

I Vietnam and the U.S., 1940-1950(1 Vol.)

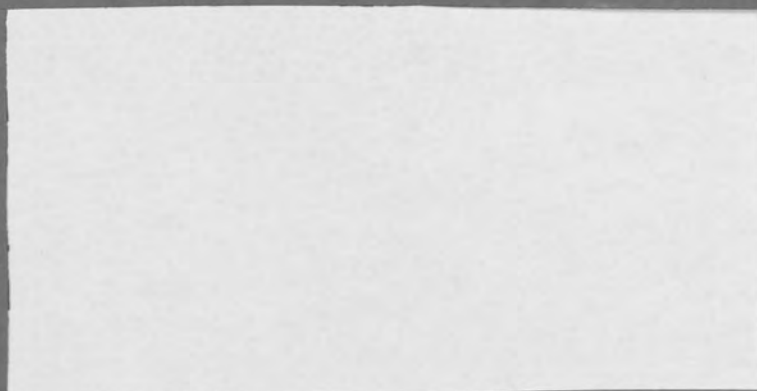
- A. U.S. Policy, 1940-1950
- B. The Character and Power of the Viet Minh
- C. Ho Chi Minh: Asian Tito?

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# UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

## 1945 - 1967



==== VIETNAM TASK FORCE =====

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VIETNAM AND THE UNITED STATES

1940 - 1950

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PART I.

VIETNAM AND THE UNITED STATES

1940 - 1950

Foreword

This portion of the study treats U.S. policy towards Vietnam in the decade of World War II and its aftermath. It is subdivided into three essays. Section A describes U.S. policy toward Indochina, and the developing conflict between France and the Viet Minh as viewed from Washington. Section B analyzes the character and power of the Viet Minh and probes the role of Vietnamese communists within the Viet Minh. Section C discusses Ho Chi Minh's political development to assess his potentiality for adopting neutrality in the East-West confrontation. Each monograph is supported by the maps and charts tabulated below.

Section A - U.S. Policy, 1940-1950

Section B - The Character and Power of the Viet Minh

Section C - Ho Chi Minh: Asian Tito?

Maps and Charts  
(Blue Tabs)

Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin  
France-Vietnam Relations  
Vietnam Nationalist Party  
Communist Party, 1921-1931  
Communist Party, 1931-1945  
Politics in North Vietnam, 1945  
Vietnamese Governments, 1945-1949  
Viet Political Movements, 1947-1950  
Extent Viet Minh Control, 1949  
Ho Chi Minh Chronology

COCHINCHINA,  
ANNAM,  
TOMKIN



Source: Cooper, Killigrew, and LaCharite',  
Case Studies in Insurgency and  
Revolutionary Warfare: Vietnam  
1941-1954 (Washington: SORO, 1964)

A. U.S. Policy,  
1940 - 1950

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I. A.

U.S. POLICY, 1940-1950

SUMMARY

Significant misunderstanding has developed concerning U.S. policy towards Indochina in the decade of World War II and its aftermath. A number of historians have held that anti-colonialism governed U.S. policy and actions up until 1950, when containment of communism supervened. For example, Bernard Fall (e.g. in his 1967 post-mortem book, Last Reflections On a War) categorized American policy toward Indochina in six periods: "(1) Anti-Vichy, 1940-1945; (2) Pro-Viet Minh, 1945-1946; (3) Non-involvement, 1946 - June 1950; (4) Pro-French, 1950 - July 1954; (5) Non-military involvement, 1954 - November 1961; (6) Direct and full involvement, 1961 - ." Commenting that the first four periods are those "least known even to the specialist," Fall developed the thesis that President Roosevelt was determined "to eliminate the French from Indochina at all costs," and had pressured the Allies to establish an international trusteeship to administer Indochina until the nations there were ready to assume full independence. This obdurate anti-colonialism, in Fall's view, led to cold refusal of American aid for French resistance fighters, and to a policy of promoting Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh as the alternative to restoring the French bonds. But, the argument goes, Roosevelt died, and principle faded; by late 1946, anti-colonialism mutated into neutrality. According to Fall: "Whether this was due to a deliberate policy in Washington or, conversely, to an absence of policy, is not quite clear....The United States, preoccupied in Europe, ceased to be a diplomatic factor in Indochina until the outbreak of the Korean War." In 1950, anti-communism asserted itself, and in a remarkable volte-face, the United States threw its economic and military resources behind France in its war against the Viet Minh. Other commentators, conversely -- prominent among them, the historians of the Viet Minh -- have described U.S. policy as consistently condoning and assisting the reimposition of French colonial power in Indochina, with a concomitant disregard for the nationalist aspirations of the Vietnamese.

Neither interpretation squares with the record; the United States was less concerned over Indochina, and less purposeful than either assumes. Ambivalence characterized U.S. policy during World War II, and was the root of much subsequent misunderstanding. On the one hand, the U.S. repeatedly reassured the French that its colonial possessions would be returned to it after the war. On the other hand, the U.S. broadly committed itself in the Atlantic Charter to support national self-determination, and President Roosevelt personally and vehemently advocated independence for Indochina. F.D.R. regarded Indochina as a flagrant example of onerous colonialism which should be turned over to a trusteeship rather than returned to France. The President discussed this proposal with the Allies at the Cairo, Teheran, and Yalta Conferences and received the endorsement of Chiang Kai-shek and Stalin; Prime Minister Churchill demurred.



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At one point, Fall reports, the President offered General de Gaulle Filipino advisers to help France establish a "more progressive policy in Indochina" -- which offer the General received in "pensive silence."

Ultimately, U.S. policy was governed neither by the principles of the Atlantic Charter, nor by the President's anti-colonialism, but by the dictates of military strategy, and by British intransigence on the colonial issue. The United States, concentrating its forces against Japan, accepted British military primacy in Southeast Asia, and divided Indochina at 16th parallel between the British and the Chinese for the purposes of occupation. U.S. commanders serving with the British and Chinese, while instructed to avoid ostensible alignment with the French, were permitted to conduct operations in Indochina which did not detract from the campaign against Japan. Consistent with F.D.R.'s guidance, the U.S. did provide modest aid to French--and Viet Minh--resistance forces in Vietnam after March, 1945, but refused to provide shipping to move Free French troops there. Pressed by both the British and the French for clarification of U.S. intentions regarding the political status of Indochina, F.D.R. maintained that "it is a matter for postwar."

The President's trusteeship concept foundered as early as March 1943, when the U.S. discovered that the British, concerned over possible prejudice to Commonwealth policy, proved to be unwilling to join in any declaration on trusteeships, and indeed any statement endorsing national independence which went beyond the Atlantic Charter's vague "respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live." So sensitive were the British on this point that the Dumbarton Oaks Conference of 1944, at which the blueprint for the postwar international system was negotiated, skirted the colonial issue, and avoided trusteeships altogether. At each key decisional point at which the President could have influenced the course of events toward trusteeship -- in relations with the U.K., in casting the United Nations Charter, in instructions to allied commanders -- he declined to do so; hence, despite his lip service to trusteeship and anti-colonialism, F.D.R. in fact assigned to Indochina a status correlative to Burma, Malaya, Singapore and Indonesia: free territory to be reconquered and returned to its former owners. Non-intervention by the U.S. on behalf of the Vietnamese was tantamount to acceptance of the French return. On April 3, 1945, with President Roosevelt's approval, Secretary of State Stettinius issued a statement that, as a result of the Yalta talks, the U.S. would look to trusteeship as a postwar arrangement only for "territories taken from the enemy," and for "territories as might voluntarily be placed under trusteeship." By context, and by the Secretary of State's subsequent interpretation, Indochina fell into the latter category. Trusteeship status for Indochina became, then, a matter for French determination.

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Shortly following President Truman's entry into office, the U.S. assured France that it had never questioned, "even by implication, French sovereignty over Indo-China." The U.S. policy was to press France for progressive measures in Indochina, but to expect France to decide when its peoples would be ready for independence; "such decisions would preclude the establishment of a trusteeship in Indochina except with the consent of the French Government." These guidelines, established by June, 1945 -- before the end of the war -- remained fundamental to U.S. policy.

With British cooperation, French military forces were reestablished in South Vietnam in September, 1945. The U.S. expressed dismay at the outbreak of guerrilla warfare which followed, and pointed out that while it had no intention of opposing the reestablishment of French control, "it is not the policy of this government to assist the French to reestablish their control over Indochina by force, and the willingness of the U.S. to see French control reestablished assumes that [the] French claim to have the support of the population in Indochina is borne out by future events." Through the fall and winter of 1945-1946, the U.S. received a series of requests from Ho Chi Minh for intervention in Vietnam; these were, on the record, unanswered. However, the U.S. steadfastly refused to assist the French military effort, e.g., forbidding American flag vessels to carry troops or war materiel to Vietnam. On March 6, 1946, the French and Ho signed an Accord in which Ho acceded to French re-entry into North Vietnam in return for recognition of the DRV as a "Free State," part of the French Union. As of April 1946, allied occupation of Indochina was officially terminated, and the U.S. acknowledged to France that all of Indochina had reverted to French control. Thereafter, the problems of U.S. policy toward Vietnam were dealt with in the context of the U.S. relationship with France. (Tab 1)

In late 1946, the Franco-Viet Minh War began in earnest. A chart (pp. A37 ff) summarizes the principal events in the relations between France and Vietnam, 1946-1949, describing the milestones along the route by which France, on the one hand, failed to reach any lasting accommodation with Ho Chi Minh, and, on the other hand, erected the "Bao Dai solution" in its stead. The U.S. during these years continued to regard the conflict as fundamentally a matter for French resolution. The U.S. in its representations to France deplored the prospect of protracted war, and urged meaningful concessions to Vietnamese nationalism. However, the U.S., deterred by the history of Ho's communist affiliation, always stopped short of endorsing Ho Chi Minh or the Viet Minh. Accordingly, U.S. policy gravitated with that of France toward the Bao Dai solution. At no point was the U.S. prepared to adopt an openly interventionist course. To have done so would have clashed with the expressed British view that Indochina was an exclusively French concern, and played into the hands of France's extremist political parties of both the Right and the Left. The U.S. was particularly apprehensive lest by intervening it strengthen the political position of French Communists. Moreover,

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in 1946 and 1947, France and Britain were moving toward an anti-Soviet alliance in Europe, and the U.S. was reluctant to press a potentially divisive policy. The U.S. considered the fate of Vietnamese nationalism relatively insignificant compared with European economic recovery and collective security from communist domination.

It is not as though the U.S. was not prepared to act in circumstances such as these. For example, in the 1945-1946 dispute over Dutch possessions in Indonesia, the U.S. actively intervened against its Dutch ally. In this case, however, the intervention was in concert with the U.K. (which steadfastly refused similar action in Indochina) and against the Netherlands, a much less significant ally in Europe than France. In wider company and at projected lower cost, the U.S. could and did show a determination to act against colonialism.

The resultant U.S. policy has most often been termed "neutrality." It was, however, also consistent with the policy of deferring to French volition announced by President Roosevelt's Secretary of State on 3 April 1945. It was a policy characterized by the same indecision that had marked U.S. wartime policy. Moreover, at the time, Indochina appeared to many to be one region in the troubled postwar world in which the U.S. might enjoy the luxury of abstention.

In February, 1947, early in the war, the U.S. Ambassador in Paris was instructed to reassure Premier Ramadier of the "very friendliest feelings" of the U.S. toward France and its interest in supporting France in recovering its economic, political and military strength:

"In spite any misunderstanding which might have arisen in minds French in regard to our position concerning Indochina they must appreciate that we have fully recognized France's sovereign position in that area and we do not wish to have it appear that we are in any way endeavoring undermine that position, and French should know it is our desire to be helpful and we stand ready assist any appropriate way we can to find solution for Indochinese problem. At same time we cannot shut our eyes to fact that there are two sides this problem and that our reports indicate both a lack French understanding of other side (more in Saigon than in Paris) and continued existence dangerously outmoded colonial outlook and methods in area. Furthermore, there is no escape from fact that trend of times is to effect that colonial empires in XIX Century sense are rapidly becoming thing of past. Action Brit in India and Burma and Dutch in Indonesia are outstanding examples this trend, and French themselves took cognizance of it both in new Constitution and in their agreements with Vietnam. On other hand we do not lose sight fact that Ho Chi Minh has direct Communist connections and it should be obvious that we are not interested in seeing colonial empire administrations supplanted by philosophy and political organizations emanating from and controlled by Kremlin....

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"Frankly we have no solution of problem to suggest. It is basically matter for two parties to work out themselves and from your reports and those from Indochina we are led to feel that both parties have endeavored to keep door open to some sort of settlement. We appreciate fact that Vietnam started present fighting in Indochina on December 19 and that this action has made it more difficult for French to adopt a position of generosity and conciliation. Nevertheless we hope that French will find it possible to be more than generous in trying to find a solution."

The U.S. anxiously followed the vacillations of France's policy toward Bao Dai, exhorting the French to translate the successive "agreements" they contracted with him into an effective nationalist alternative to Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh. Increasingly, the U.S. sensed that French unwillingness to concede political power to Vietnamese heightened the possibility of the Franco-Viet Minh conflict being transformed into a struggle with Soviet imperialism. U.S. diplomats were instructed to "apply such persuasion and/or pressure as is best calculated [to] produce desired result [of France's] unequivocally and promptly approving the principle of Viet independence." France was notified that the U.S. was willing to extend financial aid to a Vietnamese government not a French puppet, "but could not give consideration of altering its present policy in this regard unless real progress [is] made in reaching non-Communist solution in Indochina based on cooperation of true nationalists of that country."

As of 1948, however, the U.S. remained uncertain that Ho and the Viet Minh were in league with the Kremlin. A State Department appraisal of Ho Chi Minh in July 1948, indicated that:

"1. Depts info indicates that Ho Chi Minh is Communist. His long and well-known record in Comintern during twenties and thirties, continuous support by French Communist newspaper Humanite since 1945, praise given him by Radio Moscow (which for past six months has been devoting increasing attention to Indochina) and fact he has been called "leading communist" by recent Russian publications as well as Daily Worker makes any other conclusion appear to be wishful thinking.

"2. Dept has no evidence of direct link between Ho and Moscow but assumes it exists, nor is it able evaluate amount pressure or guidance Moscow exerting. We have impression Ho must be given or is retaining large degree latitude. Dept considers that USSR accomplishing its immediate aims in Indochina by (a) pinning down large numbers of French troops, (b) causing steady drain upon French economy thereby tending retard recovery and dissipate ECA assistance to France, and (c) denying to world generally surpluses which Indochina normally has available thus perpetuating conditions of disorder and shortages

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which favorable to growth communism. Furthermore, Ho seems quite capable of retaining and even strengthening his grip on Indochina with no outside assistance other than continuing procession of French puppet govts."

In the fall of 1948, the Office of Intelligence Research in the Department of State conducted a survey of communist influence in Southeast Asia. Evidence of Kremlin-directed conspiracy was found in virtually all countries except Vietnam:

"Since December 19, 1946, there have been continuous conflicts between French forces and the nationalist government of Vietnam. This government is a coalition in which avowed communists hold influential positions. Although the French admit the influence of this government, they have consistently refused to deal with its leader, Ho Chi Minh, on the grounds that he is a communist.

"To date the Vietnam press and radio have not adopted an anti-American position. It is rather the French colonial press that has been strongly anti-American and has freely accused the U.S. of imperialism in Indochina to the point of approximating the official Moscow position. Although the Vietnam radio has been closely watched for a new position toward the U.S., no change has appeared so far. Nor does there seem to have been any split within the coalition government of Vietnam....

"Evaluation. If there is a Moscow-directed conspiracy in Southeast Asia, Indochina is an anomaly so far. Possible explanations are:

1. No rigid directives have been issued by Moscow.
2. The Vietnam government considers that it has no rightest elements that must be purged.
3. The Vietnam Communists are not subservient to the foreign policies pursued by Moscow.
4. A special dispensation for the Vietnam government has been arranged in Moscow.

"Of these possibilities, the first and fourth seem most likely."

(Tab 2).

The collapse of the Chinese Nationalist government in 1949 sharpened American apprehensions over communist expansion in the Far East, and hastened U.S. measures to counter the threat posed by Mao's China.

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The U.S. sought to create and employ policy instruments similar to those it was bringing into play against the Soviets in Europe: collective security organizations, economic aid, and military assistance. For example, Congress, in the opening paragraphs of the law it passed in 1949 to establish the first comprehensive military assistance program, expressed itself "as favoring the creation by the free countries and the free peoples of the Far East of a joint organization, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, to establish a program of self-help and mutual cooperation designed to develop their economic and social well-being, to safeguard basic rights and liberties, and to protect their security and independence...." But, the negotiating of such an organization among the disparate powers and political entities of the Far East was inherently more complex a matter than the North Atlantic Treaty nations had successfully faced. The U.S. decided that the impetus for collective security in Asia should come from the Asians, but by late 1949, it also recognized that action was necessary in Indochina. Thus, in the closing months of 1949, the course of U.S. policy was set to block further communist expansion in Asia: by collective security if the Asians were forthcoming; by collaboration with major European allies and commonwealth nations, if possible; but bilaterally if necessary. On that policy course lay the Korean War of 1950-1953, the forming of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization of 1954, and the progressively deepening U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

January and February, 1950, were pivotal months. The French took the first concrete steps toward transferring public administration to Bao Dai's State of Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh denied the legitimacy of the latter, proclaiming the DRV as the "only legal government of the Vietnam people," and was formally recognized by Peking and Moscow. On 29 January 1950, the French National Assembly approved legislation granting autonomy to the State of Vietnam. On February 1, 1950, Secretary of State Acheson made the following public statement:

"The recognition by the Kremlin of Ho Chi Minh's communist movement in Indochina comes as a surprise. The Soviet acknowledgment of this movement should remove any illusions as to the 'nationalist' nature of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina.

"Although timed in an effort to cloud the transfer of sovereignty by France to the legal Governments of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, we have every reason to believe that those legal governments will proceed in their development toward stable governments representing the true nationalist sentiments of more than 20 million peoples of Indochina.

"French action in transferring sovereignty to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia has been in process for some time. Following French ratification, which is expected within a few days, the way will be open for recognition of these legal

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governments by the countries of the world whose policies support the development of genuine national independence in former colonial areas...."

Formal French ratification of Vietnamese independence was announced on 2 February 1950; on the same date, President Truman approved U.S. recognition for Bao Dai. French requests for aid in Indochina followed within a few weeks. On May 8, 1950, the Secretary of State announced that:

"The United States Government convinced that neither national independence nor democratic evolution exist 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."

The U.S. thereafter was deeply involved in the developing war. But it cannot be said that the extension of aid was a volte-face of U.S. policy precipitated solely by the events of 1950. It appears rather as the denouement of a cohesive progression of U.S. policy decisions stemming from the 1945 determination that France should decide the political future of Vietnamese nationalism. Neither the modest O.S.S. aid to the Viet Minh in 1945, nor the U.S. refusal to abet French recourse to arms the same year, signaled U.S. backing of Ho Chi Minh. To the contrary, the U.S. was wary of Ho, apprehensive lest Paris' imperialism be succeeded by control from Moscow. Uncertainty characterized the U.S. attitude toward Ho through 1948, but the U.S. incessantly pressured France to accommodate "genuine" Vietnamese nationalism and independence. In early 1950, both the apparent fruition of the Bao Dai solution, and the patent alignment of the DRV with the USSR and Communist China, impelled the U.S. to more direct intervention in Vietnam. (Tab 3)

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DISCUSSION

- Tab 1 - Indochina in U.S. Wartime Policy, 1941-1950
- 2 - U.S. Neutrality in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1946-1949
- 3 - Origins of the U.S. Involvement in Vietnam

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I.A.1

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I. A.

U.S. POLICY, 1940-1950

1. Indochina in U.S. Wartime Policy, 1941-1945

In the interval between the fall of France in 1940, and the Pearl Harbor attack in December, 1941, the United States watched with increasing apprehension the flux of Japanese military power into Indochina. At first the United States urged Vichy to refuse Japanese requests for authorization to use bases there, but was unable to offer more than vague assurances of assistance, such as a State Department statement to the French Ambassador on 6 August 1940 that:

"We have been doing and are doing everything possible within the framework of our established policies to keep the situation in the Far East stabilized; that we have been progressively taking various steps, the effect of which has been to exert economic pressure on Japan; that our Fleet is now based on Hawaii, and that the course which we have been following, as indicated above, gives a clear indication of our intentions and activities for the future." \*

The French Ambassador replied that:

"In his opinion the phrase 'within the framework of our established policies,' when associated with the apparent reluctance of the American Government to consider the use of military force in the Far East at this particular time, to mean that the United States would not use military or naval force in support of any position which might be taken to resist the Japanese attempted aggression on Indochina. The Ambassador [feared] that the French Government would, under the indicated pressure of the Japanese Government, be forced to accede..." \*

The fears of the French Ambassador were realized. In 1941, however, Japan went beyond the use of bases to demands for a presence in Indochina tantamount to occupation. President Roosevelt himself expressed the heightening U.S. alarm to the Japanese Ambassador, in a conversation recorded by Acting Secretary of State Welles as follows:

"The President then went on to say that this new move by Japan in Indochina created an exceedingly serious problem for the United States...the cost of any military occupation is tremendous and the occupation itself is not conducive to the

\* U.S. Department of State Memorandum from J. C. Dunn to Under Secretary of State Welles, 6 August 1940.

