization"—became commonplace in the Truman years.

Given this background, it is not surprising that Truman, at Potsdam in August, agreed to a plan of military operations that divided Indochina at the 16th parallel, giving the British control over the south and the Chinese, under Chiang Kai-shek, control over the north. It was clear at the time that this division would facilitate the return, at least in the south, of French troops. In September 1945, British General Douglas D. Gracey released French prisoners of war, re-armed Japanese troops, and then ordered these and other units under his command to seize power from the Viet Minh government, which had been established earlier in the month. There was no protest from the United States.⁴

A. The European Desk Perspective

General de Gaulle and his Government have made it abundantly clear that they expect a proposed Indo-Chinese federation to function within the framework of the "French Union." There is consequently not the slightest possibility at the present time or in the foreseeable future that France will volunteer to place Indo-China under an international trusteeship, or will consent to any program of international accountability which is not applied to the colonial possessions of other powers. If an effort were made to exert pressure on the French Government, such action would have to be taken by the United States alone for France could rely upon the support of other colonial powers, notably Great Britain and the Netherlands. Such action would likewise run counter to the established American policy of aiding France to regain her strength in order that she may be better fitted to share responsibility in maintaining the peace of Europe and the world.

Recommendations

In the light of the above considerations, the following recommendations, which have been communicated to the War and Navy Departments, are submitted for your approval.

1. The Government of the United States should neither oppose the restoration of Indo-China to France, with or without a program of international accountability, nor take any action toward French overseas possessions which it is not pre-

3. James C. Dunn to Joseph Grew, April 23, 1945, in *The Pentagon Papers* (GPO ed.), Bk. 8, V.B. 2, p. 18.

4. On this period, see Archimedes Patti, *Why Vietnam? Prelude to America's Albatross* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), Chap. 32. See also Reading 10.

pared to take or suggest with regard to the colonial possessions of our other Allies.

2. The Government of the United States should continue to exert its influence with the French in the direction of having them effect a liberalization of their past policy of limited opportunities for native participation in government and administration, as well as a liberalization of restrictive French economic policies formerly pursued in Indo-China.

3. The French Provisional Government should be informed confidentially that, owing to the need of concentrating all our resources in the Pacific on operations already planned, large-scale military operations aimed directly at the liberation of Indo-China cannot be contemplated at this time.

4. French offers of military and naval assistance in the Pacific should be considered on their merits as bearing upon the objective of defeating Japan, as in the case of British and Dutch proposals. The fact that acceptance of a specific proposal might serve to strengthen French claims for the restoration of Indo-China to France should not be regarded as grounds for rejection. On the contrary, acceptance of French proposals for military assistance in the defeat of Japan should be regarded as desirable in principle, subject always to military requirements in the theater of operations.

5. While avoiding specific commitments with regard to the amount or character of any assistance which the United States may give to the French resistance forces in Indo-China, this Government should continue to afford all possible assistance provided it does not interfere with the requirements of other planned operations.

6. In addition to the aid which we are able to bring from the China theater of operations to the French forces resisting the Japanese in Indo-China, the United States should oppose no obstacle to the implementation of proposals looking toward the despatch of assistance to those forces from the southeast Asia theater of operations, provided such assistance does not constitute a diversion of resources which the Combined Chiefs of Staff consider are needed elsewhere.

B. The Far Eastern Desk Perspective

[Paragraphs omitted.—eds.]

4. It is established American policy to aid France to regain her strength in order that she may be better fitted to share responsibility in maintaining the peace of Europe—where her chief interests lie—and of the world. However, in pursuing this policy, the United States must not jeopardize its own increasingly important interests in Southeast Asia.

5. The United States Government has publicly taken the position that it recognizes the sovereign jurisdiction of France over French possessions overseas when those possessions are resisting the enemy, and has expressed the hope that it will see the reestablishment of the integrity of French territory.

6. Until the last few weeks the French administration of Indochina has col-

laborated with the Japanese in marked distinction to the administrations of colonial areas belonging to our other Allies.

7. President Roosevelt recognized the future increasing importance to the United States of Southeast Asia. He saw the necessity of aiding the 150,000,000 people there to achieve improved social, economic and political standards.

He realized that dynamic forces leading toward self-government are growing in Asia; that the United States—as a great democracy—cannot and must not try to retard this development but rather act in harmony with it; and that social, economic or political instability in the area may threaten the peace and stability of the Far East and indeed the world.

8. As his solution of this problem, as it relates to Indochina, President Roosevelt long favored placing Indochina under a trusteeship. However, on April 3, 1945, the Secretary of State with the approval of the President issued a statement relative to the plans approved at Yalta⁵ which would indicate that Indochina could come under the trusteeship structure only by voluntary action of the French. It is abundantly clear that there is no possibility at the present time or in the foreseeable future that France will volunteer to place Indochina under trusteeship, or consent to any program of international accountability which is not applied to the colonial possessions of other powers. If an effort were made to exert pressure on the French Government, such action would have to be taken by the United States alone for France could rely upon the support of other colonial powers, notably Great Britain and the Netherlands.