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production by civilians in occupied countries of food supplies and raw materials of the character required by Japan. Had Japan undertaken to obtain the supplies she required from Indochina in a peaceful way, she not only would have obtained larger quantities of such supplies, but would have obtained them with complete security and without the draining expense of a military occupation. Furthermore, from the military standpoint, the President said, surely the Japanese Government could not have in reality the slightest belief that China, Great Britain, the Netherlands or the United States had any territorial designs on Indochina nor were in the slightest degree providing any real threats of aggression against Japan. This Government, consequently, could only assume that the occupation of Indochina was being undertaken by Japan for the purpose of further offense and this created a situation which necessarily must give the United States the most serious disquiet...

"...The President stated that if the Japanese Government would refrain from occupying Indochina with its military and naval forces, or, had such steps actually been commenced, if the Japanese Government would withdraw such forces, the President could assure the Japanese Government that he would do everything within his power to obtain from the Governments of China, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and of course the United States itself a binding and solemn declaration, provided Japan would undertake the same commitment, to regard Indochina as a neutralized country in the same way in which Switzerland had up to now been regarded by the powers as a neutralized country. He stated that this would imply that none of the powers concerned would undertake any military act of aggression against Indochina and would remain in control of the territory and would not be confronted with attempts to dislodge them on the part of de Gaullist or Free French agents or forces." \*

The same date, Secretary of State Cordell Hull instructed Sumner Welles to see the Japanese Ambassador, and

"Make clear the fact that the occupation of Indochina by Japan possibly means one further important step to seizing control of the South Sea area, including trade routes of supreme importance to the United States controlling such products as rubber, tin and other commodities. This was of vital concern to the United States. The Secretary said that if we did not bring out this point our people will not understand the significance of this movement into Indochina. The Secretary mentioned another point to be stressed: there is no theory on which Indochina could be flooded with armed forces, aircraft, et cetera,

\* Memorandum of Conversation by Sumner Welles, Acting Secretary of State, 24 July, 1941; the President's proposal for neutralization was submitted to Japan in a note of 8 August, 1941.

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for the defense of Japan. The only alternative is that this venture into Indochina has a close relation to the South Sea area and its value for offense against that area." \*

In a press statement of 2 August 1941, Acting Secretary of State Welles deplored Japan's "expansionist aims" and impuned Vichy:

"Under these circumstances, this Government is impelled to question whether the French Government at Vichy in fact proposes to maintain its declared policy to preserve for the French people the territories both at home and abroad which have long been under French sovereignty.

"This Government, mindful of its traditional friendship for France, has deeply sympathized with the desire of the French people to maintain their territories and to preserve them intact. In its relations with the French Government at Vichy and with the local French authorities in French territories, the United States will be governed by the manifest effectiveness with which those authorities endeavor to protect these territories from domination and control by those powers which are seeking to extend their rule by force and conquest, or by the threat thereof."

On the eve of Pearl Harbor, as part of the U.S. attempt to obtain Japanese consent to a non-aggression pact, the U.S. again proposed neutralization of Indochina in return for Japanese withdrawal. The events of 7 December 1941 put the question of the future of Indochina in the wholly different context of U.S. strategy for fighting World War II.

a. Roosevelt's Trusteeship Concept

U.S. policy toward Indochina during World War II was ambivalent. On the one hand, the U.S. appeared to support Free French claims to all of France's overseas dominions. The U.S. early in the war repeatedly expressed or implied to the French an intention to restore to France its

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\* Memorandum by Cecil W. Gray, Assistant to the Secretary of State, July 24, 1942.

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overseas empire after the war. These U.S. commitments included the August 2, 1941, official statement on the Franco-Japanese agreement; a December, 1941, Presidential letter to Pétain; a March 2, 1942, statement on New Caledonia; a note to the French Ambassador of April 13, 1942; Presidential statements and messages at the time of the North Africa invasion; the Clark-Darlan Agreement of November 22, 1942; and a letter of the same month from the President's Personal Representative to General Henri Giraud, which included the following reassurance:

"...The restoration of France to full independence, in all the greatness and vastness which it possessed before the war in Europe as well as overseas, is one of the war aims of the United Nations. It is thoroughly understood that French sovereignty will be re-established as soon as possible throughout all the territory, metropolitan or colonial, over which flew the French flag in 1939." 1/

On the other hand, in the Atlantic Charter and other pronouncements the U.S. proclaimed support for national self-determination and independence. Moreover, the President of the United States, especially distressed at the Vichy "sell-out" to Japan in Indochina, often cited French rule there as a flagrant example of onerous and exploitative colonialism, and talked of his determination to turn Indochina over to an international trusteeship after the war. In early 1944, Lord Halifax, the British Ambassador in Washington, called on Secretary of State Hull to inquire whether the President's "rather definite" statements "that Indo-china should be taken away from the French and put under an international trusteeship" -- made to "Turks, Egyptians and perhaps others" during his trip to Cairo and Teheran -- represented "final conclusions in view of the fact that they would soon get back to the French..." 2/ (The French marked well the President's views -- in fact as France withdrew from Vietnam in 1956, its Foreign Minister recalled Roosevelt's assuring the Sultan of Morocco that his sympathies lay with colonial peoples struggling for independence. 3/) Lord Halifax later recorded that:

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"The President was one of the people who used conversation as others of us use a first draft on paper...a method of trying out an idea. If it does not go well, you can modify it or drop it as you will. Nobody thinks anything of it if you do this with a paper draft; but if you do it with conversation, people say that you have changed your mind, that 'you never knew where you have him,' and so on." 4/

But in response to a memorandum from Secretary of State Hull putting the question of Indochina to F.D.R., and reminding the President of the numerous U.S. commitments to restoration of the French empire, Roosevelt replied (on January 24, 1944) that:

"I saw Halifax last week and told him quite frankly that it was perfectly true that I had, for over a year, expressed the opinion that Indo-China should not go back to France but that it should be administered by an international trusteeship. France has had the country -- thirty million inhabitants for nearly one hundred years, and the people are worse off than they were at the beginning.

"As a matter of interest, I am wholeheartedly supported in this view by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and by Marshal Stalin. I see no reason to play in with the British Foreign Office in this matter. The only reason they seem to oppose it is that they fear the effect it would have on their own possessions and those of the Dutch. They have never liked the idea of trusteeship because it is, in some instances, aimed at future independence. This is true in the case of Indo-China.

"Each case must, of course, stand on its own feet, but the case of Indo-China is perfectly clear. France has milked it for one hundred years. The people of Indo-China are entitled to something better than that." 5/

(1) Military Strategy Pre-eminent

Throughout the year 1944, the President held to his views, and consistent with them, proscribed U.S. aid to resistance groups -- including French groups -- in Indochina. But the war in the Asian theaters moved rapidly, and the center of gravity of the American effort began to shift northward toward Japan. The question of U.S. strategy in Southeast Asia then came to the fore. At the Second Quebec Conference (September, 1944), the U.S. refused British offers of naval assistance against Japan because Admiral King believed "the best occupation for any available British forces would be to re-take Singapore, and to assist the Dutch in recovering the East Indies," and because he suspected that the offer "was perhaps not unconnected with a desire for United States help in clearing the Japanese out of the Malay States and Netherlands East Indies." 6/ Admiral King's suspicions were not

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well-founded, at least insofar as Churchill's strategic thought was concerned. The Prime Minister was evidently as unwilling to invite an active American role in the liberation of Southeast Asia as the U.S. was to undertake same; as early as February, 1944, Churchill wrote that:

"A decision to act as a subsidiary force under the Americans in the Pacific raises difficult political questions about the future of our Malayan possessions. If the Japanese should withdraw from them or make peace as the result of the main American thrust, the United States Government would after the victory feel greatly strengthened in its view that all possessions in the East Indian Archipelago should be placed under some international body upon which the United States would exercise a decisive concern." 7/

The future of Commonwealth territories in Southeast Asia stimulated intense British interest in American intentions for French colonies there. In November and December of 1944, the British expressed to the United States, both in London and in Washington, their concern "that the United States apparently has not yet determined upon its policy toward Indochina." 8/ The head of the Far Eastern Department in the British Foreign Office told the U.S. Ambassador that:

"It would be difficult to deny French participation in the liberation of Indochina in light of the increasing strength of the French Government in world affairs, and that, unless a policy to be followed toward Indochina is mutually agreed between our two governments, circumstances may arise at any moment which will place our two governments in a very awkward situation." 9/

President Roosevelt, however, refused to define his position further, notifying Secretary of State Stettinius on January 1, 1945:

"I still do not want to get mixed up in any Indo-China decision. It is a matter for postwar.--...I do not want to get mixed up in any military effort toward the liberation of Indo-China from the Japanese.--You can tell Halifax that I made this very clear to Mr. Churchill. From both the military and civil point of view, action at this time is premature." 10/

However, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff were concurrently planning the removal of American armed forces from Southeast Asia. In response to approaches from French and Dutch officials requesting aid in expelling Japan from their former colonial territories, the U.S. informed them that:

"All our available forces were committed to fighting the Japanese elsewhere in the Pacific, and Indochina and the East Indies were therefore not included within the sphere of interest of the American Chiefs of Staff." 11/

When the Combined Chiefs of Staff met at Malta at the end of January, 1945,

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American willingness to forego further operations in Southeast Asia led to a directive to Admiral Lord Mountbatten, Supreme Commander in that theatre, to liberate Malaya without U.S. assistance. 12/ After the Yalta Conference (February, 1945), U.S. commanders in the Pacific were informed that the U.S. planned to turn over to the British responsibility for operations in the Netherlands East Indies and New Guinea. The President, however, agreed to permit such U.S. military operations in Indochina as avoided "alignments with the French," and detraction from the U.S. military campaign against Japan. 13/ The latter stricture precluded, in the U.S. view, the U.S. cooperation with the French at Mountbatten's headquarters, or the furnishing of ships to carry Free French forces to Indochina to undertake its liberation. This U.S. position came under particularly severe French criticism after 11 March 1945, when the Japanese overturned the Vichy regime in Vietnam, and prompted the Emperor Bao Dai to declare Vietnam unified and independent of France under Japanese protection. On 16 March 1945, a protest from General de Gaulle led to the following exchange between the Secretary of State and the President: 14/

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Washington

March 16, 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Indo-China.

Communications have been received from the Provisional Government of the French Republic asking for:

- (1) Assistance for the resistance groups now fighting the Japanese in Indo-China.
- (2) Conclusion of a civil affairs agreement covering possible future operations in Indo-China.

These memoranda have been referred to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in order to obtain their views concerning the military aspects of the problems, and I shall communicate with you further on the subject upon receipt of the Joint Chiefs' reply.

Attached herewith is the text of a recent telegram from Ambassador Caffery describing his conversation with General de Gaulle on the subject of Indo-China. From this telegram and de Gaulle's speech of March 14, it appears that this Government may be made to appear responsible for the weakness of the



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resistance to Japan in Indo-China. The British may likewise be expected to encourage this view. It seems to me that without prejudicing in any way our position regarding the future of Indo-China we can combat this trend by making public our desire to render such assistance as may be warranted by the circumstances and by the plans to which we are already committed in the Pacific area. To this end I attach a draft of a suggested statement for publication, subject to your approval, by the State Department.

/s/ E. R. Stettinius, Jr.

Enclosures:

1. Proposed Statement.
2. Copy of telegram  
from Ambassador Caffery  
[not included here]

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[Enclosure 1]

PROPOSED STATEMENT

The action of the Japanese Government in tearing away the veil with which it for so long attempted to cloak its domination of Indo-China is a direct consequence of the ever-mounting pressure which our arms are applying to the Japanese Empire. It is a link in the chain of events which began so disastrously in the summer of 1941 with the Franco-Japanese agreement for the "common defense" of Indo-China. It is clear that this latest step in the Japanese program will in the long run prove to be of no avail.

The Provisional Government of the French Republic has requested armed assistance for those who are resisting the Japanese forces in Indo-China. In accordance with its constant desire to aid all those who are willing to take up arms against our common enemies, this Government will do all it can to be of assistance in the present situation, consistent with plans to which it is already committed and with the operations now taking place in the Pacific. It goes without saying that all this country's available resources are being devoted to the defeat of our enemies and they will continue to be employed in the manner best calculated to hasten their downfall.

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[Response]

THE WHITE HOUSE  
Washington

March 17, 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR

The Secretary of State

By direction of the President, there is returned herewith Secretary of State Memorandum of 16 March, subject Indo-China, which includes a proposed statement on the Japanese action in Indo-China.

The President is of the opinion that it is inadvisable at the present time to issue the proposed statement.

/s/ William D. Leahy

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The French were also actively pressuring the President and his key advisors through military channels. Admiral Leahy reported that, following Yalta:

"The French representatives in Washington resumed their frequent calls to my office after our return from the Crimea. They labeled most of their requests 'urgent.' They wanted to participate in the combined intelligence group then studying German industrial and scientific secrets; to exchange information between the American command in China and the French forces in Indo-China; and to get agreement in principle to utilizing the French naval and military forces in the war against Japan (the latter would assist in returning Indo-China to French control and give France a right to participate in lend-lease assistance after the defeat of Germany.)

"Most of the time I could only tell them that I had no useful information as to when and where we might make use of French assistance in the Pacific.

"However, we did attempt to give a helping hand to the French resistance groups in Indo-China. Vice Admiral Fenard called me on March 18 to say that planes from our 14th Air

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Force in China were loaded with relief supplies for the undergrounders but could not start without authority from Washington. I immediately contacted General Handy and told him of the President's agreement that American aid to the Indo-China resistance groups might be given provided it involved no interference with our operations against Japan." 15/

(2) Failure of the Trusteeship Proposal

In the meantime, the President's concept of postwar trusteeship status for dependent territories as an intermediate step toward autonomy had undergone study by several interdepartmental and international groups, but had fared poorly. In deference to British sensibilities, the United States had originally sought only a declaration from the colonial powers setting forth their intention to liberate their dependencies and to provide tutelage in self-government for subject peoples. Such a declaration would have been consistent with the Atlantic Charter of 1941 in which the U.S. and the U.K. jointly agreed that, among the "common principles...on which they base their hopes for a better future for the world," it was their policy that:

"...they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them...." 16/

In November, 1942, Secretary Hull submitted to the President a proposed draft US-UK declaration entitled "The Atlantic Charter and National Independence," which the President approved. Before this draft could be broached to the British, however, they submitted a counter-proposal, a statement emphasizing the responsibility of "parent" powers for developing native self-government, and avoiding endorsement of trusteeships. Subsequent Anglo-American discussions in March 1943 addressed both drafts, but foundered on Foreign Secretary Eden's opposition. Secretary Hull reported in his memoirs that Eden could not believe that the word "independence" would be interpreted to the satisfaction of all governments:

"...the Foreign Secretary said that, to be perfectly frank, he had to say that he did not like our draft very much. He said it was the word 'independence' that troubled him, he had to think of the British Empire system, which was built on the basis of Dominion and colonial status.

"He pointed out that under the British Empire system there were varying degrees of self-government, running from the Dominions through the colonial establishments which had in some cases, like Malta, completely self-government, to backward areas that were never likely to have their own government. He

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added that Australia and New Zealand also had colonial possessions that they would be unwilling to remove from their supervisory jurisdiction." 17/

U.S. inability to work out a common policy with the U.K. also precluded meaningful discussion, let alone agreement, on the colonial issue at the Dumbarton Oaks Conversations in 1944. 18/ Through March, 1945, the issue was further occluded by debates within the U.S. Government over the postwar status of Pacific islands captured from the Japanese; in general, the War and Navy Departments advocated their retention under U.S. control as military bases, while State and other departments advocated an international trusteeship.

(3) Decision on Indochina Left to France

Secretary of State Stettinius, with the approval of President Roosevelt, issued a statement on April 3, 1945, declaring that, as a result of international discussions at Yalta on the concept of trusteeship, the United States felt that the postwar trusteeship structure:

"...should be designed to permit the placing under it of the territories mandated after the last war, and such territories taken from the enemy in this war as might be agreed upon at a later date, and also such other territories as might be voluntarily be placed under trusteeship." 19/

Indochina thus seemed relegated to French volition.

Nonetheless, as of President Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, U.S. policy toward the colonial possessions of its allies, and toward Indochina in particular, was in disarray:

-- The British remained apprehensive that there might be a continued U.S. search for a trusteeship formula which might impinge on the Commonwealth.

-- The French were restive over continued U.S. refusal to provide strategic transport for their forces, resentful over the paucity of U.S. support for French forces in Indochina, and deeply suspicious that the United States -- possibly in concert with the Chinese -- intended to block their regaining control of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

b. Truman and the Occupation of Indochina, 1945

Within a month of President Truman's entry into office, the French raised the subject of Indochina at the United Nations Conference at San Francisco. Secretary of State Stettinius reported the following conversation to Washington:

"...Indo-China came up in a recent conversation I had with Bidault and Bonnet. The latter remarked that although the French

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Government interprets [Under Secretary of State] Welles' statement of 1942 concerning the restoration of French sovereignty over the French Empire as including Indo-China, the press continues to imply that a special status will be reserved for this colonial area. It was made quite clear to Bidault that the record is entirely innocent of any official statement of this government questioning, even by implication, French sovereignty over Indo-China. Certain elements of American public opinion, however, condemned French governmental policies and practices in Indo-China. Bidault seemed relieved and has no doubt cabled Paris that he received renewed assurances of our recognition of French sovereignty over that area." 20/

In early June 1945, the Department of State instructed the United States Ambassador to China on the deliberations in progress within the U.S. Government and its discussions with allies on U.S. policy toward Indochina. He was informed that at San Francisco:

"...the American delegation has insisted upon the necessity of providing for a progressive measure of self-government for all dependent peoples looking toward their eventual independence or incorporation in some form of federation according to circumstances and the ability of the peoples to assume these responsibilities. Such decisions would preclude the establishment of a trusteeship in Indochina except with the consent of the French Government. The latter seems unlikely. Nevertheless it is the President's intention at some appropriate time to ask that the French Government give some positive indication of its intentions in regard to the establishment of civil liberties and increasing measures of self-government in Indochina before formulating further declarations of policy in this respect." 21/

The United Nations Charter (June 26, 1945) contained a "Declaration Regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories":

Article 73

"Members of the United Nations which have or assume responsibilities for the administration of territories whose peoples have not yet attained a full measure of self-government recognize the principle that the interests of the inhabitants of these territories are paramount, and accept as a sacred trust the obligation to promote to the utmost, within the system of international peace and security established by the present Charter, the well-being of the inhabitants of these territories, and, to this end:

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"a. to ensure, with due respect for the culture of the peoples concerned, their political, economic, social, and educational advancement, their just treatment, and their protection against abuses;

"b. to develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples, and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions, according to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and their varying stages of advancement;..." 22/

Again, however, military considerations governed U.S. policy in Indochina. President Truman replied to General de Gaulle's repeated offers for aid in Indochina with statements to the effect that it was his policy to leave such matters to his military commanders. At the Potsdam Conference (July, 1945), the Combined Chiefs of Staff decided that Indochina south of latitude 16° North was to be included in the Southeast Asia Command under Admiral Mountbatten. 23/ Based on this decision, instructions were issued that Japanese forces located north of that line would surrender to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and those to the south to Admiral Lord Mountbatten; pursuant to these instructions, Chinese forces entered Tonkin in September, 1945, while a small British task force landed at Saigon. Political difficulties materialized almost immediately, for while the Chinese were prepared to accept the Vietnamese government they found in power in Hanoi, the British refused to do likewise in Saigon, and deferred to the French there from the outset.

There is no evidence that serious concern developed in Washington at the swiftly unfolding events in Indochina. In mid-August, Vietnamese resistance forces of the Viet Minh, under Ho Chi Minh, had seized power in Hanoi and shortly thereafter demanded and received the abdication of the Japanese puppet, Emperor Bao Dai. On V-J Day, September 2nd, Ho Chi Minh, had proclaimed in Hanoi the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). The DRV ruled as the only civil government in all of Vietnam for a period of about 20 days. On 23 September 1945, with the knowledge of the British Commander in Saigon, French forces overthrew the local DRV government, and declared French authority restored in Cochinchina. Guerrilla war began around Saigon. Although American OSS representatives were present in both Hanoi and Saigon and ostensibly supported the Viet Minh, the United States took no official position regarding either the DRV, or the French and British actions in South Vietnam. 24/ In October, 1945, the United States stated its policy in the following terms:

"US has no thought of opposing the reestablishment of French control in Indochina and no official statement by US GOVT has questioned even by implication French sovereignty

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over Indochina. However, it is not the policy of this GOVT to assist the French to reestablish their control over Indochina by force and the willingness of the US to see French control reestablished assumes that French claim to have the support of the population of Indochina is borne out by future events." 25/

French statements to the U.S. looked for an early end to the hostilities, and spoke reassuringly of reforms and liberality. In November, Jean Chauvel, Secretary-General to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, told the U.S. Ambassador that:

"When the trouble with the Annamites broke out de Gaulle had been urged by the French Mission in India to make some sort of policy statement announcing France's intention to adopt a far-reaching progressive policy designed to give the native population much greater authority, responsibility and representation in govt. De Gaulle considered the idea but rejected it because in the state of disorder prevailing in Indochina he believed that no such policy could be implemented pending restoration of French authority and would therefore just be considered by everyone as 'merely more fine words.' Furthermore de Gaulle and the Foreign Minister believe that the present situation is still so confused and they have so little information really reliable on the overall Indochina picture that such plans and thoughts as they held heretofore may have to be very thoroughly revised in the light of recent developments.