9. The prewar French administration in Indochina was the least satisfactory colonial administration in Asia, both as regards the development and interest of the native peoples and as regards economic relations with other countries. Among the Annamites there is increasing opposition to French rule. The Chinese are giving active support to the independence movement. France will probably encounter serious difficulty in reimposing French control in Indochina.

10. If really liberal policies towards Indochina are not adopted by the French—policies which recognize the paramount interest of the native peoples and guarantee within the foreseeable future a genuine opportunity for true, autonomous self-government—there will be substantial bloodshed and unrest for many years, threatening the economic and social progress and the peace and stability of Southeast Asia.

11. On several occasions in the past few years, French authorities have issued policy statements on the future of Indochina. These show a growing trend toward greater autonomy for the French administration of Indochina, but even the recent statement of March 24 is vague and, when examined with care, indicates little intention of permitting genuine self-rule for the Indochinese. The change in French attitude towards Indochina is believed to have been occasioned by clearer realization of the anti-French sentiment among the Annamites and a be-

lief that American approval of French restoration can be won only by a liberalization of its policies towards Indochina.

12. China is exercised at the economic stranglehold which France formerly exercised through control of the Yunnan Railroad and the port of Haiphong, and is particularly perturbed at the danger to its southwest flank first made visible by the surrender of Indochina to the Japanese.

13. It is stated American policy that the cession of territory by Indochina to Thailand in 1941 is not recognized and that this territory must be returned to Indochina. This territory, however, had in earlier years been wrested by the French from Thailand and its inhabitants are culturally akin to the Thai. Similarly, parts of Laos are Thai in character. Whatever the legalistic background may be, the entire border region between Indochina and Thailand will be a source of potential conflict unless a fair and appropriate frontier is determined by an impartial international commission. The Thai Government will accept any frontier so determined.

14. It will be an American victory over Japan which will make possible the liberation of Indochina. We are fighting to assure peace and stability in the Far East and will, in fact, bear the major responsibility for its maintenance after the war. Encouragement of and assistance to the peoples of Southeast Asia in developing autonomous, democratic self-rule in close, willing association with major Western powers would not only be in harmony with political trends in that area, but would appear to be the one practical solution which will assure peace and stability in the Far East. If this policy is not followed, the millions who live in that area may well embrace ideologies contrary to our own—or ultimately develop a pan-Asiatic movement against the Western world. It is not unreasonable, therefore, for the United States to insist that the French give adequate assurance as to the implementing of policies in Indochina which we consider essential to assure peace and stability in the Far East.

5. The Big Three (Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin) met at Yalta in February 1945.—eds.

9. Vietnam's Second Appeal to the United States: Cable to President Harry S. Truman (October 17, 1945)*

By Ho Chi Minh

Part of an unsuccessful campaign to get Western leaders to recognize the legitimacy of Vietnamese national aspirations in the immediate postwar period, this telegram from Ho Chi Minh to US President Harry S. Truman went unanswered. It was in that sense a replay of Ho's similarly unavailing attempt to get in touch with the administration of a previous Democratic president, Woodrow Wilson, a quarter century earlier (Reading 2). The communication to President Truman presented here became generally known after the release of a mass of hitherto secret material on the US war against Vietnam, material that became known as The Pentagon Papers.¹

Ho Chi Minh summarizes much recent history in this cable: the role of the pro-Nazi Vichy French government in permitting Japanese occupation of Indochina; the support given to the Allied cause by the Viet Minh, which mounted guerrilla actions against the Japanese and received some vague promises of American support for Vietnamese independence after the war; the evident aim of the anti-Vichy French government to restore French hegemony over the former Indochinese empire. Whatever validity these historical arguments had, they were insufficient to prevent an American-backed return of these former colonies to France and its inevitable consequence—yet another Vietnamese struggle for the independence they claimed in the August Revolution of 1945.

Establishment of [a United Nations] Advisory Commission for the Far East is heartily welcomed by Vietnamese people in principle. Taking into consideration primo the strategical and economical importance of Vietnam secundo the earnest desire which Vietnam deeply feels and has unanimously manifested to cooperate with the other democracies in the establishment and consolidation of world peace and prosperity we wish to call the attention of the Allied nations on the following points:

First absence of Vietnam and presence of France in the Advisory Commission leads to the conclusion that France is to represent the Vietnamese people at the Commission stop. Such representation is groundless either *de jure* or *de facto*. *De jure* no alliance exists any more between France and Vietnam. Baodai abolished treaties of 1884 and 1863. Baodai voluntarily abdicated to hand over government to Democratic Republican Government [Reading 5—eds.]. Provisional Govern-

*The Pentagon Papers (GPO ed.), Bk. 1, pp. 73–74.