"Despite the fact that the French do not feel that they can as yet make any general statements outlining specific future plans for Indochina, Chauvel says that they hope 'very soon' to put into operation in certain areas programs including local elections which will be designed to grant much greater authority and greater voice in affairs to the natives. This he said would be a much better indication of the sincerity of French intentions than any policy statement....The French hope soon to negotiate an agreement with the King of Cambodia which will result in the granting of much greater responsibility and authority to the Cambodians. He mentioned specifically that there would be many more natives integrated into the local administrative services and it was also hoped that local elections could soon be held. The French he said intend to follow the same procedure in Laos when the situation permits and eventually also in Annam and Tonkin. When order is restored throughout Indochina and agreements have been reached with the individual states Chauvel said the French intend to embody the results of these separate agreements into a general program for all of Indochina." 26/

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From the autumn of 1945 through the autumn of 1946, the United States received a series of communications from Ho Chi Minh depicting calamitous conditions in Vietnam, invoking the principles proclaimed in the Atlantic Charter and in the Charter of the United Nations, and pleading for U.S. recognition of the independence of the DRV, or -- as a last resort -- trusteeship for Vietnam under the United Nations. But while the U.S. took no action on Ho's requests, it was also unwilling to aid the French. On January 15, 1946, the Secretary of War was advised by the Department of State that it was contrary to U.S. policy to "employ American flag vessels or aircraft to transport troops of any nationality to or from the Netherlands East Indies or French Indochina, nor to permit use of such craft to carry arms, ammunition or military equipment to these areas." 27/ However, the British arranged for the transport of additional French troops to Indochina, bilaterally agreed with the French for the latter to assume British occupation responsibilities, and signed a pact on 9 October, 1945, giving "full recognition to French rights" in Indochina. 28/ French troops began arriving in Saigon that month, and subsequently the British turned over to them some 800 U.S. Lend-Lease jeeps and trucks. President Truman approved the latter transaction on the grounds that removing the equipment would be impracticable. 29/

The fighting between the French and the Vietnamese which began in South Vietnam with the 23 September, 1945, French coup d'etat, spread from Saigon throughout Cochinchina, and to southern Annam. By the end of January, 1946, it was wholly a French affair, for by that time the British withdrawal was complete; on 4 March, 1946, Admiral Lord Mountbatten deactivated Indochina as territory under the Allied Southeast Asia Command, thereby transferring all control to French authorities. 30/ From French headquarters, via Radio Saigon, came announcements that a military "mopping-up" campaign was in progress, but pacification was virtually complete; but these reports of success were typically interspersed with such items as the following:

"20 March 1946:

"Rebel bands are still (wreaking destruction) in the areas south of Saigon. These bands are quite large, some numbering as many as 1,000 men. Concentrations of these bands are to be found...in the villages. Some have turned north in an attempt to disrupt (communications) in the Camau Peninsula, northeast of Batri and in the general area south of (Nha Trang). In the area south of Cholon and in the north of the Plaine des Jones region, several bands have taken refuge...."

"21 March 1946:

"The following communique was issued by the High Commissioner for Indochina this morning: 'Rebel activities have increased in



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the Bien Hoa area, on both banks of the river Dong Nai. A French convoy has been attacked on the road between Bien Hoa and Tan Uyen where a land mine had been laid by the rebels.

'In the (Baclo) area, northwest of Saigon, a number of pirates have been captured in the course of a clean-up raid. Among the captured men are five Japanese deserters. The dead bodies of three Japanese, including an officer, have been found at the point where the operation was carried out.

'A French detachment was ambushed at (San Jay), south Annam. The detachment, nevertheless, succeeded in carrying out its mission. Several aggressions by rebel parties are reported along the coastal road.'" 31/

Violence abated in South Vietnam somewhat as Franco-DRV negotiations proceeded in spring, 1946, but in the meantime, French forces moved into further confrontation with Vietnamese "rebels" in Tonkin. In February, 1946, a French task force prepared to force landings at Haiphong, but was forestalled by diplomatic maneuver. A Franco-Chinese agreement of 28 February 1946 provided that the Chinese would turn over their responsibilities in northern Indochina to the French on 31 March 1946. 32/

On March 6, 1946, a French-DRV accord was reached in the following terms: 33/

"1. The French Government recognizes the Vietnamese Republic as a Free State having its own Government, its own Parliament, its own Army and its own Finances, forming part of the Indochinese Federation and of the French Union. In that which concerns the reuniting of the three "Annamite Regions" [Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin] the French Government pledges itself to ratify the decisions taken by the populations consulted by referendum.

"2. The Vietnamese Government declares itself ready to welcome amicably the French Army when, conforming to international agreements, it relieves the Chinese Troops. A Supplementary Accord, attached to the present Preliminary Agreement, will establish the means by which the relief operations will be carried out.

"3. The stipulations formulated above will immediately enter into force. Immediately after the exchange of signatures, each of the High Contracting Parties will take all measures necessary to stop hostilities in the field, to maintain the troops in their respective positions, and to create the favorable atmosphere necessary to the immediate opening of friendly

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and sincere negotiations. These negotiations will deal particularly with:

- a. diplomatic relations of Viet-nam with Foreign States
- b. the future law of Indochina
- c. French interests, economic and cultural, in Viet-nam.

Hanoi, Saigon or Paris may be chosen as the seat of the conference.

DONE AT HANOI, the 6th of March 1946

Signed: Ho-chi Minh  
and Vu Hong Khanh

Signed: Sainteny

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French forces quickly exercised their prerogative, occupying Hanoi on 18 March 1946, and negotiations opened in Dalat in April. 34/

Hence, as of April 10, 1946, allied occupation in Indochina was officially over, and French forces were positioned in all of Vietnam's major cities; the problems of U.S. policy toward Vietnam then shifted from the context of wartime strategy to the arena of the U.S. relationship with France. 35/

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2. U.S. Neutrality in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1946-1949

a. Failures of Negotiated Settlement

The return of the French to Tonkin in March, 1946, created an explosive situation. North Vietnam, a traditionally rice-deficit area, had experienced an extraordinarily bad harvest in 1945. Severe famine was scarcely helped by the concentration of armies in the Red River Delta -- Vietnamese irregular forces, the most numerous belonging to the Viet Minh; some 150,000 Chinese; and then the French Expeditionary Corps. The people were not only hungry, but politically restive; the popular appetite for national independence had been thoroughly whetted by the Viet Minh and the formation of the DRV. While feeling against all foreign occupiers ran high, the French remained the primary target of enmity. But the March 6 Accord deferred a reckoning, serving to mollify extremists in Tonkin, and to dampen guerrilla operations in South Vietnam. The accord in any event underwrote peaceful cooperation between France and the DRV in North Vietnam for eight months.

Yet the March 6 accord constituted an admission of defeat for Ho Chi Minh, because his policy had been directed toward internationalizing the Indochina problem. Ho made repeated overtures to the United States, to the United Nations, and to China, the USSR, and the U.K. <sup>36/</sup> His letters presented eloquent appeals for U.S. or U.N. intervention in Vietnam on the grounds of the principles embodied in the Atlantic Charter, the U.N. Charter, and on humanitarian grounds. The last such to be forwarded to the U.S. prior to the Accord of 6 March 1946, is summarized in the following telegram from an American diplomat in Hanoi, received in Washington 27 February 1946:

"Ho Chi Minh handed me 2 letters addressed to President of USA, China, Russia, and Britain identical copies of which were stated to have been forwarded to other governments named. In 2 letters to Ho Chi Minh request [sic] USA as one of United Nations to support idea of Annamese independence according to Philippines [sic] example, to examine the case of the Annamese,

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and to take steps necessary to maintenance of world peace which is being endangered by French efforts to reconquer Indochina. He asserts that Annamese will fight until United Nations interfere in support of Annamese independence. The petition addressed to major United Nations contains:

"A. Review of French relations with Japanese where French Indochina allegedly aided Japs:

"B. Statement of establishment on 2 September 1945 of PENW [sic] Democratic Republic of Viet Minh:

"C. Summary of French conquest of Cochin China begun 23 Sept 1945 and still incomplete:

"D. Outline of accomplishments of Annamese Government in Tonkin including popular elections, abolition of undesirable taxes, expansion of education and resumption as far as possible of normal economic activities:

"E. Request to 4 powers: (1) To intervene and stop the war in Indochina in order to mediate fair settlement and (2) to bring the Indochinese issue before the United Nations organization. The petition ends with statement that Annamese ask for full independence in fact and that in interim while awaiting UNO decision the Annamese will continue to fight the reestablishment of French imperialism. Letters and petition will be transmitted to Department soonest." 37/

There is no record that the U.S. encouraged Ho Chi Minh thus to submit his cause to the U.S., beyond the O.S.S. support he received during and immediately after World War II; nor does the record reflect that the U.S. responded affirmatively to Ho's petitions. Rather, the U.S. Government appears to have adhered uniformly to a policy of looking to the French rather than to Vietnamese Nationalists for constructive steps toward Vietnamese independence. On 5 December, 1946, after the November incidents, but before the fighting broke out in earnest, State instructed the U.S. diplomatic representative in Hanoi as follows: 38/

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"Assume you will see Ho in Hanoi and offer following summary our present thinking as guide.

"Keep in mind Ho's clear record as agent international communism, absence evidence recantation Moscow affiliations, confused political situation France and support Ho receiving French Communist Party. Least desirable eventuality would be establishment Communist-dominated Moscow-oriented state Indochina in view DEPT, which most interested INFO strength non-communist elements Vietnam. Report fully, repeating or requesting DEPT repeat Paris.

"Recent occurrences Tonkin cause deep concern. Consider March 6 accord and modus vivendi as result peaceful negotiation provide basis settlement outstanding questions between France and Vietnam and impose responsibility both sides not prejudice future, particularly forthcoming Fontainebleau Conference, by resort force. Unsettled situation such as pertains certain to offer provocations both sides, but for this reason conciliatory patient attitude especially necessary. Intransigence either side and disposition exploit incidents can only retard economic rehabilitation Indochina and cause indefinite postponement conditions cooperation France and Vietnam which both agree essential.

"If Ho takes stand non-implementation promise by French of Cochinchina referendum relieves Vietnam responsibility compliance with agreements, you might if you consider advisable raise question whether he believes referendum after such long disorder could produce worthwhile result and whether he considers compromise on status Cochinchina could possibly be reached through negotiation.

"May say American people have welcomed attainments Indochinese in efforts realize praiseworthy aspirations greater autonomy in framework democratic institutions and it would be regrettable should this interest and sympathy be imperilled by any tendency Vietnam administration force issues by intransigence and violence.

"May inform Ho [U.S. Ambassador Paris] discussing situation French similar frankness. For your INFO, [Foreign Office] in DEC 3 conversation stated (1) no question reconquest Indochina as such would be counter French public opinion and probably beyond French military resources, (2) French will continue base policy March 6 accord and modus vivendi and make every effort apply them through negotiation Vietnam, (3) French would resort forceful measures only on restricted scale in case flagrant violation agreements Vietnam, (4) d'Argenlieu's usefulness impaired by outspoken dislike Vietnam officials and

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replacement perhaps desirable, (5) French Communists embarrassed in pose as guardian French international interests by barrage telegraphic appeals from Vietnam. [Ambassador] will express gratification this statement French policy with observation implementation such policy should go far obviate any danger that (1) Vietnamese irreconcilables and extremists might be in position make capital of situation (2) Vietnamese might be turned irrevocably against West and toward ideologies and affiliations hostile democracies which could result perpetual foment Indochina with consequences all Southeast Asia.

"Avoid impression US Govt making formal intervention this juncture. Publicity any kind would be unfortunate.

"Paris be guided foregoing.

"Acheson, Acting."

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For a while, the French seemed genuinely interested in pursuing a policy based on the March 6 Accord and the modus vivendi, and in avoiding a test of arms with the DRV. If there were contrary utterances from some, such as Admiral d'Argenlieu, the High Commissioner of Indochina, -- who recorded his "amazement that France has such a fine expeditionary corps in Indochina and yet its leaders prefer to negotiate rather than to fight...." -- there were many such as General Leclerc, who had led French forces into Hanoi on 18 March 1946, and promptly called on Ho Chi Minh, announcing every intention of honoring the March 6 Accord. "At the present time," he said, "there is no question of imposing ourselves by force on masses who desire evolution and innovation." 39/ The French Socialist Party -- the dominant political party in France -- consistently advocated conciliation during 1946. In December, 1946, even after the armed incidents in November between French and DRV armed forces in North Vietnam, Leon Blum -- who had become Premier of France, at the head of an all-Socialist Cabinet -- wrote that France had no alternative save to grant the Vietnamese independence:

"There is one way and only one of preserving in Indochina the prestige of our civilization, our political and spiritual influence, and also those of our material interests which are legitimate: it is sincere agreement [with Viet Nam] on the basis of independence...." 40/

The Communists, the other major Leftist party in France, were also vocally conciliatory; but, expectant of controlling the government, if not alone at least as part of a coalition, they tended to be more careful than the Socialists of their ability to sway nationalist sentiment. In July of 1946, L'Humanité, the Communist newspaper, had emphasized that the Party



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did not wish France to be reduced to "its own small metropolitan territory," but warned that such would be the consequence if the colonial peoples turned against France:

"Are we, after having lost Syria and Lebanon yesterday, to lose Indochina tomorrow, North Africa the day after?" 41/

In the National Assembly in September, 1946, a Communist deputy had declared that:

"The Communists are as much as the next person for the greatness of the country. But...they have never ceased to affirm that the French Union...can only be founded on the confident, fraternal, and above all, democratic collaboration of all the peoples and races who compose it...." 42/

However, Ho Chi Minh was unable to capitalize upon his connection with the French Left (Ho had been one of the founding members of the French Communist Party in the early 1920's) to turn the expressed convictions of either the Socialists or the Communists to the advantage of the DRV. The Communists were not prepared to press the case for the Vietnamese at the cost of votes in France. The Socialists in power paid only lip service to conciliation, and allowed the more militant colonialists, especially those in Vietnam, to set France's policy in Indochina; thus, Admiral d'Argenlieu, not General Leclerc, spoke for the French Government.

In mid-December, 1946, as soon as Blum took office, Ho sent him a telegram with proposals for easing tension in Vietnam, but the message did not reach Paris until December 26. 43/ By that time the flash-point had been passed. In Hanoi, on 19 December 1946, Vietnamese troops, after several days of mounting animosity punctuated with violence, cut off the city's water and electricity, and attacked French posts using small arms, mortar and artillery. The issue of who was the aggressor has never been resolved. The fighting flared across North Vietnam, and two days later, the guerrilla war in South Vietnam quickened pace. The French responded to the initial attacks with an occasional savagery which rendered increasingly remote restoration of status quo ante.

On 23 December 1946, Premier Leon Blum addressed the National Assembly on the Indochina crisis. His speech was characteristically principled, and characteristically ambiguous: he talked peace, but endorsed militant French officials in Vietnam. Although he declared that, "The old colonial system founded on conquest and maintained by constraint, which tended toward exploitation of conquered lands and peoples is finished today," he also stated that:

"We have been obliged to deal with violence. I declare that the men who are fighting out there, the French of Indochina,

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the friendly populations, may count unreservedly on the vigilance and resolution of the government.

"It was our common task to try everything to spare the blood of our children -- and also the blood that is not ours, but which is blood all the same, that of a people whose right to political liberty we recognized ten months ago, and who should keep their place in the union of peoples federated around France....

"Before all, order must be reestablished, peaceful order which is necessarily the basis for the execution of contracts." 44/

Premier Blum was succeeded within a week of his speech by the first government of the Fourth Republic under Paul Ramadier. France sent three emissaries to Vietnam at this juncture: Admiral d'Argenlieu, General Leclerc, and the Socialist Minister of Overseas France, Marius Moutet. Admiral d'Argenlieu became the High Commissioner of Indochina, and accused the Vietnamese of breaking faith with France. He stated emphatically that France intended to preserve in Indochina:

"...the maintenance and development of its present influence and of its economic interests, the protection of ethnic minorities with which it is entrusted, the care of assuring the security of strategic bases within the framework of defense of the Federation and the French Union....

"France does not intend in the present state of evolution of the Indochinese people to give them unconditional and total independence, which would only be a fiction gravely prejudicial to the interests of the two parties." 45/

The other two representatives of France were dispatched on fact-finding missions. Their reports contained diametrically opposing policy recommendations. General Leclerc wrote:

"In 1947 France will no longer put down by force a grouping of 24,000,000 inhabitants which is assuming unity and in which there exists a xenophobic and perhaps a national ideal....

"The capital problem from now on is political. It is a question of coming to terms with an awakening xenophobic nationalism, channeling it in order to safeguard, at least in part, the rights of France." 46/

The General had been sent to examine the military situation, and returned recommending a political solution. The Socialist Marius Moutet had been sent to inquire into the political prospects, and returned with the conclusion that only a military solution was promising. Like

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Admiral d'Argenlieu, Moutet believed that there could be no negotiations with Ho Chi Minh. He wrote of the "cruel disillusionment of agreements that could not be put into effect...", and he declared that:

"We can no longer speak of a free agreement between France and Vietnam...."

"Before any negotiations today, it is necessary to have a military decision. I am sorry, but one cannot commit such madness as the Vietnamese have done with impunity." 47/

It was the politician's ideas, rather than the general's, which prevailed in Paris. Premier Ramadier -- himself a Socialist -- spoke of peace in Vietnam, and announced that his government favored independence and unity for Vietnam:

"Independence within the French Union and union of the three Annamese countries, if the Annamese people desire it." 48/

At the same time, however, his government permitted Admiral d'Argenlieu to launch a military campaign of major proportions and punitive intent.

Very early in the war, the French raised the spectre of Communist conspiracy in Vietnam. Admiral d'Argenlieu in Saigon called for an internationally concerted policy to array the Western powers against the expansion of communism in Asia, beginning with Vietnam. In the National Assembly debated in March, 1947, a Rightist deputy introduced the charge that the violence in Vietnam had been directed from Moscow:

"Nationalism in Indochina is a means, the end is Soviet imperialism." 49/

Neither the government nor the people of France heeded General Leclerc's statement of January, 1947:

"Anti-communism will be a useless tool as long as the problem of nationalism remains unsolved." 50/

Ho Chi Minh, for his part, issued repeated appeals to France for peace, even offering to withdraw personally:

"When France recognizes the independence and unity of Vietnam, we will retire to our village, for we are not ambitious for power or honor." 51/

In February, 1947, the French offered terms to Ho tantamount to unconditional surrender. Ho flatly rejected these, asking the French representative, "If you were in my place, would you accept them? ...In the French Union there is no place for cowards. If I accepted these conditions I should be one." 52/ On 1 March 1947, Ho appealed publicly to

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the French government and the French people:

"Once again, we declare solemnly that the Vietnamese people desire only unity and independence in the French Union, and we pledge ourselves to respect French economic and cultural interests....If France would but say the word to cease hostility immediately, so many lives and so much property would be saved and friendship and confidence would be regained." 53/

But the French displayed little interest in negotiations. Premier Ramadier stated in March, 1947, that:

"We must protect the life and possessions of Frenchmen, of foreigners, of our Indochinese friends who have confidence in French liberty. It is necessary that we disengage our garrisons, re-establish essential communications, assure the safety of populations which have taken refuge with us. That we have done." 54/

Ramadier and his ministers spoke repeatedly in the spring of 1947 of an imminent end to the "military phase" of the crisis, and of the beginning of a "constructive phase," in which presumably economic and political assistance would supplant the military instrument; but in what was to become a pattern of expectation and frustration, the Fourth Republic discovered that its military forces were incapable of controlling even the principal lines of communication in Vietnam, and that the military solution severely taxed the full resources of the French Union. In March, 1947 an additional division of troops for the French Expeditionary Corps, dispatched to Vietnam per General Leclerc's recommendation, had to be diverted en route to quell an insurgency in Madagascar.

By the summer of 1947, the French Government was aware that the situation in Indochina was at an impasse. Having failed in its attempt to force a military decision, it turned to a political solution, as suggested by General Leclerc. But again the ideas of Admiral d'Argenlieu weighed heavily. In January, 1947, d'Argenlieu wrote that:

"If we examine the problem basically, we are led to inquire whether the political form unquestionably capable of benefiting from the political prestige of legitimacy is not the traditional monarchic institution, the very one that existed before the Japanese surrender....The return of the Emperor Bao Dai would probably reassure all those who, having opposed the Viet Minh, fear they will be accused of treason." 55/

It was with Bao Dai, not Ho Chi Minh, that the French elected to negotiate for a political settlement with Vietnamese Nationalists.

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French emissaries approached Bao Dai with terms not unlike those Ho Chi Minh had negotiated on 6 March 1946: unity and independence within the French Union, provided Bao Dai formed a government which would furnish a clear alternative to Ho Chi Minh's DRV. With French encouragement, a group of Vietnamese Nationalists formed a political party advocating the installation of Bao Dai at the head of a non-Viet Minh Vietnamese regime. Bao Dai was at first evasive and skeptical, but was eventually convinced that the French situation in Indochina was sufficiently desperate that they would have to honor commitments they made to him. Bao Dai also seems to have believed that he could attract American support and material aid -- a view which may have stemmed in part from a 1947 Life magazine article by William C. Bullitt, the influential former U.S. Ambassador to France, endorsing Bao Dai as a solution to France's dilemma. 56/

France then proceeded to contract with Bao Dai a series of agreements, each of which ostensibly brought Bao Dai closer to genuine autonomy for Vietnam. It was not, however, until February, 1950, that the French National Assembly acceded to political independence and unification for Vietnam. Chronicled below are the principal steps by which France failed on the one hand to reach an accommodation with Ho Chi Minh, and on the other hand erected the "Bao Dai solution" in its stead. 57/

FRANCE - VIET  
RELATIONS

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PRINCIPAL EVENTS  
FRANCE - VIETNAM RELATIONS

1946 - 1950

<u>Event</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
Accord of 6 March 1946	Agreement signed by Ho Chi Minh with French provides that:  1. France recognizes DRV as: "Free State ... forming part of the Indochina Federation and the French Union."  2. DRV welcomes French Army into Tonkin for 5 years.  3. Further negotiations to spell out details for DRV independence.	1. Led to French occupation of Tonkin Delta.  2. No significant step taken by France toward DRV autonomy.
First Dalat Conference, 19 April - 11 May 1946	French and DRV delegates attempt to negotiate differences, but are able to enact only minor agreements on cultural and educational matters.	1. Overshadowed by continuing guerrilla war in Cochinchina.  2. A commission was set up to arrange an armistice; futile.
Establishment of Provisional Government of Cochinchina, 1 June 1946	French announce formation of an independent Cochinchina within the Indochina Federation and the French Union.	1. Touched off new wave of guerrilla war in South Vietnam.  2. Possibility of divided Vietnam pressured DRV in negotiations with France; stiffened DRV attitudes.