1. See the discussion of *The Pentagon Papers*, including the three available editions, in Appendix C.

ment rectorated [sic] abolishment of treaties of 1884 and 1863. *De facto* since March ninth France having handed over governing rule to Japan has broken all administrative links with Vietnam, since August 18, 1945, Provisional Government has been a *de facto* independent government in every respect, recent incidents in Saigon instigated by the French roused unanimous disapproval leading to fight for independence.²

Second France is not entitled because she had ignominiously sold Indo China to Japan and betrayed the Allies. Third Vietnam is qualified by Atlantic Charter³ and subsequent peace agreement and by her goodwill and her unflinching stand for democracy to be represented at the Advisory Commission. We are convinced that Vietnam at Commission will be able to bring effective contribution to solution of pending problems in Far East whereas her absence would bring forth instability [sic] and temporary character to solutions otherwise reached. Therefore we express earnest request to take part in Advisory Commission for Far East. We should be very grateful to your excellency and Premier Attlee Premier Stalin Generalissimo Tchang Kai Shek for the conveyance of our desiderata to the United Nations.

10. Franco-Vietnamese Agreement on the Independence of Vietnam (March 1946)*

By the spring of 1946, Ho Chi Minh had successfully negotiated with the French to eliminate the troubling presence of Chinese Nationalist troops, whose propensity to loot and rape had increased the suffering of a population still struggling against famine. With their withdrawal, the Vietnamese had also eliminated the possibility of a Chinese-sponsored "nationalist" regime. Now there remained only the French. A compromise agreement reached on March 6 allowed for the return of French troops, agreed to Vietnamese status as a "free" rather than an independent state, and bound the French to a referendum on the status of southern Vietnam. For the Vietnamese, the choice was stark. "We agreed to allow 15,000

2. For the outbreak of Franco-Vietnam conflict, see the Editors' Introduction to Part II.—eds.

3. The Atlantic Charter of August 14, 1941, a declaration of Anglo-American war goals and principles, was incorporated into a United Nations declaration of January 1, 1942, in which twenty-six nations pledged cooperation in fighting the Axis nations.—eds.

*Bulletin hebdomadaire, Ministère de la France d'Outremer, no. 67 (March 18, 1946), translated in Harold R. Isaacs, ed., *New Cycle in Asia: Selected Documents on Major International Developments in the Far East, 1943–1947* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 169.

French troops to enter the North for a specific period of time in order to boot out 180,000 brutal soldiers of Chiang Kai-shek," Vo Nguyen Giap argued. "It is better to sniff French dung for a while," Ho Chi Minh urged his more uncompromising comrades, "than eat China's all our lives."¹

The agreement was broken almost at once by the French, whose military command in the south simply announced the formation of a separate Republic of Cochinchina. Nevertheless, Ho Chi Minh continued to negotiate in France, returning to Vietnam in October with a *modus vivendi* that promised political freedom to Vietnamese in the south and worked out details for the establishment of mixed Franco-Vietnamese commissions to supervise foreign trade and customs. It was a dispute over who constituted legitimate authority in Haiphong Harbor that led to the all-out French attack on the city in November 1946 and the renewal of Vietnam's armed struggle for independence.

In December, Ho Chi Minh appealed to the country as he had in 1941—"those who have rifles will use their rifles; those who have swords will use their swords. . . ." He had worked hard to avoid war: "We are not unaware of what is in store for us. France disposes of terrifying weapons. The struggle will be atrocious." Nevertheless, "the Vietnamese people are willing to endure everything rather than give up their freedom."²

1. The French Government recognizes the Republic of Vietnam as a free state, having its Government, its Parliament, its army, and its finances, and forming part of the Indochinese Federation and the French Union.

With regard to the unification of the three Ky (Nam Ky, or Cochinchina, Trung Ky, or Annam, Bac Ky, or Tonkin), the French Government undertakes to follow the decisions of the people consulted by referendum.

2. The Government of Vietnam declares itself ready to receive the French army in friendly fashion when, in accord with international agreements, it relieves the Chinese troops. An annex attached to the present Preliminary Convention will fix the terms under which the operation of relief will take place.

3. The stipulations formulated above shall enter into effect immediately upon exchange of signatures. Each of the contracting parties shall take necessary steps to end hostilities, to maintain troops in their respective positions, and to create an atmosphere favorable for the immediate opening of friendly and frank negotiations. These negotiations shall deal particularly with the diplomatic relations between Vietnam and foreign states, the future status of Indochina, and economic and cultural interests. Hanoi, Saigon, and Paris may be indicated as the locales of the negotiations. Signed: [Jean] Sainteny, Ho Chi Minh, Vu Huong Khanh.³

1. Quoted in James Pinckney Harrison, *The Endless War: Fifty Years of Struggle in Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1982), p. 109.

2. Harrison, p. 114. In general, Harrison's account of the 1945–1946 negotiations is excellent, pp. 105–114.

3. Sainteny was a French intelligence officer who served as French Commissioner to Vietnam in 1945–1946. Vu Huong Khanh was an official in the anti-Communist Vietnamese Nationalist Party (Vietnam Quoc Dan Dong, or VNQDD).—eds.

11. Sponsoring French Colonialism: The State Department Decision (May 1950)*

By Secretary of State Dean Acheson

American military aid to the French began as early as January 1946, and by May 1947 recognition of French sovereignty in Indochina was national policy.¹ When the Chinese Communists proclaimed the establishment of a People's Republic of China, in October 1949, US policy moved swiftly to full-scale material support of the French war against the Viet Minh. In the following reading, Secretary of State Acheson firmly tied American national interests to the victory of French colonialism. By the end of the French war, the United States was paying 80 percent of its cost.

The [French] Foreign Minister and I have just had an exchange of views on the situation in Indochina and are in general agreement both as to the urgency of the situation in that area and as to the necessity for remedial action. We have noted the fact that the problem of meeting the threat to the security of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos which now enjoy independence within the French Union is primarily the responsibility of France and the Governments and peoples of Indochina. The United States recognizes that the solution of the Indochina problem depends both upon the restoration of security and upon the development of genuine nationalism and that United States assistance can and should contribute to these major objectives.

The United States Government, convinced that neither national independence nor democratic evolution exists in any area dominated by Soviet imperialism, considers the situation to be such as to warrant its according economic aid and military equipment to the Associated States of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development.

*Statement of Secretary of State Dean Acheson at ministerial level meeting in Paris (May 8, 1950), *Department of State Bulletin*, 22 (May 22, 1950), p. 821.

1. Archimedes L. A. Patti, *Why Vietnam? Prelude to America's Albatross* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 380, 386.

12. Taking Up the White Man's Burden: Two American Views (1954)*

By John Foster Dulles and Richard M. Nixon

In the spring of 1954, as French defeat in Indochina became more certain, leading government officials such as Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and Vice-President Richard Nixon campaigned for the United States to take France's place. To save the "free world" from communism, they argued, US intervention might be necessary, especially because, in the words of the Vice-President, "the Vietnamese lack the ability to conduct a war by themselves or govern themselves."

As France capitulated in Geneva in mid-1954, the Eisenhower Administration decided to maintain an anti-communist government in southern Vietnam and to harass secretly the victorious Communist government, which had been ceded authority over northern Vietnam. To provide a legal framework for these policies, in August 1954 the National Security Council recommended the negotiation of a collective security treaty for Southeast Asia. Such a treaty would, the NSC memorandum pointed out, "provide . . . a legal basis to the President to order an attack on Communist China in the event it commits armed aggression which endangers the peace, safety and vital interests of the United States," allow for American assistance to be offered to a "legitimate local government which requires assistance to defeat local Communist subversion or rebellion not constituting armed attack," and allow the United States "freedom to use nuclear weapons" if necessary.¹ One month later, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was established, pledging the governments of Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Great Britain, and the United States to come to one another's aid and, of more immediate importance, to the aid of Cambodia, Laos, "and the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam," none of which was a signatory.² The legal framework and the public rationale for full American intervention in Vietnam were now in place.

*A: Speech to the Overseas Press Club, New York City, March 29, 1954, in *Department of State Bulletin*, 30 (April 12, 1954), pp. 539-540. B: *The New York Times*, April 17, 1954.

1. NSC 5492/2, August 20, 1954, in Gareth Porter, ed., *Vietnam: A History in Documents* (New York: New American Library, 1981), pp. 164-166.

2. For text of the treaty, see *Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam*, rev. June 16, 1965, report of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 89th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D.C.: 1965), pp. 62-66.

A. Opposition to the Spread of Communism by Whatever Means: Secretary of State John Foster Dulles

... If the Communist forces won uncontested control over Indochina or any substantial part thereof, they would surely resume the same pattern of aggression against other free peoples in the area.

The propagandists of Red China and Russia make it apparent that the purpose is to dominate all of Southeast Asia. . . .

The United States has shown in many ways its sympathy for the gallant struggle being waged in Indochina by French forces and those of the Associated States.³ Congress has enabled us to provide material aid to the established governments and their peoples. Also, our diplomacy has sought to deter Communist China from open aggression in that area.

President Eisenhower, in his address of April 16, 1953, explained that a Korean armistice would be a fraud if it merely released aggressive armies for attack elsewhere. I said last September that if Red China sent its own army into Indochina, that would result in grave consequences which might not be confined to Indochina.

Recent statements have been designed to impress upon potential aggressors that aggression might lead to action at places and by means of free-world choosing, so that aggression would cost more than it could gain.

The Chinese Communists have, in fact, avoided the direct use of their own Red Armies in open aggression against Indochina. They have, however, largely stepped up their support of the aggression in that area. Indeed, they promote that aggression by all means short of open invasion.