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<u>Event</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
Fontainbleau Conference, 6 July - 10 September 1946	Formal negotiations in France between DRV delegation headed by Ho Chi Minh and second-rank French officials leads to no agreement on any substantive issue.	DRV delegation withdrew in protest over convening of Second Dalat Conference (below), resumed talks, then acceded to adjournment without progress.
Second Dalat Conference, 1 August 1946	Conference among French, Cochinchinese, Laotians, Cambodians, Montagnards of Annam:  1. Announces formation of "federal states" under French High Commissioner.  2. Denounces DRV delegation at Fontainbleau as unrepresentative.  3. Cambodians and Cochinchinese move for direct representation in French Union and abroad, but French refuse.	1. Caused breakdown of Fontainbleau Conference.  2. Erected new facade of federation, but led to no significant political concessions by French.
Franco-DRV Modus Vivendi, 14 September 1946	After DRV delegation departed from Fontainbleau, Ho Chi Minh signs agreement with France which provides, effective 30 October 1946:  1. Reciprocal rights for citizens.  2. Reciprocal property rights and restoration seized French property in Vietnam.  3. Piastre related to franc.  4. Customs union and free trade within Indochina Federation.  5. Armistice Commission to deal with guerrilla war in Cochinchina.	1. Led to some release of prisoners, and lull in guerrilla operations.  2. No substantial French political concessions eventuated.



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<u>Event</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
	6. Referendum to decide Cochinchina's relationship to DRV.	
	7. France-DRV talks to resume in January, 1947.	
"Incidents" at Haiphong, Langson, and Tourane, November, 1946	Local disputes lead to clashes between French and DRV troops.	1. French seized unilateral control over Haiphong and Langson. 2. French reinforcements landed at Tourane in violation of March 6 Accord.
Hanoi Incident, 19 December 1946	Large-scale conflict begins, spreads throughout Vietnam.	Complete breakdown of relations between France and DRV
Declaration of the Freedom of Cochinchina, 4 February 1947	French High Commissioner extends powers of the Saigon Government to include: 1. Legislative and executive action on all internal affairs. 2. Universal suffrage for election of legislature.	1. President Le Van Hoach of Cochinchina admitted Viet Minh controlled greater part of Cochinchina. 2. Elections repeatedly postponed because of civil disorder.
First Ha Long Bay Agreement, 7 December 1947	1. Bao Dai associates himself with French-sponsored nationalist movement. 2. French promise in vague terms national independence for Vietnam.	1. French took no action toward releasing their control in Vietnam. 2. Bao Dai withdrew to Europe. 3. Agreement condemned by non-Viet Minh nationalists; e.g., Ngo Dinh Diem.

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<u>Event</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
Second Ha Long Bay Agreement, 5 June 1948	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. France solemnly recognizes the independence of Vietnam within the French Union.</li><li>2. Bao Dai reassociates himself with the attempt to form a nationalist government.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. France transferred no significant political power to Vietnamese.</li><li>2. Led only to further negotiations between Bao Dai and France.</li></ol>
Elysee Agreement, 8 March 1949	<p>In an exchange of letters between Bao Dai and President Auriol, France:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Reconfirms Vietnam's status as an independent Associated State within the French Union.</li><li>2. Agrees to unifying Vietnam, and placing it under Vietnamese administration, under terms to be negotiated subsequently.</li><li>3. Retains control of Vietnamese armed forces and foreign relations.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. French economic and political primacy remained unchanged, even in principle.</li><li>2. Cochinchina formally merged with Annam and Tonkin in State of Vietnam in June, 1949.</li><li>3. Plans for internal administrative transfer announced 30 December 1949.</li><li>4. Practical matters of transfer of administrative functions in principal external affairs were deferred to Pau Negotiations of 1950.</li></ol>
Recognition of the Independence of the State of Vietnam, 14 June 1949	<p>French High Commissioner for Indochina and Emperor Bao Dai exchange letters in Saigon formalizing Elysee Agreement.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Cochinchina government tendered resignation to Bao Dai, merging in principle with new State of Vietnam.</li><li>2. No actual transfer of political power occurred.</li></ol>

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<u>Event</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
French Ratification of the Independence of Vietnam, 2 February 1950	Following National Assembly approval (29 January 1950), France announces ratification of the status for Vietnam described in the Elysee Agreement.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. U.S. recognized State of Vietnam (3 February 1950).</li><li>2. Details of transfer of powers awaited Pau Negotiations (March-November, 1950).</li></ol>

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b. U.S. Policy Toward the Conflict, 1947-1949

The U.S. manifested increasing concern over the conflict in Indochina, but through 1949 American policy continued to regard the war as fundamentally a matter for French resolution. It is clear on the record that American policy-makers of the day perceived the vacuity of French policies in 1946 and 1947. The U.S., in its representations to France, consistently deplored the prospect of protracted war in Vietnam, and urged meaningful concessions to Vietnamese nationalism. However, the U.S. always stopped short of endorsing Ho Chi Minh, deterred by Ho's history of communist affiliation. Accordingly, U.S. policy gravitated with that of France toward the Bao Dai solution. At no point was the U.S. prepared to adopt an openly interventionist course. To have done so would have clashed with the expressed British view that Indochina was an exclusively French concern, and played into the hands of France's extremist political parties of both the Right and the Left. The U.S. was particularly apprehensive lest by intervening it strengthen the political position of French Communists. Moreover, in 1946 and 1947, France and Britain were moving toward an anti-Soviet alliance in Europe, and the U.S. was reluctant to press a potentially divisive policy. Compared with European recovery, and escape from communist domination, the U.S. considered the fate of Vietnamese nationalism relatively insignificant. Further, the dispute in 1946 and 1945 over the Dutch possession in Indonesia had furnished a precedent: there the U.S. had moved cautiously, and only after long delays, to internationalize the conflict. Extensive American and British investments in Indonesia, moreover, afforded common ground for intervention. No similar rationale or commonality existed for intervention in Indochina, since Indochina was almost exclusively a French economic preserve, and a political morass which the U.K. was manifestly interested in avoiding.

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The resultant U.S. policy has most often been termed "neutrality." It was, however, also consistent with the policy of deferring to French volition announced by President Roosevelt's Secretary of State on 3 April 1945. It was a policy characterized by the same indecision that had marked U.S. wartime policy. It was, moreover, a policy formulated with an undertone of indifference: at the time, Indochina appeared to be one region in which the U.S. might enjoy the luxury of abstention.

When open warfare broke out between the DRV and France in December, 1946, John Carter Vincent, Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs, in a memorandum to Under Secretary Acheson of 23 December 1946, recommended that the latter call in the French Ambassador to highlight inherent dangers. The memorandum included this acute analysis:

"Although the French in Indochina have made far-reaching paper-concessions to the Vietnamese desire for autonomy, French actions on the scene have been directed toward whittling down the powers and the territorial extent of the Vietnam 'free state.' This process the Vietnamese have continued to resist. At the same time, the French themselves admit that they lack the military strength to reconquer the country. In brief, with inadequate forces, with public opinion sharply at odds, with a government rendered largely ineffective through internal division, the French have tried to accomplish in Indochina what a strong and united Britain has found it unwise to attempt in Burma. Given the present elements in the situation, guerrilla warfare may continue indefinitely."

Secretary Acheson acted on Mr. Vincent's suggestion, and expressed to the Ambassador views summarized as follows:

"We had anticipated such a situation developing in November and events have confirmed our fears. While we have no wish to

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offer to mediate under present conditions we do want the French GOVT to know that we are ready and willing to do anything which it might consider helpful in the circumstances. We have been gratified to learn of Moutet's mission and have confidence in his moderation and broad viewpoint. We believe however that the situation is highly inflammatory and if present unsettled conditions continue, there is a possibility that other powers might attempt to bring the matter up before the Security Council. If this happens, as in the case of Indonesia, the question will arise whether the matter is one of purely French internal concern or a situation likely to disturb the peace. Other powers might likewise attempt some form of intervention as has been suggested in the Chinese press. We would be opposed to such steps, but from every point of view it seems important that the question be settled as soon as possible. Mr. Acheson added that he wondered whether the French would attempt to reconquer the country through military force which was a step that the British had found unwise to attempt in Burma." 58/

On 8 January, 1947, the Department of State instructed the American Ambassador in Paris that the U.S. would approve sale of arms and armaments to France "except in cases which appear to relate to Indochina." 59/ On the same date, 8 January 1947, the French conveyed to the Department of State a message that:

"...the French Government appreciated the understanding attitude that Mr. Acheson had shown in discussing the problem of Indochina; that it had taken note of Mr. Acheson's offer of 'good offices' and appreciated the spirit in which the offer was made; and that the French Government did not feel that it could avail itself of our offer but must continue to handle the situation single-handedly along the lines stated by Moutet. The emissary went on to say that the principal objective of the French military was to restore order and reopen communications. He said that after this was done the French Government would be prepared to discuss matters with the Vietnamese. He said that the French Government had every intention of living up to the agreement of last March 6 and the modus vivendi of September 15, once order was restored. He was asked...whether he thought the French military could restore order within any foreseeable future time. He seemed to think, without much evidence of conviction, that they could." 60/

There then ensued an interesting exchange between the U.S. official and the French representative in which the Frenchman sketched a claim of American culpability for the war:

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"Speaking personally, I told him that I thought there was one flaw in the French approach to the problem worth mentioning. I had in mind an apparent assumption by the French that there was an equality of responsibility as between the French and the Vietnamese. I said that this did not seem to me to be the case; that the responsibility of France as a world power to achieve a solution of the problem was far greater than that of the Vietnamese; and that the situation was not one which could be localized as a purely French-Vietnamese one but might affect adversely conditions throughout Southeast Asia.

"[The emissary] quickly substituted the word 'authority' for 'responsibility' and said that the French were now faced with the problem of reasserting their authority and that we must share the responsibility for their delay in doing so because we had not acceded to French requests in the autumn of 1945 for material assistance." 61/

Early in February, the U.S. Ambassador in Paris was instructed to reassure Premier Ramadier of the "very friendliest feelings" of the U.S. toward France and its interest in supporting France's recovering economic, political and military strength:

"In spite any misunderstanding which might have arisen in minds French in regard to our position concerning Indochina they must appreciate that we have fully recognized France's sovereign position in that area and we do not wish to have it appear that we are in any way endeavoring undermine that position, and French should know it is our desire to be helpful and we stand ready assist any appropriate way we can to find solution for Indochinese problem. At same time we cannot shut out eyes to fact that there are two sides this problem and that our reports indicate both a lack French understanding of other side (more in Saigon than in Paris) and continued existence dangerously outmoded colonial outlook and methods in area. Furthermore, there is no escape from fact that trend of times is to effect that colonial empires in XIX Century sense are rapidly becoming thing of past. Action Brit in India and Burma and Dutch in Indonesia are outstanding examples this trend, and French themselves took cognizance of it both in new Constitution and in their agreements with Vietnam. On other hand we do not lose sight fact that Ho Chi Minh has direct Communist connections and it should be obvious that we are not interested in seeing colonial empire administrations supplanted by philosophy and political organizations emanating from and controlled by Kremlin...."

"Frankly we have no solution of problem to suggest. It is basically matter for two parties to work out themselves and from your reports and those from Indochina we are led to feel that both parties have endeavored to keep door open to some sort of

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settlement. We appreciate fact that Vietnam started present fighting in Indochina on December 19 and that this action has made it more difficult for French to adopt a position of generosity and conciliation. Nevertheless we hope that French will find it possible to be more than generous in trying to find a solution." 62/

Thus, the U.S. chose to remain outside the conflict; the announced U.S. position was, in the words of Secretary of State George C. Marshall, to hope that "a pacific basis of adjustment of the difficulties could be found." 63/ Events conspired against this hope, however, and as the fighting continued, the prospect of a Moscow-controlled state in Vietnam continued to draw the U.S. nearer to involvement. On 13 May 1947, the Department of State furnished the following guidance to U.S. diplomats in Paris, Saigon, and Hanoi:

"Key our position is our awareness that in respect developments affecting position Western democratic powers in southern Asia, we essentially in same boat as French, also as British and Dutch. We cannot conceive setbacks to long-range interests France which would not also be setbacks our own. Conversely we should regard close association France and members French Union as not only to advantage peoples concerned, but indirectly our own.

"In our view, southern Asia in critical phase its history with seven new nations in process achieving or struggling independence or autonomy. These nations include quarter inhabitants world and their future course, owing sheer weight populations, resources they command, and strategic location, will be momentous factor world stability. Following relaxation European controls, internal racial, religious, and national differences could plunge new nations into violent discord, or already apparent anti-Western Pan-Asiatic tendencies could become dominant political force, or Communists could capture control. We consider as best safeguard against these eventualities a continued close association between newly-autonomous peoples and powers which have long been responsible their welfare. In particular we recognize Vietnamese will for indefinite period require French material and technical assistance and enlightened political guidance which can be provided only by nation steeped like France in democratic tradition and confirmed in respect human liberties and worth individual.

"We equally convinced, however, such association must be voluntary to be lasting and achieve results, and that protraction present situation Indochina can only destroy basic voluntary cooperation, leave legacy permanent bitterness, and irrevocably alienate Vietnamese from France and those values represented by France and other Western democracies.



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"While fully appreciating difficulties French position this conflict, we feel there is danger in any arrangement which might provide Vietnamese opportunity compare unfavorably their own position and that of other peoples southern Asia who have made tremendous strides toward autonomy since war.

"While we are still ready and willing do anything we can which might be considered helpful, French will understand we not attempting come forward with any solution our own or intervene in situation. However, they will also understand we inescapably concerned with situation Far East generally, upon which developments Indochina likely have profound effect....

"For your INFO, evidence that French Communists are being directed accelerate their agitation French colonies even extent lose much popular support France (URTEL 1719 Apr 25) may be indication Kremlin prepared sacrifice temporary gains with 40 million French to long range colonial strategy with 600 million dependent people, which lends great urgency foregoing views....DEPT much concerned lest French efforts find QUOTE true representatives Vietnam UNQUOTE with whom negotiate result creation impotent puppet GOVT along lines Cochinchina regime, or that restoration Baodai [sic] may be attempted, implying democracies reduced resort monarchy as weapon against Communism. You may refer these further views if nature your conversations French appears warrant." 64/

The U.S. position may have influenced the French to revise the first Ha Long Bay Agreement (December, 1947) and when the second agreement was signed in June, 1948, the U.S. promptly instructed the U.S. Ambassador to "apply such persuasion and/or pressure as is best calculated [to] produce desired result" of France's "unequivocally and promptly approving the principle of Viet independence." 65/ Again, however, the Ambassador was instructed to avoid ostensible intervention while making it clear that the U.S. foresaw France's losing Indochina if it persisted to ignore American advice. These instructions were repeated at the end of August, 1948, with the assertion that the Department of State "believes nothing should be left undone which will strengthen truly nationalist groups in Indochina and induce present supporters of the Viet Minh to come to the side of that group." 66/

The first suggestions that the U.S. became tangibly involved in Vietnam appear in a reported conversation of the U.S. Ambassador with the French Foreign Office in September, 1948. The U.S. Ambassador again urged on France legislation or other definite action to move toward the unification of Vietnam, and the immediate negotiation of concrete steps toward autonomy as envisaged by the Ha Long Bay Agreement. He then told the French representative that:

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"...US is fully appreciative difficulties which face French Government in Indochina at this time and reminds him that US had already indicated its willingness, if French Government so desired, to give public indication its approval of concrete steps by French Government to come to grips with basic political problem of Indochina. I informed him that US also willing under similar circumstances to consider assisting French Government with respect to matter of financial aid for Indochina through ECA but could not give consideration to altering its present policy in this regard unless real progress made in reaching non-Communist solution in Indochina based on cooperation of true nationalists of that country." 67/

As negotiations proceeded with Bao Dai preliminary to the Elysee Agreement, the Department of State instructed the American Ambassador in Paris, on 17 January 1949, that:

"While the Department is desirous of the French coming to terms with Bao Dai or any truly nationalist group which has a reasonable chance of winning over the preponderance of Vietnamese, we cannot at this time irretrievably commit the U.S. to support of a native government which by failing to develop appeal among Vietnamese might become virtually a puppet government separated from the people and existing only by the presence of French military forces." 68/

Following the Elysee Agreement, the U.S. was better disposed toward providing aid in Indochina. On 10 May 1949, the American Consul in Saigon was informed that the U.S. desired the "Bao Dai experiment" to succeed, since there appeared to be no other alternative.

"At the proper time and under the proper circumstances, the Department will be prepared to do its part by extending recognition to the Bao Dai government and by expressing the possibility of complying with any request by such a government for U.S. arms and economic assistance. It must be understood, however, that an aid program of this nature would require Congressional approval. Since the U.S. could, however, scarcely afford backing a government which would have the color and be likely to suffer the fate of a puppet regime, it must be clear that France will offer all necessary concessions to make the Bao Dai solution attractive to the nationalists. This is a step of which the French themselves must see the urgency and necessity in view of the possibly short time remaining before Communist successes in China are felt in Indochina. Moreover, the Bao Dai government must through its own efforts demonstrate the capacity to organize and conduct affairs wisely so as to insure the maximum opportunity for obtaining requisite popular support, inasmuch as a government created in Indochina analogous to the Kuomintang would be foredoomed to failure." 69/

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But "anti-communism" initially proved to be no better guideline for the formulation of American policy in Indochina than it had been for the French. Indeed, early U.S. attempts to discern the nature and extent of communist influence in Vietnam devolved to the seeming paradox that if Ho Chi Minh were communist, he seemed to have no visible ties with Moscow. For example, a State Department appraisal of Ho Chi Minh provided to the U.S. Ambassador in China in July, 1948, was admittedly speculative:

"1. Depts info indicates that Ho Chi Minh is Communist. His long and well-known record in Comintern during twenties and thirties, continuous support by French Communist newspaper Humanite since 1945, praise given him by Radio Moscow (which for past six months has been devoting increasing attention to Indochina) and fact he has been called 'leading communist' by recent Russian publications as well as Daily Worker makes any other conclusion appear to be wishful thinking.

"2. Dept has no evidence of direct link between Ho and Moscow but assumes it exists, nor is it able evaluate amount pressure or guidance Moscow exerting. We have impression Ho must be given or is retaining large degree latitude. Dept considers that USSR accomplishing its immediate aims in Indochina by (a) pinning down large numbers of French troops, (b) causing steady drain upon French economy thereby tending retard recovery and dissipate ECA assistance to France, and (c) denying to world generally surpluses which Indochina normally has available thus perpetuating conditions of disorder and shortages which favorable to growth communism. Furthermore, Ho seems quite capable of retaining and even strengthening his grip on Indochina with no outside assistance other than continuing procession of French puppet govts." 70/

In the fall of 1948, the Office of Intelligence Research in the Department of State conducted a survey of communist influence in Southeast Asia. Evidence of Kremlin-directed conspiracy was found in virtually all countries except Vietnam:

"Since December 19, 1946, there have been continuous conflicts between French forces and the nationalist government of Vietnam. This government is a coalition in which avowed communists hold influential positions. Although the French admit the influence of this government, they have consistently refused to deal with its leader, Ho Chi Minh, on the grounds that he is a communist.

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"To date the Vietnam press and radio have not adopted an anti-American position. It is rather the French colonial press that has been strongly anti-American and has freely accused the U.S. of imperialism in Indochina to the point of approximating the official Moscow position. Although the Vietnam radio has been closely watched for a new position toward the U.S., no change has appeared so far. Nor does there seem to have been any split within the coalition government of Vietnam....

"Evaluation. If there is a Moscow-directed conspiracy in Southeast Asia, Indochina is an anomaly so far. Possible explanations are:

1. No rigid directives have been issued by Moscow.
2. The Vietnam government considers that it has no rightist elements that must be purged.
3. The Vietnam Communists are not subservient to the foreign policies pursued by Moscow.
4. A special dispensation for the Vietnam government has been arranged in Moscow.

Of these possibilities, the first and fourth seem most likely."71/

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- 3. Origins of the U.S. Involvement in Vietnam
- a. The Policy Context

Events in China of 1948 and 1949 brought the United States to a new awareness of the vigor of communism in Asia, and to a sense of urgency over its containment. U.S. policy instruments developed to meet unequivocal communist challenges in Europe were applied to the problem of the Far East. Concurrent with the development of NATO, a U.S. search began for collective security in Asia; economic and military assistance programs were inaugurated; and the Truman Doctrine acquired wholly new dimensions by extension into regions where the European empires were being dismantled. In March, 1947, President Truman had set forth the following policy guidelines:

"I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.