Under all the circumstances it seems desirable to clarify further the United States position.

Under the conditions of today, the imposition on Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally, by whatever means, must be a grave threat to the whole free community. The United States feels that that possibility should not be passively accepted but should be met by united action. This might involve serious risks. But these risks are far less than those that will face us a few years from now if we dare not be resolute today.

The free nations want peace. However, peace is not had merely by wanting it. Peace has to be worked for and planned for. Sometimes it is necessary to take risks to win peace just as it is necessary in war to take risks to win victory. The chances for peace are usually bettered by letting a potential aggressor know in advance where his aggression could lead him.

I hope that these statements which I make here tonight will serve the cause of peace. . . .

3. The reference is to the struggle against the Viet Minh.—eds.

B. Fear of Impending French Defeat: Vice-President Richard M. Nixon

... What is to be done [about the war in Indochina]? For one, the problem is not one of materials and wasn't four months ago. More men are needed and the question is where to get them. They will not come from France, for France is tired of the war, as we were tired of Korea. Therefore, additional man power must come from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, particularly Vietnam. The French, however, while slow in training the native soldiers, resent the idea that the United States or others should send men to do the job.

More difficult is the job of spirit. Encouragement must be given to fight and resist. Some say if the French got out, the Vietnamese will fight with more spirit, because they would be fighting for their independence.

But the Vietnamese lack the ability to conduct a war by themselves or govern themselves. If the French withdrew, Indochina would become Communist-dominated within a month.

The United States as a leader of the free world cannot afford further retreat in Asia. It is hoped the United States will not have to send troops there, but if this government cannot avoid it, the Administration must face up to the situation and dispatch forces.

Therefore, the United States must go to Geneva and take a positive stand for united action by the free world. Otherwise it will have to take on the problem alone and try to sell it to the others.

French pressure will be exerted at the conference (beginning April 26) for negotiation and the end of the fighting. The British will take a similar position, because of mounting Labor Party pressure and defections in the Conservative ranks. The British do not want to antagonize Red China, which they have recognized.

This country is the only nation politically strong enough at home to take a position that will save Asia.

Negotiations with the Communists to divide the territory would result in Communist domination of a vital new area. Communist intransigence in Korea perhaps will teach the French and the British the futility of negotiation and bring them over to the plan of "united action" proposed by Secretary of State Dulles [i.e., the SEATO treaty—eds.]...

It should be emphasized that if Indochina went Communist, Red pressures would increase on Malaya, Thailand, and Indonesia and other Asian nations. The main target of the Communists in Indochina, as it was in Korea, is Japan. Conquest of areas so vital to Japan's economy would reduce Japan to an economic satellite of the Soviet Union. ...

13. Vietnamese Victory: Dien Bien Phu, 1954*

By General Vo Nguyen Giap

*In the wake of the French defeat in Indochina came a post factum "battle of the books" in France, during which time various participants delivered their explanations and justifications. Few were more prolific than General Henri Navarre, commander of French forces in Indochina and initiator of the Navarre Plan, under which the French fortified the village of Dien Bien Phu, near the Laotian border, and invited the Vietnamese to attack. In his *Agonie de l'Indochine* (Paris, 1956), Navarre explained how Dien Bien Phu was to be a trap for his Vietnamese counterpart, General Vo Nguyen Giap. Anticipating the defensive tone of recent US military men, who have tried to explain not why they lost in Vietnam but why they weren't allowed to win, Navarre complained about the "defeatism and treason" on the home front that hampered French forces in Indochina.¹*

Quite a contrary analysis is given in this reading by the commander of the forces that defeated the French. Vo Nguyen Giap, former history professor, was Defense Minister of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

The Resistance War: A People's War

Following the success of the Revolution, the Party clearly realised the danger of aggression from the French colonialists. Even in the Declaration of Independence [Reading 6—eds.] and the Oath of Independence, the Party called for a heightening of vigilance, and mobilised the people to be prepared to defend the Fatherland.

The French colonialists' aggressive war broke out in Saigon when people's power had not yet been consolidated and great difficulties in all fields lay ahead of us. Never had our country borne the yoke of so many foreign armies. The Japanese had capitulated but were still in possession of their arms. The Chiang Kai-shek army which landed in the North, did its best ... to overthrow people's power. In the South, British forces occupied the country up to the 16th parallel and tried to help the French colonialists expand their aggressive war. ...

The signing of the Preliminary Convention on March 6, 1946 [Reading 10—eds.] between the French and our forces was the result of this correct policy and strategy. Due to the concession granted by us, part of the French army could land

*Excerpts from Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War: People's Army* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), *passim*.

1. Henri Navarre, *Le Temps des vérités* (Paris: Plon, 1979), pp. 280–282.

at certain localities in north Viet Nam to relieve the Chiang troops. On the French Government's side, it recognised that the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam was a free country within the framework of the French Union, having its own government, army, parliament, finance, etc. . . .