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I believe we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way...." 72/

The President went on to underscore the U.S. determination to commit its resources to contain communism. While he clearly subordinated military aid to economic and political means, he did assert the U.S. intent to assist in maintaining security:

"To insure the peaceful development of nations, free from coercion, the United States has taken a leading part in establishing the United Nations. The United Nations is designed to make possible freedom and independence for all its members. We shall not realize our objectives, however, unless we are willing to help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes." 73/

In the year 1947, while U.S. military assistance began to flow into Greece to ward off subversive aggression, the U.S. inaugurated the European Recovery Plan (ERP). ERP was aimed at economic recovery in Western Europe, especially in countries such as France and Italy where post-war depression was fostering marked leftward political trends. In one of the high level appraisals of the situation that the U.S. had to counter in 1947, the Harriman Committee on Foreign Aid has concluded that:

"The interest of the United States in Europe...cannot be measured simply in economic terms. It is also strategic and political. We all know that we are faced in the world today with two conflicting ideologies....Our position in the world has been based for at least a century on the existence in Europe of a number of strong states committed by tradition and inclination to the democratic concept...." 74/

The fall of the Czechoslovakian Government in February 1948 brought about the Brussels Pact, a Western European collective defense and economic collaboration arrangement. The blockade of Berlin, which began on 1 April 1948, accelerated U.S. movement toward membership in the alliance. On June 11, 1948 the U.S. Senate adopted a resolution advising the Executive to undertake the:

"...Progressive development of regional and other collective arrangements for individual and collective self-defense in accordance with the purposes, principles, and provisions of the Charter [of the UN], association of

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the United States, by constitutional process, with such regional and other collective arrangements as are based on continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, and as affect its national security." 75/

That same month, Congress passed the Economic Cooperation Act, and in July, 1948, opened negotiations for a North Atlantic Alliance. The North Atlantic Treaty was signed in April, 1949, and entered into force in August of that year.

In the same omnibus foreign assistance legislation which had authorized ECA in June, 1948, Congress had provided for a China Aid Program. This measure met almost immediate failure, for Mao's armies spread unchecked over the China mainland, and by mid-1949 the position of the nationalists there was untenable. The "failure" of U.S. aid -- which was termed such by Congressional critics -- no less than the urgent situation in Europe and the exploding of the first Soviet nuclear device in September, 1949, figured in Congressional action on military assistance legislation. 76/

On October 6, 1949, Congress passed the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) through which U.S. arms, military equipment and training assistance might be provided world-wide for collective defense. In the first appropriations under MDAP, NATO countries received 76% of the total, and Greece and Turkey (not yet NATO members), 16%. 77/ But Korea and the Philippines received modest aid, and the legislators clearly intended the law to underwrite subsequent appropriations for collective security in Asia. The opening paragraph of the law not only supported NATO, but foreshadowed the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty:

"An Act to Promote the Foreign Policy and Provide for the Defense and General Welfare of the United States by Furnishing Military Assistance to Foreign Nations, Approved October 6, 1949.

"Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act may be cited as the 'Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949.'

"FINDINGS AND DECLARATION OF POLICY

"The Congress of the United States reaffirms the policy of the United States to achieve international peace and security through the United Nations so that armed force shall not be



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used except in the common interest. The Congress hereby finds that the efforts of the United States and other countries to promote peace and security in furtherance of the purposes of the Charter of the United Nations require additional measures of support based upon the principle of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid. These measures include the furnishing of military assistance essential to enable the United States and other nations dedicated to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter to participate effectively in arrangements for individual and collective self-defense in support of those purposes and principles. In furnishing such military assistance, it remains the policy of the United States to continue to exert maximum efforts to obtain agreements to provide the United Nations with armed forces as contemplated in the Charter and agreements to achieve universal control of weapons of mass destruction and universal regulation and reduction of armaments, including armed forces, under adequate safeguards to protect complying nations against violation and evasion.

"The Congress hereby expresses itself as favoring the creation by the free countries and the free peoples of the Far East of a joint organization, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, to establish a program of self-help and mutual cooperation designed to develop their economic and social well-being, to safeguard basic rights and liberties and to protect their security and independence.

"The Congress recognizes that economic recovery is essential to international peace and security and must be given clear priority. The Congress also recognizes that the increased confidence of free peoples in their ability to resist direct or indirect aggression and to maintain internal security will advance such recovery and support political stability." 78/

While Congress was deliberating on MDAP, the staff of the National Security Council, at the request of the Secretary of Defense, had been reexamining U.S. policy toward Asia. In June, 1949, the Secretary had noted that he was:

"...increasingly concerned at the...advance of communism in large areas of the world and particularly the successes of communism in China...."

"A major objective of United States policy, as I understand it, is to contain communism in order to reduce its threat to our security. Our actions in Asia should be part of a carefully considered and comprehensive plan to further that objective." 79/

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The NSC study responding to the Secretary's request is remarkable for the rarity of its specific references to Indochina. The staff study focused, rather, on generalities concerning the conflict between the interests of European metropolises and the aspirations of subject Asian peoples for independence. The following extract is from the section of the study dealing with Southeast Asia:

"The current conflict between colonialism and native independence is the most important political factor in south-east Asia. This conflict results not only from the decay of European imperial power in the area but also from a widening political consciousness and the rise of militant nationalism among the subject peoples. With the exception of Thailand and the Philippines, the southeast Asia countries do not possess leaders practiced in the exercise of responsible power. The question of whether a colonial country is fit to govern itself, however, is not always relevant in practical politics. The real issue would seem to be whether the colonial country is able and determined to make continued foreign rule an overall losing proposition for the metropolitan power. If it is, independence for the colonial country is the only practical solution, even though misgovernment eventuates. A solution of the consequent problem of instability, if it arises, must be sought on a non-imperialist plane. In any event, colonial-nationalist conflict provides a fertile field for subversive communist activities, and it is now clear that southeast Asia is the target of a coordinated offensive directed by the Kremlin. In seeking to gain control of southeast Asia, the Kremlin is motivated in part by a desire to acquire southeast Asia's resources and communication lines, and to deny them to us. But the political gains which would accrue to the USSR from communist capture of southeast Asia are equally significant. The extension of communist authority in China represents a grievous political defeat for us; if southeast Asia also is swept by communism we shall have suffered a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East and in a then critically exposed Australia. The United States should continue to use its influence looking toward resolving the colonial nationalist conflict in such a way as to satisfy the fundamental demands of the nationalist-colonial conflict, lay the basis for political stability and resistance to communism, and avoid weakening the colonial powers who are our western allies. However, it must be remembered that the long colonial tradition in Asia has left the peoples of that area suspicious of Western influence. We must approach the problem from the Asiatic point of view in so far as possible and should refrain from taking the lead in movements which must of necessity be of Asian origin. It will therefore be to our interest wherever possible

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to encourage the peoples of India, Pakistan, the Philippines and other Asian states to take the leadership in meeting the common problems of the area....

"It would be to the interest of the United States to make use of the skills, knowledge and long experience of our European friends and, to whatever extent may be possible, enlist their cooperation in measures designed to check the spread of USSR influence in Asia. If members of the British Commonwealth, particularly India, Pakistan, Australia and New Zealand, can be persuaded to join with the United Kingdom and the United States in carrying out constructive measures of economic, political and cultural cooperation, the results will certainly be in our interest. Not only will the United States be able thus to relieve itself of part of the burden, but the cooperation of the white nations of the Commonwealth will arrest any potential dangers of the growth of a white-colored polarization." 80/

On December 30, 1949, the National Security Council met with President Truman presiding, discussed the NSC staff study, and approved the following conclusions:

"As the basis for realization of its objectives, the United States should pursue a policy toward Asia containing the following components:

"a. The United States should make known its sympathy with the efforts of Asian leaders to form regional associations of non-Communist states of the various Asian areas, and if in due course associations eventuate, the United States should be prepared, if invited, to assist such associations to fulfill their purposes under conditions which would be to our interest. The following principles should guide our actions in this respect:

(1) Any association formed must be the result of a genuine desire on the part of the participating nations to cooperate for mutual benefit in solving the political, economic, social and cultural problems of the area.

(2) The United States must not take such an active part in the early stages of the formation of such an association that it will be subject to the charge of using the Asiatic nations to further United States ambitions.

(3) The association, if it is to be a constructive force, must operate on the basis of mutual aid and self-help in all fields so that a true partnership may exist based on equal rights and equal obligations.

(4) United States participation in any stage of the development of such an association should be with a view to accomplishing our basic objectives in Asia and to assuring that any

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association formed will be in accord with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations dealing with regional arrangements.

"b. The United States should act to develop and strengthen the security of the area from Communist external aggression or internal subversion. These steps should take into account any benefits to the security of Asia which may flow from the development of one or more regional groupings. The United States on its own initiative should now:

(1) Improve the United States position with respect to Japan, the Ryukyus and the Philippines.

(2) Scrutinize closely the development of threats from Communist aggression, direct or indirect, and be prepared to help within our means to meet such threats by providing political, economic, and military assistance and advice where clearly needed to supplement the resistance of the other governments in and out of the area which are more directly concerned.

(3) Develop cooperative measures through multi-lateral or bilateral arrangements to combat Communist internal subversion.

(4) Appraise the desirability and the means of developing in Asia some form of collective security arrangements, bearing in mind the following considerations:

(a) The reluctance of India at this time to join in any anti-Communist security pact and the influence this will have among the other nations of Asia.

(b) The necessity of assuming that any collective security arrangements which might be developed be based on the principle of mutual aid and on a demonstrated desire and ability to share in the burden by all the participating states.

(c) The necessity of assuring that any such security arrangements would be consonant with the purposes of any regional association which may be formed in accordance with paragraph 3-a above.

(d) The necessity of assuring that any such security arrangement would be in conformity with the provisions of Article 51 of the Charter relating to individual and collective self-defense.

"c. The United States should encourage the creation of an atmosphere favorable to economic recovery and development in non-Communist Asia, and to the revival of trade along multi-lateral, non-discriminatory lines. The economic policies of the

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United States should be adapted to promote, where possible, economic conditions that will contribute to political stability in friendly countries of Asia, but the United States should carefully avoid assuming responsibility for the economic welfare and development of that continent...."

\* \* \*

"h. The United States should continue to use its influence in Asia toward resolving the colonial-nationalist conflict in such a way as to satisfy the fundamental demands of the nationalist movement while at the same time minimizing the strain on the colonial powers who are our Western allies. Particular attention should be given to the problem of French Indo-China and action should be taken to bring home to the French the urgency of removing the barriers to the obtaining by Bao Dai or other non-Communist nationalist leaders of the support of a substantial proportion of the Vietnamese....

"i. Active consideration should be given to means by which all members of the British Commonwealth may be induced to play a more active role in collaboration with the United States in Asia. Similar collaboration should be obtained to the extent possible from other non-Communist nations having interests in Asia.

"j. Recognizing that the non-Communist governments of South Asia already constitute a bulwark against Communist expansion in Asia, the United States should exploit every opportunity to increase the present Western orientation of the area and to assist, within our capabilities, its governments in their efforts to meet the minimum aspirations of their people and to maintain internal security." 81/

Thus, in the closing months of 1949, the course of U.S. policy was set to block further communist expansion in Asia: by collective security if the Asians were forthcoming, by collaboration with major European allies and commonwealth nations, if possible, but bilaterally if necessary. On that policy course lay the Korean War of 1950-1953, the forming of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization of 1954, and the progressively deepening U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

b. The U.S. Enters the War

On December 30, 1949, the French signed over ten separate implementing agreements relating to the transfer of internal administration in Vietnam to Bao Dai's State of Vietnam, in accordance with the Elysee Agreement of March 8, 1949. By January, 1950, Mao's legions had reached Vietnam's northern frontier, and North Vietnam was moving into the Sino-Soviet orbit. A Department of State telegram reviewed U.S. policy as of 20 January 1950:

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"DEPT still hopeful Bao Dai will succeed in gaining increasing popular support at Ho's expense and our policy remains essentially the same; to encourage him and to urge FR toward further concessions.

"The start made by Bao Dai, the qualities exhibited by him, and his initial reception seem to have been better than we might have anticipated, even discounting optimism of FR sources. Transfer of power apparently well received. FR success in disarming and interning fleeing CHI Nationalists without serious intervention to the present by CHI COMMIES also encouraging.

"However, more recently, marked opposition has been encountered which demonstrates at least that Bao Dai's popular support has not yet widened. Increased Viet Minh MIL activity is disquieting. This CLD be special effort by Ho, timed to coincide with transfer of power and the arrival of CHI COMMIES armies on frontier, and to precede Bangkok Conference, or CLD be evidence of increasing strength reinforced by hopes of CHI COMMIE support, direct or indirect.

"DEPT has as yet no knowledge of negotiations between Ho and Mao groups although radio intercept of New China News Agency release of JAN 17 indicates that Ho has messaged the 'GOVTS of the world' that 'the GOVT of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam is the only legal GOVT of the Vietnam people' and is 'ready to establish DIPL relations with any GOVT which WLD be willing to cooperate with her on the basis of equality and mutual respect of national sovereignty and territory so as to defend world peace and democracy. Ho's radio making similar professions....

"Nature and timing of recognition of Bao Dai now under consideration here and with other GOVTS...." 82/

First the Chinese Communists, and then the Soviets recognized the DRV. On 29 January 1950, the French National Assembly approved legislation granting autonomy to the State of Vietnam. On February 1, 1950, Secretary of State Acheson made the following public statement:

"The recognition by the Kremlin of Ho Chi Minh's communist movement in Indochina comes as a surprise. The Soviet acknowledgment of this movement should remove any illusions as to the 'nationalist' nature of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina.

"Although timed in an effort to cloud the transfer of sovereignty by France to the legal Governments of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, we have every reason to believe that those legal

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governments will proceed in their development toward stable governments representing the true nationalist sentiments of more than 20 million peoples of Indochina.

"French action in transferring sovereignty to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia has been in process for some time. Following French ratification, which is expected within a few days, the way will be open for recognition of these legal governments by the countries of the world whose policies support the development of genuine national independence in former colonial areas. Ambassador Jessup has already expressed to Emperor Bao Dai our best wishes for prosperity and stability in Vietnam, and the hope that closer relationship will be established between Vietnam and the United States." 83/

Formal French ratification of Vietnamese independence was announced on 2 February 1950. President Truman approved U.S. recognition for Bao Dai the same date, and on 4 February, the American Consul General in Saigon was instructed to deliver the following message to Bao Dai:

"Your Imperial Majesty:

"I have Your Majesty's letter in which I am informed of the signing of the agreements of March 8, 1949 between Your Majesty, on behalf of Vietnam, and the President of the French Republic, on behalf of France. My Government has also been informed of the ratification on February 2, 1950 by the French Government of the agreements of March 8, 1949.

"Since these acts establish the Republic of Vietnam as an independent State within the French Union, I take this opportunity to congratulate Your Majesty and the people of Vietnam on this happy occasion.

"The Government of the United States of America is pleased to welcome the Republic of Vietnam into the community of peace-loving nations of the world and to extend diplomatic recognition to the Government of the Republic of Vietnam. I look forward to an early exchange of diplomatic representatives between our two countries...." 84/

Recognition of Bao Dai was followed swiftly by French requests for U.S. aid. On May 8, 1950, Secretary of State Acheson released the following statement in Paris:

"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

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fact that the problem of meeting the threat to the security of Viet Nam, 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 exist 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." 85/

On May 11, 1950, the Acting Secretary of State made the following statement:

"A special survey mission, headed by R. Allen Griffin, has just returned from Southeast Asia and reported on economic and technical assistance needed in that area. Its over-all recommendations for the area are modest and total in the neighborhood of \$60 million. The Department is working on plans to implement that program at once.

"Secretary Acheson on Monday in Paris cited the urgency of the situation applying in the associated states of Viet-Nam, Laos and Cambodia. The Department is working jointly with ECA to impelment the economic and technical assistance recommendations for Indochina as well as the other states of Southeast Asia and anticipates that this program will get underway in the immediate future.

"Military assistance for Southeast Asia is being worked out by the Department of Defense in cooperation with the Department of State, and the details will not be made public for security reasons.

"Military assistance needs will be met from the President's emergency fund of \$75 million provided under MDAP for the general area of China.

"Economic assistance needs will be met from the ECA China Aid funds, part of which both Houses of Congress have indicated will be made available for the general area of China. Final



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legislative action is still pending on this authorization  
but is expected to be completed within the next week." 86/

The United States thereafter was directly involved in the developing  
tragedy in Vietnam.



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I. A.

FOOTNOTES

1. U.S. Department of State, Documentary History of United States Policy Toward Indochina, 1940-1953 (Historical Office, Research Project No. 354, April, 1954) TS; see also U.S. Congress, House, Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1944 (House Document No. 303, 1965), III, 769-784; Ruth B. Russell, A History of the United Nations Charter (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1958), 173-174.
2. Ibid. Included in the Documentary History..., op. cit., is a Memorandum of Conversation between Roosevelt and Stalin, Teheran, November 28, 1943 (SECRET). The President is said to have then considered that a twenty- to thirty-year period would be necessary before the Indochinese peoples would be ready for independence.
3. Speech of Foreign Minister Pineau, New York Times, March 5, 1956.
4. Russell, op. cit., 79.
5. Ibid., 174, quoting Cordell Hull, Memoirs, II, 1957; U.S. Department of State, Documentary History..., op. cit., A-10.
6. Ernest J. King and Walter M. Whitehill, Fleet Admiral King: A Naval Record (1952), 569; quoted in Russell, op. cit., 574.
7. John Ehrman, Grand Strategy: August 1943-September 1944, Vol. V. (1956), 442; quoted in Russell, op. cit., 574.
8. U.S. Department of State, Documentary History..., op. cit., A-16.
9. Ibid., A-16.
10. Extract from Stettinius Diary; quoted in U.S. State Department Study, Documentary History..., op. cit., A-17.
11. William D. Leahy, I Was There (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950), 244, 269, 286.
12. Russell, op. cit., 575.
13. In March 1945, the President remarked to Gen. Wedemeyer, then commanding officer for U.S. forces in China, "that he must watch carefully to prevent British and French political activities in the area and that he should give only such support to the British and French as would be required in direct operations against the Japanese." U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers: The Conference of Berlin (the Potsdam Conference), 1945, I, 917.

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14. The de Gaulle representations were made orally to the U.S. Ambassador. See U.S. Department of State, telegram 1196 from Paris, 13 March, and Documentary History..., A-19, A-20.
15. Leahy, I Was There, op. cit., pp. 338-339. On the basis of research into the Air Force archives, Bernard Fall wrote in Street Without Joy (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole, 1967, 4th ed.) note, p. 25, that General Claire Chennault, commander of the 14th Air Force, "...Did indeed fly support missions in behalf of the retreating French forces." [After the Japanese take-over in March.] In his The Two Viet-Nams, moreover, Fall cited the memoirs of General Lionel-Max Chassin, commander of the French Far East Air Force, to the effect that the 14th Air Force provided supplies and even fighter support to the French until at least April 26, 1945. (New York: Praeger, 1967, 2nd revised ed.) n. 10, pp. 468-469. In both books, however, Fall presents a strong case for the paucity of U.S. aid to the French in the 1945-1946 period. See also U.S. Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation by Assistant Secretary of State Dunn, 19 March 1945, and telegram to Paris 1576 of 19 April 1945.
16. Russell, op. cit., 975.
17. Russell, op. cit., 91; quoting from Cordell Hull, The Memoirs of Cordell Hull, 2 Vols., (New York: Macmillan Co., 1948).
18. Russell, op. cit., pp. 176-177, 573-589.
19. Ibid., 585, US Dept State, Documentary History..., op. cit., B-2.
20. U.S. Department of State, Documentary History..., op. cit., B-1.
21. U.S. Department of State, Documentary History..., op. cit., B-2, p. 2.
22. Russell, op. cit., p. 1047. \*
23. U.S. Department of State, Memorandum by the Director of the Office of European Affairs (Matthews) to the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, May 23, 1945. The proposal for a division of responsibility between Chinese Nationalist and British forces was first made by General Marshall, head of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, on July 18, 1945. After some negotiation with Chiang Kai-shek over the precise dividing line, the British accepted the 16th parallel; Truman and Churchill formally agreed to the arrangement on July 24. See Foreign Relations of the United States (Potsdam), op. cit., I, 83 377, 922; and II, 1313, 1319, 1465.

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24. As for the O.S.S., the ranking American official in northern Vietnam in 1945, Brigadier General Philip E. Gallagher, has attested: "...throughout the months before the Japanese capitulation, O.S.S. officers and men operated behind Japanese lines, to arm, lead and train native guerrillas who were organized by the Vietminh." (A situation report, undated, in the Gallagher Papers, quoted in Bert Cooper, John Killigrew, and Norman LaCharité, Case Studies in Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare: Vietnam 1941-1954 [Washington, D.C.: Special Operations Research Office, The American University, 1964], p. 107.) Other sources conclude, however, that O.S.S. assistance to the Viet Minh-led guerrillas was extremely limited, although it gave the Viet Minh the opportunity to proclaim that they were part of the Allied effort against the Japanese. (See Fall, Le Viet-Minh: La République Démocratique du Viet-Nam [Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1960], p. 34; Cooper, Killigrew, and LaCharité, op. cit.)
25. U.S. Department of State, Documentary History..., op. cit., B-3.
26. U.S. Department of State, telegram from Paris 6857, 28 November 1945.
27. U.S. Department of State, Documentary History..., op. cit., B-4, B-6, B-9.
28. U.S. Department of State, Political Activities Along the South China-Indochina Border (Office of Intelligence Research, Report No. 4575, December 29, 1947), 5.
29. U.S. Department of State, Documentary History..., op. cit., B-5.
30. U.S. Department of State, Political Activities Along the South China-Indochina Border, op. cit., 5.
31. U.S. Department of State, Indochina Since 1939 (Office of Intelligence Research, No. 3602, 25 March 1946), 6.
32. U.S. Department of State, Brief on Issues in Dispute Between France and Vietnam (Office of Intelligence Research, OIR Report No. 4303, March 10, 1947), 6.
33. U.S. Department of State, Indochina Since 1939: A Factual Survey (Office of Intelligence Research, No. 3602, 25 March 1946), Appendix A. Appended to the Accords of 6 March were a series of supplementary agreements, among which was a plan for withdrawing all French troops within five years.
34. Ibid., 7, 11.

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35. In a note to the French Ambassador, of 10 April 1946, the Department of State confirmed that: "...the Franco-Chinese agreement completes the reversion of all of Indo-China to French control...." and that the Combined Chiefs of Staff "offer no objection" to the arrangement.
36. U.S. Department of State, Documentary History..., op. cit., B-9, B-6. The Department of State files contain at least 6 communications from Ho in the period September, 1945, to February, 1946, addressed to the U.S. Government in his capacity as "President of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam" or as President and Foreign Minister of the "Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam": (1) Letter to President Truman, September 29, 1950 (confidential; file 851G.00/10-1845). (2) Letter to the Secretary of State, October 22, 1945 (from Kunming, desp. 38, October 24, 1945, confidential; file 851G.00/10-2445). (3) Letter to Secretary of State, November 1, 1945 (from Chungking, desp. 890, November 26, 1945, unclassified). (4) Letter to President Truman, undated (from Chungking, tel. 1948, November 8, 1945, confidential; file 851G.00/11.845). (5) Letter to President Truman, January 18, 1946 (from Chungking, tel. 281, February 13, 1946, confidential; file 740.00119 PW/2-1346). (6) Letter to President Truman, February 16, 1946 (unclassified file 851G.10/2-2046).
37. Ibid.
38. U.S. Department of State, telegram to Saigon 305, December 5, 1946.
39. Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 155.
40. Ibid., p. 186; Buttinger, op. cit., II, pp. 676-678.
41. Hammer, op. cit., p. 190.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., p. 186.
44. Ibid., p. 191.
45. Ibid., p. 192.
46. Ibid., p. 193.
47. Ibid., pp. 193-194.

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48. Ibid., p. 195.
49. Ibid., p. 197.
50. Ibid., p. 195.
51. Ibid., p. 195.
52. Ibid., p. 207.
53. Ibid., p. 204.
54. Ibid., p. 199.
55. Ibid., p. 208.
56. Buttinger, op. cit., 806-807.
57. Chart is based on contemporary publications of the U.S. Department of State, Office of Intelligence Research, together with Hammer, op. cit., and Buttinger, op. cit., passim.
58. U.S. Department of State telegram to Paris 6586 of 24 December 1946, CONFIDENTIAL.
59. U.S. Department of State telegram to Paris 75, 8 January 1947.
60. U.S. Department of State memorandum for Mr. Acheson, dated 8 January 1947, subject "French Indochina."
61. Ibid.
62. State Department telegram 431 to Embassy in Paris, 3 February 1947, SECRET.
63. Hammer, op. cit., 202.
64. U.S. Department of State telegram to Paris 1737, 13 May 1947.
65. U.S. Department of State telegram from Paris 3621 of 9 July 1948, and telegram to Paris 2637 of 14 July 1948.
66. U.S. Department of State telegram to Paris 3368, 30 August 1948.
67. U.S. Department of State telegram from Paris 5129, 30 September 1948.
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B. The Character  
and Power of  
the Viet Minh

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I. B.

THE CHARACTER AND POWER OF THE VIET MINH

SUMMARY

One of the recurrent themes of criticism of U.S. policy in Vietnam has been that from the end of World War II on, there was a failure to recognize that the Viet Minh was the principal vehicle for Vietnamese nationalism and that it, in fact, was in control of and effectively governing all of Vietnam. Evidence on issues like popularity and control is always somewhat suspect--especially when dealing with an exotic country like Vietnam at a time when what Americans knew about it was largely dependent on French sources. Nonetheless, some generalizations can be made and supported.

First, the Viet Minh was the main repository of Vietnamese nationalism and anti-French colonialism. There were other such groups promoting Viet independence but none were competitive on a country-wide scale. It is also true that the disciplined, well-organized, and well-led Indochinese Communist Party was the controlling element in the Viet Minh. The ICP was not, however, in the numerical majority either in total membership or in leadership posts held. This gap between control and numbers can be explained by two factors: (a) ICP strategy was to unify nationalist elements to achieve the immediate objective of independence; and (b) the other components of the Viet Minh were sizable enough to fractionalize the whole movement. In other words, from World War II on, the ICP was strong enough to lead, but not to dominate Vietnamese nationalism.

Second, the Viet Minh was sufficiently popular and effective to turn itself into a Vietnam-wide government that could have extended its authority throughout the country after World War II--except for the obstacle of reasserted French power, and, to a lesser degree, of indigenous political opposition in Cochinchina. The Viet Minh was always more powerful in Tonkin and Annam than in South Vietnam. However, it seems likely that in the absence of the French, the Viet Minh through its governmental creation, the DRV, would have overridden indigenous tribal, religious, and other opposition in short order.

Vietnamese nationalism developed three types of political parties or movements:

Reform parties. Narrowly based among the small educated Vietnamese elite, these parties made little pretense at representing the masses of the peasantry--except in the ancient mandarin sense of

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paternal leadership. In general, they advocated reform of the relationship between France and Vietnam to establish an independent and united nation, but would neither sever beneficial bonds with the metropole, nor alter drastically the Vietnamese social structure. Members included many men of impeccable repute and undoubted nationalist convictions--among them Ngo Dinh Diem--but also a number of known opportunist and corrupt Vietnamese. The reformist parties were further discredited by collaboration with the Japanese during World War II. These parties formed the basis for the "Bao Dai solution" to which France and the U.S. gravitated in the late 1940's.

Theocratic parties. In Cochinchina--and almost exclusively there--during the 1930's there emerged religious sects commanding firm loyalties of hundreds of thousands of peasants. Two of these--the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao--aspired to temporal as well as spiritual power, fielded armed forces, and formed local governments. They opposed both French political and cultural hegemony, and domination by other Vietnamese parties. Some elements collaborated openly with the Japanese during 1940-1945. Because these parties were of local and religious character, any parallel with other Viet political organizations would be inexact. These movements account in large measure for the distinctive character of South Vietnamese nationalism as compared with that of Annam or Tonkin.

Revolutionary parties. The numerous remaining Vietnamese political parties fall into the revolutionary category: they advocated Vietnam's independence from France and some degree of radical reorganization of the Viet polity. Their political coloration ranged from the deep red of the Saigon-centered Trotskyites (who advocated anti-imperialist revolution throughout the world, and within Vietnam, expropriation for the workers and peasants) through the less violent hues of communism and Kuomintang-styled nationalism, to the indistinct, eclectic nationalism of the Binh Xuyen criminal fraternity (another Saigon phenomenon). Only two of these movements developed a Vietnam-wide influence: the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), and the Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNQDD). Both these parties were troubled throughout their history by factionalism, and by repeated (French police) purges. Both aspired to politicizing the peasants; neither wholly succeeded. Of the two, the ICP consistently demonstrated the greater resiliency and popularity, attributable to superior conspiratorial doctrine and technique, and to more coherent and astute leadership. Both the ICP and the VNQDD figured in peasant uprisings in 1930-1931, and 1940-1941. Each played a role in the Vietnamese resistance against the Vichy French and the Japanese during World War II: the ICP as the nucleus of the Viet Minh, and the VNQDD as the principal component of the Chinese Nationalist-sponsored Dong Minh Hoi.

The Viet Minh--Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi, League for the Independence of Vietnam--came into being in May, 1941, at the 8th Plenum of the Indochinese Communist Party, held in South China. It was formed as a "united front" organization with Ho Chi Minh at its head, and was

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initially composed of the ICP, Revolutionary Youth League, the New Vietnam Party, and factions of the Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNQDD). Membership was held open to any other individuals or groups willing to join in struggling for "national liberation." The announced program of the Viet Minh called for a wide range of social and political reforms designed mainly to appeal to Viet patriotism. Emphasis was placed on an anti-Japanese crusade and preparation for "an insurrection by the organization of the people into self-defense corps," not on communist cant.

Though a Kuomintang general originally sponsored the Viet Minh, Ho soon became suspect, and in 1942 was jailed by the Chinese. While he was in prison, probably to offset the Viet Minh's growing appeal, and to assure tighter Chinese control of the Vietnamese, the KMT fostered a rival Viet "popular front," the Vietnam Revolutionary League (Dong Minh Hoi), which was based on the VNQDD, the Great Vietnam Nationalist Party (Dai Viet), and a number of smaller groups, but was supposed to include the Viet Minh. In fact, however, the Dong Minh Hoi never acquired more than a nominal control over the Viet Minh. In 1943, Ho was released from prison and put in charge of the Dong Minh Hoi--a status apparently conditioned on his accepting overall Chinese guidance and providing the allies with intelligence. But as the war progressed, Ho and the Viet Minh drew apart from the Dong Minh Hoi, and the latter never succeeded in acquiring apparatus within Vietnam comparable to the Viet Minh's.

During the war, some Vietnamese political parties collaborated with the Japanese or the Vichy French. These were put at a disadvantage during and after the war in competition with the ICP, the Viet Minh, or the Dong Minh Hoi--all of which developed an aura of unwavering faith to resistance against all foreign domination. But only the ICP and the Viet Minh established their reputations by extensive wartime operations among the people of Vietnam. In Cochinchina, up until surfacing in April 1945, the ICP continued to operate largely underground and without much regard for the Viet Minh mantle; in Annam and Tonkin, however, all ICP undertakings were given Viet Minh identity. Throughout Vietnam, the ICP initiated patient political action: the dissemination of propaganda, the training of cadres, the establishment of a network of cells down to hamlet level. The ICP was during the war the hard core of the Viet Minh, but the bulk of the Viet Minh membership were no doubt quite unaware of that fact: they served the Viet Minh out of a patriotic fervor.

The American O.S.S. during World War II dealt with the Viet Minh as the sole efficient resistance apparatus within Vietnam, depending upon it for reliable intelligence, and for aid in assisting downed allied pilots. However, the Viet Minh itself assigned priority to political tasks ahead of these military missions. The first permanent Viet Minh bases were established in 1942-43 in the mountains north of Hanoi. Only after its political network was well established did it field its first guerrilla forces, in September 1943. The first units of the Viet Minh Liberation Army came into being on December 22, 1944, and there is little

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evidence of large scale, concerted guerrilla operations until after March 1945.

At the end of 1944, the Viet Minh claimed a total membership of 500,000, of which 200,000 were in Tonkin, 150,000 in Annam, and 150,000 in Cochinchina. The Viet Minh political and military structure was significantly further developed in North Vietnam. In May 1945, a Viet Minh "liberated zone" was established near the Chinese border. As the war drew to a close the Viet Minh determined to preempt allied occupation, and to form a government prior to their arrival. The Viet Minh ability to do so proved better in the north than in the south. In August 1945, Ho Chi Minh's forces seized power from the Japanese and Bao Dai in North Vietnam, forced the emperor to abdicate, and to cede his powers to Ho's Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). In Cochinchina, however, the Viet Minh were able to gain only tenuous control of Saigon and its environs. Nonetheless, when the allies arrived, the Viet Minh were the de facto government in both North and South Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh and his DRV in Hanoi, and an ICP-dominated "Committee of the South" in Saigon.

On 12 September 1945, the British landed a Gurkha battalion and a company of Free French soldiers in Saigon. The British commander regarded the Vietnamese government with disdain because of its lack of authority from the French and because of its inability to quell civil disorder in South Vietnam. Saigon police clashed with Trotskyites, and in the rural areas, fighting broke out between Viet Minh troops and those of Cao Dai and Hoa Hao. Spreading violence rendered futile further attempts to draw together the Vietnamese factions, and prompted the French to implore the British commander to permit them to step in to restore order. On the morning of 23 September, French troops overthrew the Vietnamese government after a tenure of only three weeks. The official British account termed the French method of executing the coup d'etat "unfortunate" in that they "absolutely ensured that countermeasures would be taken by the [Vietnamese]...." Vietnamese retaliation was quick and violent: over one hundred Westerners were slain in the first few days, and others kidnapped; on 26 September, the U.S. commander of the O.S.S. in Saigon was killed. Thus, the first Indochina War began in Cochinchina in late September, 1945, and American blood was shed in its opening hours.

At that juncture, the ICP in Cochinchina was in a particularly vulnerable position. The ICP had permitted the Viet Minh to pose as an arm of the Allies, and had supported cooperation with the British and amnesty for the French. The Party had even undertaken, through the Committee of the South, to repress the Trotskyites. But violence undermined its advocacy of political moderation, of maintaining public order, and of negotiations with the French. Further, the ICP in Saigon was assured by French communists that they would receive no assistance from Party brethren abroad. The French coup d'etat thrust conflict upon the Vietnamese of Cochinchina. The question before the communists was how to respond; the ICP leadership determined that violence was the sole

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recourse, and that to maintain leadership of the nationalist movement in South Vietnam they had to make the Viet Minh the most unbending foe of compromise with the French.

The situation in all of Vietnam at the end of the war was confused-- neither the French, nor the Viet Minh, nor any other group exercised clear authority. While the Viet Minh was far and away the single most powerful Vietnamese organization, and while it claimed dominion over all Vietnam, its authority was challenged in the North by the Chinese and in the South by the British. The French position was patently more tenuous than that of the Viet Minh until 9 October 1945. On that date, France and the UK concluded an agreement whereby the British formally recognized French civil administration in Indochina and ceded its occupation rights to France south of the 16th parallel. This ceding of authority in the South did not, as a practical matter, ensure French rule. With only 35,000 French soldiers in South Vietnam, the Viet Minh and other parties were well able to contest the French.

Viet Minh authority in Annam and Tonkin was less ambiguous, but by no means unchallenged. In the North, the salient political fact of life for the Viet Minh was the presence of the Chinese Nationalist Army of Occupation numbering 50,000 men. Through this presence, the Chinese were able to force the Viet Minh to accommodate Chinese-Viet Nationalists within the DRV and to defer to Chinese policy in other respects. The resultant situation in North Vietnam in the autumn of 1945 is depicted in the map on page B-41.

The Viet Minh had to go further still in accommodating the wishes of the Chinese. In setting up the DRV government of 2 September 1945, pro-Chinese, non-Viet Minh politicians were included, and the ICP took only 6 of 16 cabinet posts. On 11 November 1945, the Viet Minh leadership went even further, and formally dissolved the ICP in the interest of avoiding "misunderstandings." Even this, however, was not sufficient. Compelled by opposition demands, Ho agreed to schedule national elections for January of 1946. The results of these elections were arranged beforehand with the major opposition parties, and the Assembly thus "elected" met on 2 March 1946. This Assembly approved a new DRV government, with the ICP holding only 2 of 12 cabinet posts.

By then, France was ready to pose a stronger challenge. French reinforcements had arrived in Indochina, so that Paris could contemplate operations in North Vietnam as well as in Cochinchina. In early 1946, the Chinese turned over their occupation rights in the North to France. Faced with increased French military power and Chinese withdrawal, and denied succor from abroad, Ho decided that he had no recourse save to negotiate with the French. On 6 March 1946, Ho signed an Accord with the French providing for French re-entry into Vietnam for five years in return for recognizing the DRV as a free state within the French union.

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This Accord taxed Ho's popularity to the utmost, and it took all Ho's prestige to prevent open rebellion. On 27 May 1946, Ho countered these attacks by merging the Viet Minh into the Lien Viet, a larger, more embracing "national front." Amity within the Lien Viet, however, lasted only as long as the Chinese remained in North Vietnam. When they withdrew a few weeks later, in mid-June, the Viet Minh, supported by French troops, attacked the Dong Minh Hoi and the VNQDD, as "enemies of the peace," effectively suppressed organized opposition, and asserted Viet Minh control throughout North Vietnam.

But even this ascendancy proved transitory. Ho Chi Minh, though he tried hard, was unable to negotiate any durable modus vivendi with the French in the summer and fall of 1946. In the meantime, the DRV and the Viet Minh were drawn more and more under the control of the "Marxists" of the former ICP. For example, during the session of the DRV National Assembly in November, nominal opposition members were whittled down to 20 out of more than 300 seats, and a few "Marxists" dominated the proceedings. Nonetheless, the DRV government maintained at least a facade of coalition. A chart (pp. B51-55) of its leadership during 1945-1949 illustrates that through 1949, ICP members remained in the minority, and nominally oppositionist VNQDD and Dong Minh Hoi politicians were consistently included.

Although the Cochinchina war continued throughout 1946, with the Viet Minh assuming a leading role in resistance, war in North Vietnam did not break out until December, 1946. A series of armed clashes in November were followed by a large scale fighting in Hanoi in late December. The DRV government took to the hills to assume the status of shadow state. The Viet Minh transformed itself back into a semi-covert resistance organization and committed itself throughout the nation to the military defeat of the French. During the opening year of the war, 1947, the Viet Minh took steps to restore its image as a popular, patriotic, anti-foreign movement, and again to play down the ICP role in its leadership. The DRV government was reorganized and prominent communists excluded. As the Viet Minh gathered strength over the years, however, these same leaders reentered the DRV government.

In February 1951, addressing the Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (Lao Dong), Ho Chi Minh stated that the Communist Party had formed and led the Viet Minh, and founded and ruled the DRV. When the French colonialists reappeared in South Vietnam and a Nationalist Chinese-sponsored government seemed in prospect in North Vietnam, Ho averred, the Party went underground, and entered into agreements with the French:

"Lenin said that even if a compromise with bandits was advantageous to the revolution, he would do it...."

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But Ho's explanation notwithstanding, the Viet Minh was irrefutably nationalist, popular, and patriotic. It was also the most prominent and successful vehicle of Viet nationalism in the 1940's. To a degree it was always non-communist. Available evidence indicates, however, that from its inception, Ho Chi Minh and his lieutenants of the Indochinese Communist Party conceived its strategy, directed its operations, and channeled its energies consistent with their own goals--as they subsequently claimed. Whether the non-communist elements of the Viet Minh might have become dominant in different circumstances must be relegated to speculation. It seems clear that, as matters developed, all of the non-communist nationalist movements--reformist, theocratic, or revolutionary--were too localized, too disunited, or too tainted with Japanese or Nationalist Chinese associations to have competed successfully with the ICP for control of the Viet Minh. And none could compete effectively with the Viet Minh in gaining a following among Vietnam's peasants.



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I. B. 1.

THE CHARACTER AND POWER OF THE VIET MINH

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I. B. THE CHARACTER AND POWER OF THE VIET MINH

1. Origins of the Viet Minh

a. Pre-World War II Vietnamese Political Movements

(1) The Political Situation During the 1920's and 1930's

In eighty years of French domination of Vietnam there had been no increase in per-acre yield of rice, so that the comparative fertility of Vietnam's fields were, in 1940, the lowest in the world. 1/ Viet population increased at double the expansion in rice production from cultivating new land. Thus, French contentions that their imperium had uplifted the Vietnamese notwithstanding, there is no evidence that they improved popular diet, or solved the problem of recurrent famine. In fact, the rural peasants were in 1940 socially disadvantaged in comparison with their ancestors, in that the pre-colonial mandarin society with its subsistence economy had better provided for their basic political, economic and social needs. Moreover, the neomercantilism of France had, in fact, given the Banque d'Indochine a key role in colonial policy. The Banque was a virtual French monopoly, nearly as baleful an influence over the Vietnamese as the communists depicted it; at least, with the colonial administration, it defended the French economic position through blocking Vietnamese social and political mobility. Vietnamese entered legitimate domestic businesses under severe handicaps, and were all but foreclosed from foreign commerce. Few descriptions of pre-World War II Vietnam by non-French authors fail to portray a colonialism like that depicted by Karl Marx. For example, the Austrian-American authority, Joseph Buttinger, characterized the state of Viet society and politics in the late 1930's as follows:

"Pauperization was the lot of most peasants and of all tenants, not only in overpopulated Tongking and Annam, but also in Cochinchina, which was so much richer than the other four Indochinese states that it contributed 40 per cent to the general budget. The economic burdens of French rule, according to a contemporary English writer, 'were shouldered principally by the rural population, and the fiscal demands, together with the increasing birthrate, led to a progressive pauperization of the countryside, a process illustrated by the fact that rural indebtedness in Cochinchina alone increased from 31 million piasters in 1900 to 134 million piasters in 1930.'

"There is, however, no more devastating verdict on the failure of the French to combat rural poverty than the dry statement of another French authority on living conditions in Vietnam. 'It is only in periods of intense agricultural labor,' wrote E. Lerich in a study published in 1942, 'which means during

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one-third of the year and particularly during the harvest, that the people have enough to eat.'

"The peasant's painful efforts, wrote an exceedingly tame Vietnamese nationalist during the 1920's, are not rewarded with sufficient well-being, so he 'dreams of more happiness, of more justice.' There can be no doubt that he did. But what the moderate nationalists failed to see was that by 1930, a great many peasants were ready to proceed from dream to action. They would now have listened to any party whose leaders were ready to make the troubles of the poor their chief political concern. This, unfortunately, was grasped only by the communists. When they proclaimed that the struggle for independence could have meaning for the poor only if independence aimed at improving their social condition, the communists had won the first round in their fight for leadership of the nationalist camp." 2/

Communists were, however, not the only Vietnamese political movement actively seeking to change the French colonial relationship. Three categories of political forces can be identified:

Principal Vietnamese Political Movements, 1920 - 1940  
(with Dates of Activation) 3/

Parties Advocating Reform of the French System

Constitutionalist Party (1923)  
Vietnam People's Progressive Party (1923)  
Democratic Party (1937)  
Socialist Party (1936)

Theocratic Movements

Cao Daism (1920)  
Hoa Hao-ism (1939)

Parties Advocating Revolution and National Independence

Vietnam Nationalist Party (1927)  
Vietnam Revolutionary Party (1927) - disbanded 1930  
New Vietnam Revolutionary Party (1928) - disbanded 1930  
Indochinese Communist Party (1930)  
Trotskyist Movement (1931)  
Vietnam Restoration League (1931)

The reformist parties were strongest in Cochinchina. There the French administered directly rather than through Vietnamese as in Annam or Tonkin, and, apparently feeling more secure in their control, tolerated in the South open Vietnamese political activism prohibited in central and north Vietnam. Nonetheless, no reformist movements acquired a popular base, and all were moribund at the start of World War II.