With the Preliminary Convention, we had carried out the policy of "making peace to go forward." Immediately after the signing of the convention, there was a time when illusions of peace partly influenced our vigilance towards the colonialists' reactionary schemes. . . .

At the beginning, owing to the fact that there were progressive elements in the French government and due to tactical necessity, we named as our enemy French reactionary colonialists. But later, especially from 1947 on, the French government definitely became reactionary, the aggressors were unmistakably the French imperialists who were the enemy of our entire people and were invading our country. In this situation, the national factor was of utmost importance. To fight French imperialism, it was necessary to unite the whole nation, all revolutionary classes, patriotic elements, to strengthen and widen the National United Front. Our Party obtained great success in its policy of uniting the people. The slogan: "Unity, unity and broad unity—success, success and great success," put forth by President Ho Chi Minh, became a great reality. The anti-imperialist National United Front in our country was a model of the broadest national front in a colonial country.

The revolution for national liberation under the leadership of the Communist Party never deviated from the democratic revolution. The anti-imperialist task always went side by side with the anti-feudal task, although the former was the more urgent; Viet Nam was a backward agricultural country and the great majority of the population were peasants. While the working class is the class leading the revolution, the peasantry is the main force of the revolution, full of anti-imperialist and anti-feudal spirit. Moreover, in waging the Resistance War, we relied on the countryside to build our bases to launch guerrilla warfare in order to encircle the enemy in the towns and eventually arrive at liberating the towns. Therefore, it was of particular importance to pay due attention to the peasant question and the anti-feudal question to step up the long Resistance War to victory. . . .

In 1952–1953, our Party decided to mobilise the masses for a drastic reduction of land rent and to carry out land reform, implementing the slogan "land to the tiller." Hence, the resistance spirit of millions of peasants was strongly roused, the peasant-worker alliance strengthened, the National United Front made firmer, the administration and army consolidated and resistance activities intensified. There were errors in land reform but they were, in the main, committed after the restoration of peace and thus did not have any effect on the Resistance War. . . .

Looking back, on the whole, our Party stuck to the national democratic revolution line throughout the Resistance War. Thanks to this, we succeeded in mobilising our people to launch the people's war, using the enormous strength of the people to vanquish the aggressors. . . .

Under the Party's leadership, the people's administration played an important

part in the mobilisation of manpower and wealth for the Resistance. "All for the front, all for victory" was the slogan for our nation and it showed the determination of our people to concentrate all their forces to fight to the bitter end to overthrow the French imperialists and their henchmen, liberate the country and wrest back independence and land. This was the slogan of the people's war. . . .

Enemy Strategy: Party Strategy

Launching the Resistance War, our Party accurately assessed the strong and weak points of the enemy and ours and clearly saw the balance of forces and the enemy strategic schemes in order to define our strategic principle.

The *enemy*, an imperialist power much weakened after World War Two, was still strong as compared with us. Moreover, he possessed a seasoned professional army equipped with up-to-date arms, well supplied and experienced in aggressive wars. His weak point lay in the unjust character of his war. As a result, he was internally divided, not supported by the people of his own country and did not enjoy the sympathy of world opinion. His army was strong at the beginning but its fighting spirit was deteriorating. French imperialism had other weak points and difficulties, namely: limited manpower and wealth, their dirty war was strongly condemned by their countrymen, etc.

On *our side*, our country was originally a colonial and semi-feudal country whose independence was newly won back. Thus, our forces in all fields were not yet consolidated, our economy was a backward agrarian one, our army untried guerrilla troops with few and obsolete arms, our supplies insufficient and our cadres lacking experience. Our strong point lay in the just nature of our Resistance War. Hence, we succeeded in uniting our entire people. Our people and troops were always imbued with the spirit of sacrificing themselves in fighting the enemy, and enjoyed the sympathy and support of people throughout the world.

These were the main features of the two sides in the last Resistance War. They clearly pointed out that the enemy's strong points were our weak ones and our strong points were his weak ones, but the enemy's strong points were temporary ones while ours were basic ones.

Owing to the above-mentioned characteristics, *the enemy's strategic principle was to attack swiftly and win swiftly*. The more the war was protracted the lesser would be his strong points, and their weak points would grow weaker. This strategic principle was in contradiction with the French imperialists' limited forces which had grown much weaker after World War Two. Consequently, in their schemes of invading our country, they were compelled to combine their plan of attacking swiftly and win swiftly with that of invading step-by-step, and even of negotiating with us in their time-serving policy to muster additional forces. Despite the difficulties and obstacles caused by their weak points, whenever they had the possibility, they would immediately carry out their plan of attacking swiftly and winning swiftly, hoping to end the war by a quick victory. . . .