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The theocratic movements were also Cochinchinese phenomena, but, unlike the reformist parties, commanded wide popular support. Cao Daism swiftly took hold in the late 20's and 30's, and became a genuine political force among the peasants in Tay Ninh Province (northwest of Saigon) and in the Mekong Delta. The Hoa Hao movement grew even more rapidly from its inception in the late 30's among the peasants of the Delta southwest of Saigon.

The revolutionary parties were, by contrast, concentrated chiefly in the North, their more radical and conspiratorial complexion reflecting both necessity -- given the repressive policies of the French and the mandarins through whom they ruled -- and foreign intellectual influences, especially those emanating from China, and from the universities in Hanoi and Hue. All the revolutionary parties were active among Vietnamese living abroad. The Vietnamese Restoration League was chiefly based in Japan (and eventually became the Japanese backed vehicle for Vietnamese entry into the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere). The remainder were principally Chinese based, and strongly influenced by Sun Yat Sen's philosophy, Chiang Kai Shek's Kuomintang, and Mao Tse Tung's Chinese Communist Party. Of the group, only the Indochinese Communist Party and the Vietnamese Nationalist Party achieved real political power, but not even these were successful in dislodging French control; a brief recounting of their failures, however, reveals much concerning the political antecedents of modern Vietnam.

(2) The Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNQDD)

The Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (VNQDD) was formed in 1927 chiefly out of dissatisfaction among young Vietnamese with movements, such as the ineffectual Revolutionary Association and the early communist organizations, which were dominated by men of mandarin or alien intellectual backgrounds. The VNQDD prided itself on identification with the Vietnamese peasantry, and modeled itself after the Kuomintang: cellular and covert, advocating Sun Yat Sen's program of "Democracy, Nationalism, and Socialism." As the diagram (Figure 1) <sup>4/</sup> indicates, the history of the Nationalist Party is one of fragmentation -- both from factional disputes and from French counter-action -- and merger with other movements. In a fashion appealing to a people who value historic lineage, the Nationalist Party traced its origins to one of the few modern Vietnamese national heroes, Phan Boi Chau; to a Viet movement in Yunnan under Phan Boi Chau's disciple, Le Phu Hiep; and to a Kuomintang-oriented Vietnamese publishing house called the Annamese Library. The Nationalists initially were a Tonkin party, but became allied with the Vietnam Revolutionary Party of Annam (and, in a minor fashion, the same party in Cochinchina). The relationship never amounted to much more than liaison, and the Nationalists remained Tonkin-centered. There, however, they acquired a significant following, and succeeded in forming a number of cells among Vietnamese serving in the French armed forces. In 1930 the Nationalist Party leader, Nguyen Thai Hoc, ordered a mass uprising against the French. On February 10, 1930, the insurrection began with a mutiny of troops at

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HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM NATIONALIST PARTY

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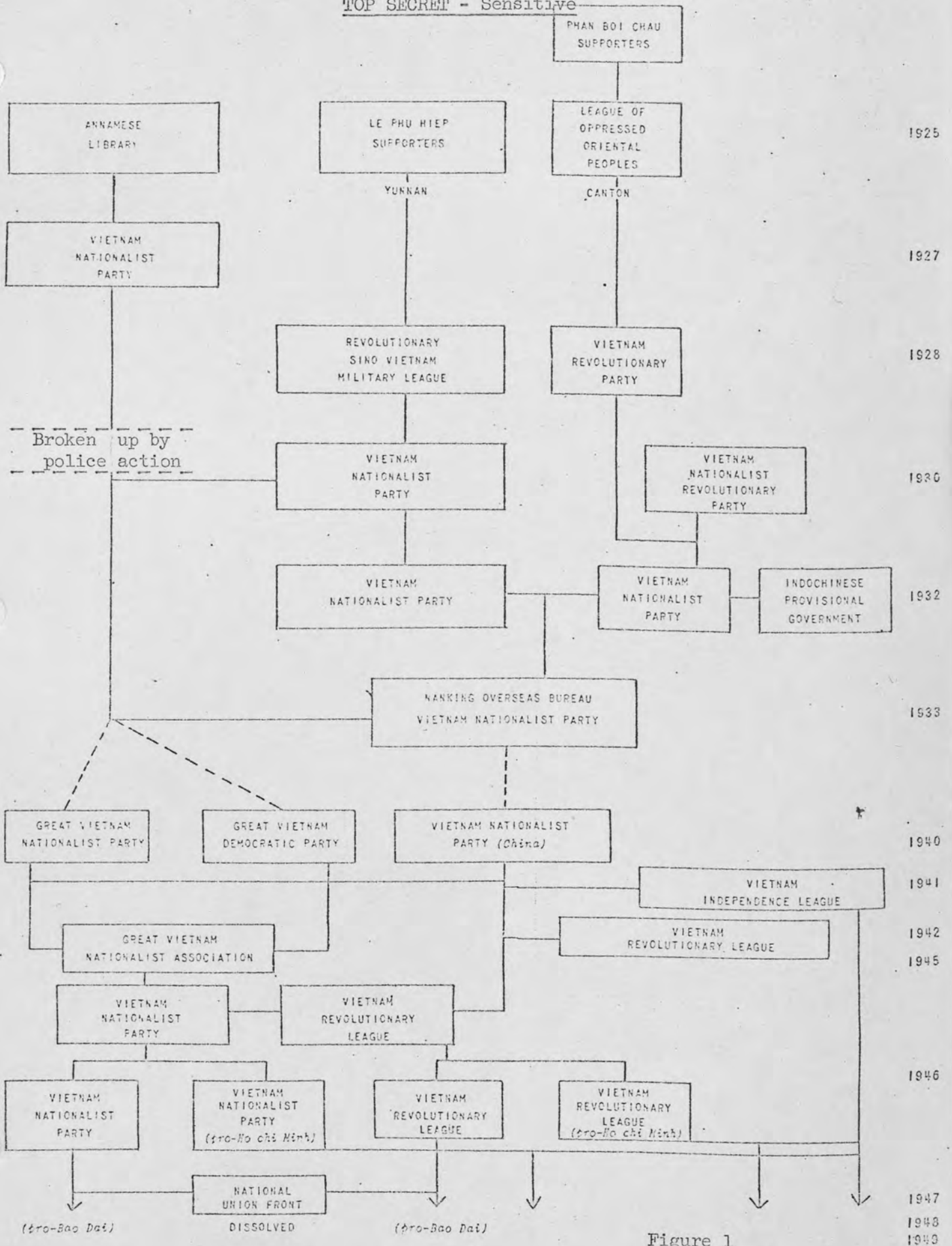


Figure 1

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Yen Bay, and spread throughout Tonkin. The French reaction was quick, efficient and severe. Nguyen Thai Hoc was captured and executed, along with hundreds of lesser Nationalists; others fled to China. By 1932, Nationalist Party remnants within Vietnam had been hounded into activity, and the Party thereafter centered on the exile community in China. By 1940, in a series of factional struggles, three main branches evolved: a pro-Japanese faction called the Great Vietnam Democratic Party (Dai Viet Dan Chinh); a faction re-established in Vietnam called the Great Vietnam Nationalist Party (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang); and a Kunming faction under Vu Khong Khanh bearing the original VNQDD name. The latter group survived the war, and became important in its aftermath.

(3) The Primacy of the Indochinese Communist Party

The disunity, vulnerability, and meanderings of the Nationalist Party -- notwithstanding its relative effectiveness compared with most other parties -- stands in contrast with the solidarity and resiliency of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP). The main unifying factor of the communist movement was Ho Chi Minh, and the coterie of dedicated revolutionaries, most of whom he personally recruited, trained, and led. But important as was such leadership, doctrine and discipline also figured in communist success. Ho (then known as Nguyen Ai Quoc) participated in the founding of the French Communist Party, and after training in Moscow, formed the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League in Canton, primarily nationalist in announced aims (Figure 2). 5/ In its journal in 1926, however, Ho wrote that: "Only a communist party can insure the well-being of Annam," and he apparently began about that time training cadres for covert operations. By 1929, some 250 Vietnamese had been trained in Canton, and at least 200 had returned to Indochina to undertake organizational work; as of that year, some 1000 reported communists and collaborators indicated that 10% were in Cochinchina, some 20% in Annam, and the remainder in Tonkin. 6/ In 1929 communists sought fusion with the New Vietnam Revolutionary Party, and attacked the Nationalist Party (VNQDD) as a "bourgeois party." That same year, a faction of the Revolutionary Youth League formed an Indochinese Communist Party (Dong Duong Cong San Dang), the first to bear the title. In 1930 the Revolutionary Youth League, some members of the socialist Nguyen An Ninh Association, and the exiled Annam Communist Party joined with the latter faction into first the Vietnam Communist Party, and then -- per Comintern wishes to broaden the party to embrace Laos and Cambodia -- a reorganized Indochinese Communist Party, which was recognized by the Comintern.

In the Nationalist-precipitated violence of 1930, about 1000 ICP members led 100,000 peasants in strikes, demonstrations, and open insurrection. In Ho's home province of Nghe An, peasant soviets were set up, landlords were killed, and large estates broken up -- methods so violent, so tainted with pillage and murder, that the Comintern objected that they were not in consonance with "organized violence" of Marxist doctrine. 7/ Again, however, French counteraction was swift and telling. French police destroyed overt apparatus of the ICP in Vietnam during 1930 and 1931, and

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1921 - 1931

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNIST ORGANIZATIONS IN INDOCHINA, 1921-31

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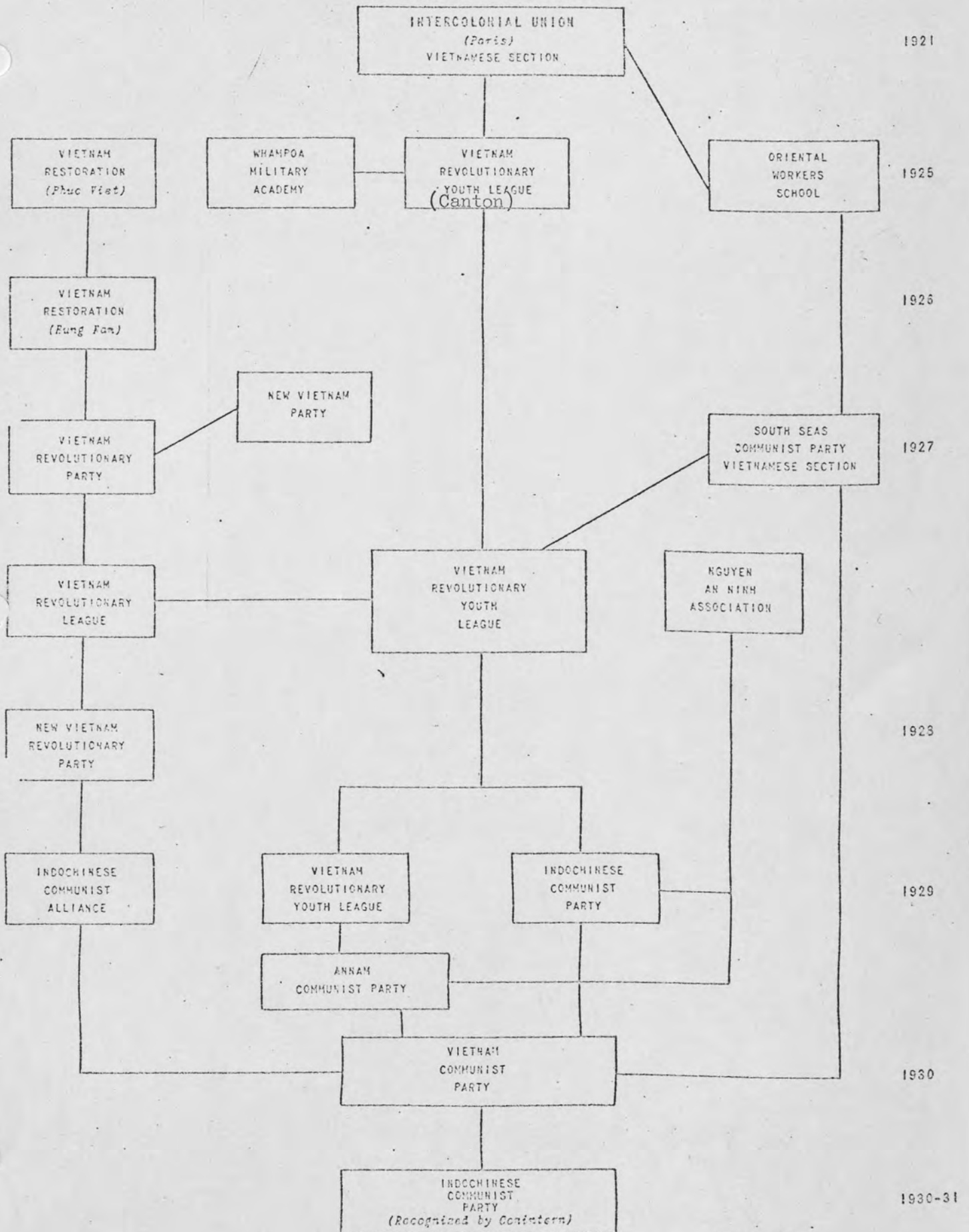


Figure 2

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on their request, Ho Chi Minh was arrested by the British in Hong Kong. Attempts at party reorganization in 1932 were met by renewed police repression, and not until 1933 were communists again permitted political activity of any sort. The party, however, did revive, establishing a new foothold in more permissive Cochinchina, under Tran Van Giau (Figure 3). 8/ Tran there formed the League Against Imperialism, a front organization specifically non-violent in its program designed to attract support from the political center and right. In 1935, following the Comintern Seventh World Congress, the ICP centered itself on Saigon, and launched an Indochinese Congress "Democratic Front," paralleling the communists' Popular Front movement in metropolitan France. Almost immediately, however, Trotskyite elements, advocating "permanent revolution," split with the ICP leadership, and began to press an independent, more revolutionary line.

The Trotskyites were divided within themselves into the "Struggle" Group and the "October" Group, differing mainly in the degree to which they countenanced cooperation with the ICP. In 1937 a Trotskyite candidate, Tu Thu Thau, together with an ICP leader, Nguyen Van Tao, was elected to the Saigon Municipal Council. By 1939 Trotskyite elements had drawn together into one party, and that year a Trotskyite slate won 80% of votes cast in a Cochinchinese election -- a severe defeat for the ICP which led Nguyen Van Tao to set up another communist splinter party.

The divisions within the communist movement of Vietnam during the 1930's, as well as the ICP willingness to subordinate its doctrinal abhorrence of both the French and the bourgeoisie for short term goals, are evident in the following report on "The Party's Line in the Period of the Democratic Front (1936-1939)" submitted by Nguyen Ai Quoc (alias of Ho Chi Minh) in July, 1939:

"1. For the time being, the Party cannot put forth too high a demand (national independence, parliament, etc.). To do so is to enter the Japanese fascists' scheme. It should only claim for democratic rights, freedom of organization, freedom of assembly, freedom of press and freedom of speech, general amnesty for all political detainees, and struggle for the legalization of the Party.

"2. To reach this goal, the Party must strive to organize a broad Democratic National Front. This Front does not embrace only Indochinese people but also progressive French residing in Indochina; not only toiling people but also the national bourgeoisie.

"3. The Party must assume a wise, flexible attitude with the bourgeoisie, strive to draw it into the Front, win over the elements that can be won over and neutralize those which can be neutralized. We must by all means avoid leaving them outside the Front, lest they should fall into the hands of the enemy of the revolution and increase the strength of the reactionaries.

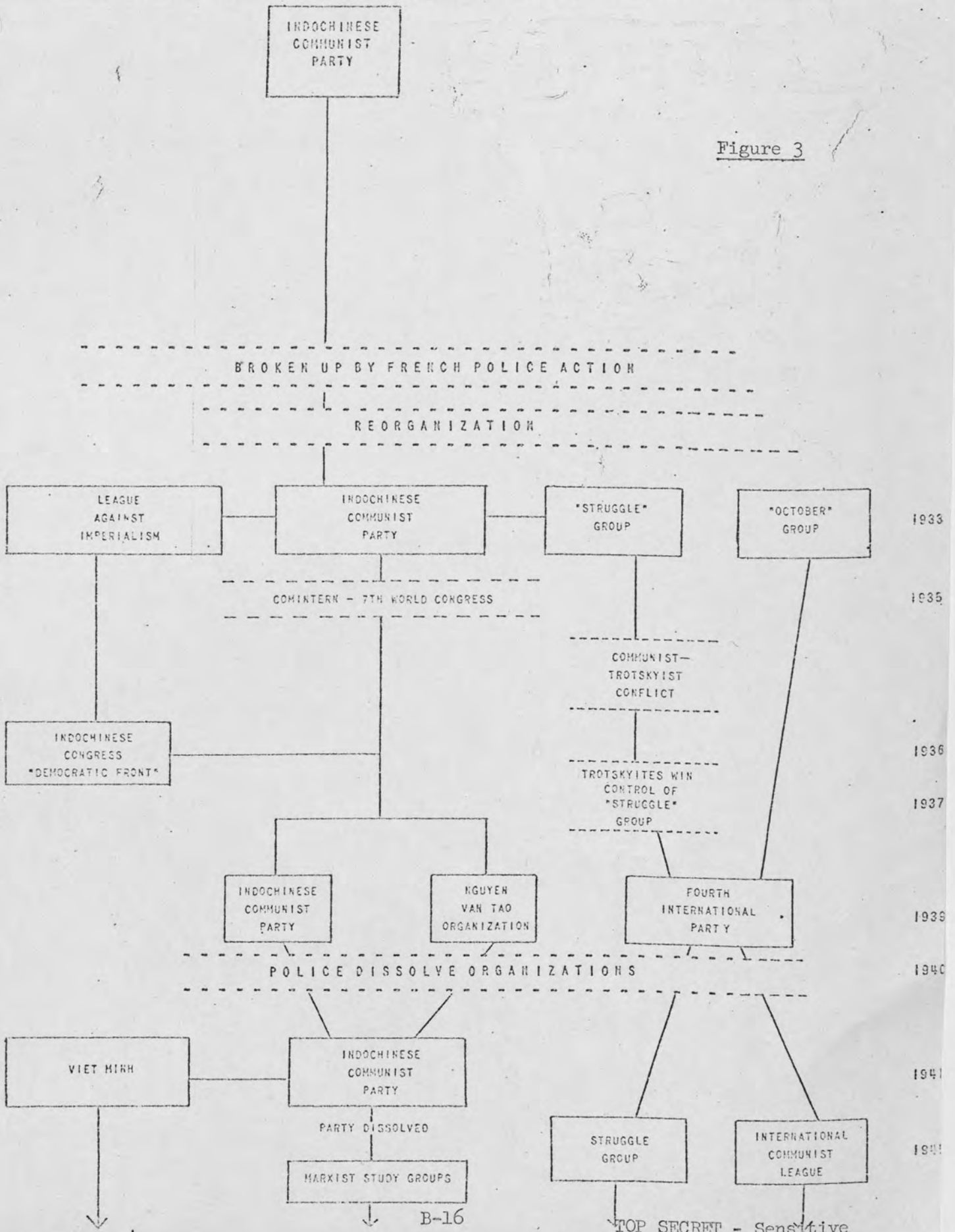
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COMMUNIST  
PARTY  
1931 - 1945

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DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNIST ORGANIZATIONS IN INDOCHINA, 1931-45

Figure 3



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"4. There cannot be any alliance with or any concession to the Trotskyite group. We must do everything possible to lay bare their faces as henchmen of the fascists and annihilate them politically.

"5. To increase and consolidate its forces, to widen its influence, and to work effectively, the Indochinese Democratic Front must keep close contact with the French Popular Front because the latter also struggles for freedom, democracy, and can give us great help.

"6. The Party cannot demand that the Front recognizes its leadership. It must instead show itself as the organ which makes the greatest sacrifices, the most active and loyal organ. It is only through daily struggle and work that the masses of the people acknowledge the correct policies and leading capacity of the Party and that it can win the leading position.

"7. To be able to carry out this task, the Party must uncompromisingly fight sectarianism and narrow-mindedness and organize systematic study of Marxism-Leninism in order to raise the cultural and political level of the Party members and help the non-Party cadres raise their level. We must maintain close contact with the French Communist Party.

"8. The Central Executive Committee must supervise the Party press to avoid technical and political mistakes. (E.g., in publishing comrade R's biography, the Lao-Dong revealed his address and his origin, etc. It also published without comment his letter saying that Trotskyism is a product of boastfulness, etc.)." 9/

In August, 1939, however, the Hitler-Stalin alliance was contracted, and the following month all varieties of communists, both domestic and colonial, were declared anathema by the French. In Vietnam, communist organizations were once more thoroughly destroyed by police action, the Trotskyites suffering particularly. 10/ Once the covert segments of the ICP survived.