Realising clearly the enemy's strong and weak points and ours, to cope with

the enemy's strategic scheme, *our party set forth the guiding principle of a long-term Resistance War*. Facing an enemy who temporarily had the upper hand, our people was not able to strike swiftly and win swiftly but needed time to overcome its shortcomings and increase the enemy's weak points. Time was needed to mobilise, organise and foster the forces of Resistance, to wear out the enemy forces, gradually reverse the balance of forces, turning our weakness into strength and concurrently availing ourselves of the changes in the international situation² which was growing more and more advantageous to our Resistance, eventually to triumph over the enemy.

The general law of a long revolutionary war is usually to go through three stages: defensive, equilibrium and offensive. Fundamentally, in the main directions, our Resistance War also followed this general law. Of course, the reality on the battlefields unfolded in a more lively and more complicated manner. Implementing the guiding principle of a long war, after a period of fighting to wear out and check the enemy troops, we carried out a strategic withdrawal from the cities to the countryside in order to preserve our forces and defend our rural bases. . . . From 1950 onwards, campaigns of local counter-offensives were successively opened and we won the initiative on the northern battlefield. The Dien Bien Phu campaign in early 1954 was a big counter-offensive which ended the Resistance War with a great victory. . . .

Guerrilla War: Only the First Stage

To bring the Resistance War to victory, it was not enough to have a correct strategic guiding principle but an appropriate *guiding principle of fighting* was also necessary in order successfully to carry out that strategic guiding principle. In general, our Resistance War *was a guerrilla war moving gradually to regular war, from guerrilla warfare to mobile warfare combined with partial entrenched camp warfare*. Basically, we had grasped that general law; hence we were successful. However, we did not thoroughly grasp it from the beginning but only after a whole process of being tested and tempered in the practice of war.

In the Resistance War, *guerrilla warfare* played an extremely important role. Guerrilla warfare is the form of fighting of the masses of people, of the people of a weak and badly equipped country who stand up against an aggressive army which possesses better equipment and technique. This is the way of fighting the revolutionary war which relies on the heroic spirit to triumph over modern weapons, avoiding the enemy when he is the stronger and attacking him when he is the weaker, now scattering, now regrouping one's forces, now wearing out, now exterminating the enemy, determined to fight him everywhere, so that wherever

2. Giap refers here to the anticolonial tendencies in the late 1940s and early 1950s, as well as to the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek's regime by the Communists on the mainland of China.—eds.

the enemy goes he would be submerged in a sea of armed people who hit back at him, thus undermining his spirit and exhausting his forces. . . .

Equipment, Training, Leadership, and Popular Action

To organise an army, the *question of equipment* must be solved because arms and equipment are the material basis of the combativeness of the army. Without arms it is of no use to speak of organising an army and of waging armed struggle. In the first stage of the building of the army, owing to our backward national economy, with almost no industry, and with the army's rear in mountain and rural areas only, the equipping of our army encountered many difficulties. The Party pointed out to the army that it had to look for its equipment on the front line, to capture the enemy weapons to arm itself and shoot at the enemy with his guns. We scored great success in implementing this principle. The great part of our regular army and guerrilla units were armed with weapons captured on the battlefronts. The French Expeditionary Corps practically became carriers engaged in supplying our army with U.S.-type arms. On the other hand, our Party guided the workers in the spirit of self-reliance, and found means to manufacture a part of the arms and munitions for the army. In circumstances of extreme hardship and privation, the workers in the arms-factories raised to new heights the heroic and creative spirit of the Vietnamese working class, overcoming very great material and technical difficulties in order to turn scrap-iron into weapons for our troops to exterminate the enemy.

In these circumstances, our Party educated the army to develop the fine nature of a revolutionary army to increase the political supremacy in order to make good our weakness in equipment. Hence our army succeeded, with inferior arms, in defeating the enemy who was many times stronger in weapons. It has become an extremely fine tradition of our army—to vanquish modern weapons with an heroic spirit. However, because of our inferior weapons, in the Resistance War our army and people had to fight in extremely hard and difficult circumstances, to make great sacrifices and shed much blood. We must always realise that inferiority in arms and equipment is a big weakness that must be overcome at all costs. . . . [Space limitations prevent presentation of Giap's analysis of the early stages of the Franco-Vietnamese War. By its eighth year, 1953, this war was going badly for the French, and a change in leadership and strategy seemed called for. General Henri Navarre was brought in.—eds.]

The Navarre Plan and the Vietnamese Response

Since the frontier campaign,³ our army had scored successive victories in many campaigns and kept the initiative on all battlefronts in north Viet Nam. After the

3. This campaign took place along the Vietnamese-Chinese border in 1950.—eds.

liberation of Hoa Binh, the guerrilla bases in the Red River delta were extended, and vast areas in the North-West were won back one after the other. The enemy found themselves in a daily more dangerous situation, and were driven on to the defensive. The Franco-American imperialists saw that to save the situation they had to bring in reinforcements, re-shuffle generals and map out a new plan. At that time, the war in Korea had just come to an end. The U.S. imperialists were more and more involved in plotting to protract and extend the war in Indochina. It was in these circumstances that they worked out the "Navarre plan"—a plan to continue and extend the war—which had been carefully studied and prepared in Paris and Washington.

In a word, *the "Navarre plan" was a large-scale strategic plan aimed at wiping out the greater part of our main forces within eighteen months, and occupying our whole territory, in order to turn Viet Nam permanently into a colony and military base of the American and French imperialists.*

In accordance with this plan, in the first stage, fairly strong mobile forces would be regrouped in the Red River delta to attack and wear out our main forces, at the same time occupying Dien Bien Phu with a view to turning the temporarily occupied area in the North-West into a strong springboard. . . .

In Autumn 1953, General Navarre launched this Machiavellian strategic plan. With the slogans "always keep the initiative" and "always on the offensive," the High Command of the French Expeditionary Corps concentrated in the Red River delta 44 mobile battalions, launched fierce mopping-up operations in its rear, attacked Ninh Binh, Nho Quan, threatened Thanh Hoa, parachuted troops on Lang Son and threatened Phu Tho. At the same time, they armed local bandits to sow confusion in the North-West. Then, on January 20, 1954, Navarre dropped parachute troops to occupy Dien Bien Phu. His plan was to reoccupy Na San, consolidate Lai Chau and extend the occupied zone in the North-West.

About November, after wiping out a part of the enemy's forces on the Ninh Binh battlefield, our army opened the Winter-Spring campaign to smash the "Navarre plan" of the American and French imperialists.

In December 1953, our troops marched on the North-West, annihilated an important part of the enemy's manpower, liberated Lai Chau and encircled Dien Bien Phu.

Also in December, the Pathet Lao forces and the Viet Nam People's Volunteers launched an offensive in Middle Laos, wiped out important enemy forces, liberated Thakhek, and reached the Mekong river.

In January 1954, in the Fifth zone, our troops launched an offensive on the Western Highlands, annihilated considerable enemy manpower, liberated the town of Kontum, and came into contact with the newly liberated Bolovene Highlands, in Lower Laos.

Also in January of that year, the Pathet Lao forces and the Viet Nam People's Volunteers launched an offensive in Upper Laos, swept away important enemy forces, liberated the Nam Hu basin and threatened Luang Prabang.

Throughout this period, in the areas behind the enemy lines in north Viet

Nam, in Binh Thi Thien, as well as in the southernmost part of Trung Bo and in Nam Bo, guerrilla warfare was greatly intensified.⁴

In the second week of March, thinking that the period of offensive of our troops was at an end, the enemy regrouped a part of his forces to resume the "Atlanta" campaign in the South of Trung Bo and occupy Quy Nhon on March 12.

On the next day, March 13, our troops *launched the big offensive against the Dien Bien Phu entrenched camp.*

Our troops fought on the Dien Bien Phu battlefield for 55 days and nights until the complete destruction of the entrenched camp on May 7, 1954. . . .

The war unleashed by the Franco-American imperialists was an unjust war of aggression. This colonial war had no other aim than to occupy and dominate our country. The aggressive nature and object of the war forced the enemy to scatter his forces to occupy the invaded localities. The carrying out of the war was for the French Expeditionary Corps a continuous process of dispersal of forces. The enemy divisions were split into regiments, then into battalions, companies and platoons, to be stationed at thousands of points and posts on the various battlefronts of the Indochina theatre of operations. The enemy found himself face to face with a contradiction: Without scattering his forces it was impossible for him to occupy the invaded territory; in scattering his forces, he put himself in difficulties. His scattered units would fall easy prey to our troops, his mobile forces would be more and more reduced and the shortage of troops would be all the more acute. On the other hand if he concentrated his forces to move from the defensive position and cope with us with more initiative, the occupation forces would be weakened and it would be difficult for him to hold the invaded territory. Now, if the enemy gives up occupied territory, the very aim of the war of re-conquest is defeated. . . .

Dien Bien Phu being the keystone of the Navarre plan, we considered that it should be wiped out if the Franco-American imperialist plot of protracting and expanding the war was to be smashed. However, the importance of Dien Bien Phu could not be regarded as a decisive factor in our decision to attack it. In the relation of forces at that time, could we destroy the fortified entrenched camp of Dien Bien Phu? Could we be certain of victory in attacking it? Our decision had to depend on this consideration alone.

Dien Bien Phu was a very strongly fortified entrenched camp. But on the other hand, it was set up in a mountainous region, on ground which was advantageous to us, and decidedly disadvantageous to the enemy. Dien Bien Phu was, moreover, a completely isolated position, far away from all the enemy's bases. The only means of supplying Dien Bien Phu was by air. These circumstances could easily deprive the enemy of all initiative and force him on to the defensive if attacked.

4. Binh Thi Thien refers to the three provinces of central Vietnam: Quang Binh, Quang Tri, and Thua Thien. Trung Bo is the central administrative division of Vietnam, Nam Bo being the southern division.—eds.