That the ICP endured the French purges of 1930 - 1932 and 1939 - 1940 testifies to its strength, for the same attacks emasculated the VNQDD and all other revolutionary Vietnamese political parties. At the outset of World War II, the ICP enjoyed a virtual monopoly on organized Vietnamese nationalism, a position attributable to (1) ruthlessness of the French in eliminating competition; (2) superior communist discipline, training, and hence, survivability; (3) inherently better communist strategy and tactics for balking the French colonial administration and mobilizing popular opinions; and (4) French tolerance of "popular front" communists generated by the ascendancy of the Left in metropolitan France during the mid-30's. The French, by denying political expression to moderate Vietnamese nationalists, polarized native political sentiments, and invited popular support of the more vehement and radical solutions proffered by the ICP.

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b. World War II and the Viet Minh

(1) Formation of the Independence League, 1941

The fall of France in June 1940 was followed immediately by a Japanese demand for permission to occupy Indochina. On 19 June 1940, Japan presented the French the first of a series of ultimatums, which culminated, after some ungraceful maneuvering by the Vichy government, in an order signed September 2, 1940, by Marshall Petain, directing the colonial administration to negotiate terms by which Japanese armed forces might enter Indochina and use military bases there. Within the month, after demonstrations by the Japanese Navy off the Tonkin coast, and an actual invasion of Tonkin from China by the Japanese Army, the terms sought by the Japanese were forthcoming. The French ruled in Vietnam as hosts to the Japanese until 1945, but the presence of Japanese bayonets rendered their sovereignty largely titular. The Vichy administration under Rice Admiral Jean Decoux developed a peculiarly Indochinese French nationalism which dignified its client status, extolled France's tutelage functions for the Vietnamese, and foreclosed any concessions whatever to native aspirations for political independence. Above all, it attempted to preserve the fiction that the Japanese had been stationed in Indochina with its permission. Admiral Decoux held that:

"A country is not occupied if it keeps its own army free in its movements, if its government and all the wheels of its administration function freely and without impediment, if its general services and particularly its police and security forces remain firmly in the hands of the sovereign authority and outside of all foreign interference." 11/

But, the very emphasis the Vichy government placed upon its "freedom" dramatized among Viet patriots the extent of its collaboration. It was soon evident that the Decoux regime served the purposes of Japanese policy, and was "free" only to the degree the Japanese chose. Early in 1941 Japan countenanced a Thai invasion of Laos and Cambodia. French military action was successful in halting the Thais, but the Japanese, requiring Thai cooperation for their drive into Malaya, forced the French to grant Thailand all the territory it sought. On May 6, 1941, the first of a series of Franco-Japanese commercial treaties was signed, which had the effect of diverting from France to Japan all the exploitive gains from French colonial enterprise, without Indochina's receiving in return such goods as it normally received in trade from France. Japanese armed forces were granted full run of the country, and after December 7, 1941, Decoux declared Indochina part of the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere."

The Japanese entry into Indochina kindled, in 1940 and 1941, Vietnamese insurrections against the French, who now appeared more reprehensible and vulnerable than ever. Too, some Vietnamese nationalists had long looked to the Japanese to liberate their nation. The communists were apparently undecided whether to risk another premature insurrection. While it appears

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that the Central Committee of the ICP may have actually ordered subordinate echelons to refrain from violence, communists, first in Cochinchina, and then in Tonkin, led armed uprisings. The results were disastrous for the rebels. The Japanese, who probably encouraged the revolts to the extent they could, stood aside while the French reacted swiftly and savagely to crush the Vietnamese. <sup>12/</sup> Numerous ICP and other nationalist leaders died in the fighting, or in the harsh ministrations of French colonial justice which followed. The outcome of the rebellions of 1940 and 1941 was thus yet another French purge, exile of Vietnamese nationalist movements. While small scale covert operations continued in Vietnam, party headquarters were forced to move abroad, mostly to Nationalist China. In 1946, the Vietnamese government published a tract which acknowledged its debt to China:

"Thus it came to pass that southern China became the by-word of all Vietnam revolutionists. It was the birthplace of the Vietnam revolutionary movement, the base from where were directed all revolutionary activities 'beyond the border' -- on Vietnam's own territory." <sup>13/</sup>

Chinese motives for sponsoring the Vietnamese nationalists included a desire to acquire intelligence of Japanese forces on their southern flank, and to tie down Japanese through sabotage and other operations in Indochina; there may have been a longer range interest in political influence over postwar Indochina.

In May, 1941, the head of the ICP, Nguyen Ai Quoc -- the person later to be called Ho Chi Minh -- convened the Eighth Plenum of the ICP Central Committee to approve the forming of a new united front organization to which Vietnamese patriots wishing to resist the Japanese and oppose the French might rally. The Party meeting was followed by a "congress" of Vietnamese nationalists who had recently escaped from their homeland, and others who had been in exile for years; there were also representatives of the "national liberation associations" of workers, peasants, soldiers, women, and youth -- most of them ICP organized and dominated. The "congress" adopted the recommendations of the ICP leaders, and established the Vietnam Independence League, Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi, which became known as the Viet Minh. Nguyen Ai Quoc was named General Secretary of the new League, and most of its key positions were assigned to ICP members. Nguyen Ai Quoc issued a letter on the occasion, including the following appeal:

"Compatriots throughout the country! Rise up quickly! Let us follow the heroic example of the Chinese people! Rise up quickly to organize the Association for National Salvation to fight the French and the Japanese.

"Elders!

"Prominent personalities!

"Some hundreds of years ago, when our country was endangered by the Mongolian invasion, our elders under the Tran dynasty rose up



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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 floruous task of national salvation.

"Rich people, soldiers, workers, peasants, intellectuals, employees, traders, youth, and women who warmly love your country! At the present time national liberation is the most important problem. Let us unite together! As one in mind and strength we shall overthrow the Japanese and French and their jackals in order to save people from the situation between boiling water and burning heat.

"Dear compatriots!

"National salvation is the common cause to the whole of our people. Every Vietnamese must take part in it. He who has money will contribute his money, he who has strength will contribute his strength, he who has talent will contribute his talent. I pledge to use all my modest abilities to follow you, and am ready for the last sacrifice.

"Revolutionary fighters!

"The hour has struck! Raise aloft the insurrectionary banner and guide the people throughout the country to overthrow the Japanese and French! The sacred call of the Fatherland is resounding in your ears; the blood of our heroic perdecissors who sacrificed their lives is stirring in your hearts! The fighting spirit of the people is displayed everywhere before you! Let us rise up quickly! United with each other, unify your action to overthrow the Japanese and the French.

"Victory to Viet-Nam's Revolution!

"Victory to the World's Revolution!" 14/

(2) Component Parties and Program

The Viet Minh was originally an "anti-fascist" league of the following Viet nationalist groups:

- The New Vietnam Party (Tan Viet Dang)
- The Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League (Viet Nam Thanh Nhien Cach Menh Dong Chi Hoi)
- Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNQDD) (Only certain factions of this party elected to join the Viet Minh)

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- The several "National Liberation Associations"
- The Indochinese Communist Party (ICP)

Beginning in October, 1940, the Central Committee of the ICP had withdrawn its specifically communist slogans (e.g., "To confiscate landlords' lands and distribute it to the tillers," was toned down to "Confiscation of the land owned by traitors for distribution to the poor farmers.") and had begun instead to emphasize "national liberation." 15/ Within the Viet Minh, "national liberation" became central to the Party program, but the ICP from the outset dominated the league. According to Vo Nguyen Giap, the Party set political goals for the Viet Minh at the expense of its historic "anti-feudal task," but necessarily:

"To rally the different strata of the people and the national revolutionary forces in the struggle against the main enemy, that is the French and Japanese fascist imperialists...

"It is precisely for this reason [emphasis on national liberation] that within a short period, the Viet Minh gathered together the great forces of the people and became the most powerful political organization of the broad revolutionary masses." 16/

By 1943, the Viet Minh was in fact attracting a broad spectrum of nationalists and intelligentsia, as well as extending its organization steadily among the peasants. A 1946 official history presented this formulation of its program at that time:

"At a conference in 1943, delegates of all anti-fascist revolutionary organizations adopted the following political program: (1) Election of a constituent assembly to work out the constitution for a free Indo-China on the basis of adult suffrage; (2) Restoration of democratic liberties and rights, including freedom of organization, press and assembly, freedom of belief and opinion, the right to property, the right of workers to strike, freedom of domicile and freedom of propaganda; (3) The organization of a national army; (4) The right of minorities to self-determination; (5) Equal rights for women; (6) Nationalization of banks belonging to fascists and the formation of an Indo-Chinese national bank; (7) The building up of a strong national economy by the development of native industry, communications, agriculture and commerce; (8) Agricultural reforms and the extension of cultivation to fallow lands; (9) Labor legislation, including the introduction of the eight-hour working day and progressive reforms in social legislation; (10) Development of national education and culture.

"In the international sphere the program stands for the revision of unequal treaties and an alliance with all democratic nations for the maintenance of peace. More important for the

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anti-Japanese war, however, is the immediate program of action which is: (1) Organization of the masses -- workers, peasants, women, and youth -- for the anti-fascist struggle. This has already attained promising successes. (2) Preparation of an insurrection by the organization of the people into self-defense corps. (3) The formation of guerrilla bands and bases 'which will assume greater importance as we gradually approach the time of country-wide military action.'" 17/

(3) Competitive Parties

(a) Dong Minh Hoi

From the outset, the Chinese were suspicious of the Viet Minh. In 1942, they arrested Nguyen Ai Quoc, and imprisoned him. In October, 1942, more than one year after the founding of the Viet Minh, the Kuomintang sponsored a second "united front" of Vietnamese nationalists named the Vietnam Revolutionary League (Viet Nam Cach Menh Dong Minh Hoi). Colocated with headquarters of the Viet Minh in Kwangsi Province, China, Luichow, the Dong Minh Hoi -- as it came to be known -- included:

- The Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNDD)
- The Vietnam Restoration League (Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong Minh Hoi)
- The Great Vietnam Nationalist Party (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang)
- The Viet Minh
- The Liberation League (Giai Phong Hoi)

The Dong Minh Hoi was launched with the official sanction of Marshall Chang Fa-kuei, the quasi-autonomous Chinese warlord; its initial program was expressly modeled after the Kuomintang's Three People's Principles of Sun Yat Sen, and its paramilitary organizations were established with a view to close cooperation with the Nationalist Army. However, after more than a year in prison, Nguyen Ai Quoc was released by the Chinese -- perhaps on Chang Fa-kuei's orders, and without knowledge or sanction of Chiang Kai-Shek's headquarters -- and installed, under the new alias of Ho Chi Minh, as Chairman of the Dong Minh Hoi. The Viet Minh alone profitted by this duality of leadership. Only in the person of Ho Chi Minh, and in Luichow itself, was there any merger of the two "united front" organizations. Afield, and especially in Tonkin, they competed -- and occasionally fought -- with one another.

The Dong Minh Hoi acquired only modest political and military power in Vietnam, and became a significant political factor there only after Chinese Nationalist forces occupied Tonkin in late 1945. On March 28, 1944,

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a "Provisional Republican Government of Vietnam" was proclaimed in Luichow, China, with Viet Minh officials occupying only a minority of positions in the government. 18/ But in Vietnam, the Viet Minh formed the only effective and extensive resistance movement.

(b) Collaborator Parties

Both the French and the Japanese sponsored Vietnamese political parties. On the whole, the Japanese enjoyed significantly greater success in manipulating the Vietnamese, and they thereby emasculated Decoux's colonial administration. Through direct support of the theocratic movements, such as the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao, and a variety of nationalist political parties, they maintained the potential for popular dissidence in balance with available French force. As a result, large portions of Vietnamese territory, especially in Cochinchina, were vacated by the French to Vietnamese rule. Japanese sources reported during World War II that the more important of the collaborating Viet nationalists were in two groups: The Great Vietnam Nationalist Association (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Hoi) -- an outgrowth of rightist elements within the VNQDD; and the Vietnam Restoration League (Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong Minh Hoi) -- based on the nationalist groups which had been in exile in Japan. According to Japanese reports, in Annam and Tonkin, these included:

Great Vietnam Party (Dai Viet)

- (1) The Great Annam People's Party (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang), which at its height -- about 1940 -- had about 25,000 members; but as a result of the pressure of the French authorities in Indochina, it is now somewhat reduced. Its members are chiefly from the lower classes, students or boy scouts, and its influence extends from the provinces of Ha Dong, Hai Duong, Bac Ninh and Central Annam to the Laos District.
- (2) The Great Annam Democratic Party, which was disbanded in 1941 as a result of official pressure but reformed in 1942 and consists chiefly of intellectuals and men of letters; its members number about 2,000. This was probably the section of the Vietnam Nationalist Party known as the Dai Viet Dan Chinh and directed by Nguyen Tuong Tam.
- (3) Three other groups whose total membership is two or three thousand. One of these smaller groups was probably the Youth Patriots (Than Nhien Ai Quoc), led by Vo Xuan Cam, which has been described as a terrorist party that maintained a flow of violent anti-French propaganda. Another was the Servants of the Country (Phung Xa Quoc Gioi), directed by Pham Dinh Cuong.

Restoration League (Phuc Quoc)

- (1) The Annam National Party, consisting of a volunteer corps, a civilian section, and a military section. The volunteer corps,

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which is the principal element, counts 1,500 in the north, 3,000 in the center, and 5,000 in the south and has influence amongst business men, officials, and intellectuals.

- (2) The Vietnam Patriots' Party (Viet Nam Ai Quoc Dang), made up of doctors, lawyers and intellectuals in the liberal professions and having latent power among young intellectuals.
- (3) The National Socialist Party (Dai Viet Quoc Xa), having about 2000 members and its chief sphere of influence in the light industry towns of Haiphong and Hanoi. This party was directed by Tran Trong Kim, late premier of the Bao Dai government, and is said to have been inspired by the Japanese Military Police and Intelligence Organization (Kempei Tai) to recruit Vietnamese for the puppet military forces. 19/

In Cochinchina, the Restoration League was preeminent:

Restoration League

- (1) The Vietnam National Independence Party (Viet Nam Quoc Gia Doc Lap Dang), founded by Tran Van An, Nguyen Van Sam, Ho Van Nga, and Ngo Tan Nhon. Some of the elements of the dissolved Vietnam Revolutionary Party (Viet Nam Cach Menh Dang), which had been founded in 1939, joined the new organization. The Party was markedly pro-Japanese in orientation. It favored collaboration with the Japanese Army and the adherence of Vietnam to the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.
- (2) The Vietnam Patriots' Party (Viet Nam Ai Quoc Dang), a group of intellectuals and students.
- (3) The Great Vietnam Nationalist Party (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang), an outgrowth of the Cochinchina Vietnam Nationalist Party, consisting of pro-Japanese elements.
- (4) The Vietnam National Party (Viet Nam Quoc Gia Dang), a minor political group.
- (5) The Youth Justice Association (Thanh Nhien Nghia Dong Doan), a minor youth group.
- (6) The Youth Patriots (Thanh Nhien Ai Quoc), the southern branch of a terrorist youth group. Elements of this southern group created an organization known as the Vietnam Democratic Party (Viet Nam Dan Chu Ngia Dang).
- (7) The Hoa Hao Buddhist Sect (Phat Giao Hoa Hao), also known as the Vietnam Independence Restoration Party (Viet Nam Doc Lap Van Dang), a militant Buddhist sect led by Huynh Phu So.

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- (8) The Great Religion of the Third Amnesty (Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do), a Cao-Daist sect led by Tran Quang Vinh, the principal subordinate of the Cao-Daist Pope, Pham Cong Tac. The Cao-Daists had been furnished arms by the Japanese and were used as an auxiliary police force throughout Cochinchina. 20/

Whatever short term advantages these groups gained vis-a-vis the Vichy French, however, collaboration with the Japanese had the longer run effect of discrediting a significant number of Vietnamese nationalists, putting their movements at particular disadvantage in postwar competition with the Viet Minh, which preserved its aura of unwavering faith to resistance against all foreign domination.

(c) Trotskyists

In Cochinchina radical communists survived, and as the war progressed, gained a following concentrated in Saigon. In 1944 the "October" Group announced the forming of the International Communist League, and in March, 1945, issued a manifesto condemning the "Stalinists" of the ICP who supported the Allies, and the "feudalist" collaborators with the Japanese:

"The future defeat of Japanese imperialism will set the Indochinese people on the road to national liberation. The bourgeoisie and feudalists who cravenly serve the Japanese rulers today, will serve equally the Allied imperialist states. The petty-bourgeois nationalists, by their aimless policy, will also be incapable of leading the people towards revolutionary victory. On the working class, which struggles independently under the flag of the Fourth International, will be able to accomplish the advance guard tasks of the revolution.

"The Stalinists of the Third International have already abandoned the working class to group themselves miserably with the 'democratic' imperialisms. They have betrayed the peasants and no longer speak of the agrarian question. If today they march with foreign capitalists, in the future, they will help the class of national exploiters to destroy the revolutionary people in the hours to come." 21/

The Trotskyite "Struggle" Group also re-emerged in May, 1945, to resume its rivalry with the "October" faction, but both parties advocated world revolution, a worker-peasant government, arming of the people and general expropriation of land and industry. Their principal significance was to debilitate the ICP in Cochinchina, and to impair the effectiveness of the Viet Minh there.

(4) Viet Minh Operations in Vietnam

The ICP, at the heart of the Viet Minh, communicated to the League the lessons it had painfully learned in the uprisings of

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1930-31, and 1940-41: (1) however eager the people were to take up arms, insurrection had to be correctly timed in order to exploit both maximum confusion in enemy ranks and the fullest support from the non-committed; (2) little faith could be placed on defectors from enemy forces -- reliance had to rest rather "chiefly on the great masses of the people"; (3) bases for the support of operations had to be carefully prepared beforehand. 22/ According to its own histories, the ICP began in 1941 to prepare for a general uprising in Vietnam. In Cochinchina, up until April 1945, the ICP continued to operate largely underground and without much regard for the Viet Minh mantle; in Tonkin, however, all ICP undertakings were given Viet Minh identity. Throughout Vietnam, the ICP initiated patient political action: the dissemination of propaganda, the training of cadres, the establishment of a network of cells down to hamlet level. The Central Committee of the ICP adopted this four point program in 1941:

- "1. Develop new organizations among the people, and consolidate those which exist within the Viet Minh.
2. Expand organizations into the cities.
3. Organize the minority peoples within the Viet Minh.
4. Form small guerrilla groups." 23/

The Viet Minh assigned priority to political tasks ahead of military missions. Cadres were repeatedly impressed with the essentiality of a properly prepared political and material base for guerrilla warfare. Even where the latter was countenanced, they were enjoined to put "reliance on the masses, continual growth, extreme mobility, and constant adaptation." 24/ In the mountainous region of North Vietnam above Hanoi the first permanent Viet Minh bases were established in 1942-1943. Then followed shadow government by Viet Minh agents, and in September, 1943, after the people had been well organized, the first locally recruited guerrilla forces were formed under Viet Minh auspices. Not until December 22, 1944, was the first unit of the Viet Minh Liberation Army created, but there is little evidence of concerted guerrilla operations until after March, 1945; by that time the underground organization was pervasive. As of the end of 1944, the Viet Minh claimed a membership of 500,000, of which 200,000 were in Tonkin, 150,000 in Annam, and 150,000 in Cochinchina. 25/ The aim was for each village to have a Viet Minh committee, responsive to a hierarchy of committees; in most instances where the village committee existed, it was in a position to challenge the government authority. According to Giap, by 1945 the Viet Minh was the de facto government in many areas:

"There were regions in which the whole masses took part in organizations of national salvation, and the village Viet Minh Committees had, as a matter of course, full prestige among the masses as an underground organization of the revolutionary power." 26/

On 9 March, 1945, the Japanese overturned the Vichy regime in Indochina, and set up the Emperor of Annam, Bao Dai, as the head of a state declared independent of France, but participating in the Greater East Asia

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Co-Prosperity Sphere. This unification of Vietnam by the faltering Japanese under the ineffectual Annamese Emperor opened new political opportunity for the Viet Minh. On April 6, 1945, the ICP Central Committee directed the forming of a shadow government throughout Vietnam, to extend to every echelon of the society, prepared to mobilize the whole people for war. In May, 1945, a Viet Minh "liberated zone" was established near the Chinese border.

Whatever may be said for the distortion of the historical record by communist historians to magnify the importance of the Viet Minh, it is fact that the American O.S.S. during World War II dealt with the Viet Minh as the sole efficient resistance apparatus within Vietnam, for intelligence and for aid in assisting downed allied pilots. 27/ It also seems clear that in terms of popular reputation in Vietnam, no Viet political movements save the ICP and the Viet Minh added to their stature for their wartime activities.

(5) The Liberation of North Vietnam

As the war drew to a close, the Viet Minh proved to be as adroit strategically as it had showed itself on the tactical level -- or, as Truong Chinh, the Secretary General of the ICP was careful to point out in 1946, the ICP proved to be adroit. According to Truong Chinh, on August 13, 1945, the Party, informed of Japan's collapse, decided to preempt Allied occupation of Vietnam, and hurriedly convened a Viet Minh congress that had been pending since June:

"During the historic Congress, the Indochinese Communist Party advocated an extremely clear policy: to lead the masses in insurrection in order to disarm the Japanese before the arrival of the allied forces in Indo-China; to wrest power from the Japanese and their puppet stooges and finally as the people's power, to welcome the allied forces coming to disarm the Japanese troops stationed in Indo-China." 28/

A possibly more accurate record -- since it jibes with other accounts and alludes to spontaneous local uprisings in advance of Party's "order for general revolution" -- was published by the DRV in September, 1946:

"These epoch-making developments prompted the Viet Minh Party to convene without further delay the National Congress. A revolutionary committee was crated and the general revolution was ordered on the night of August 13, immediately after the news of Japan's unconditional surrender.

"On August 16, the National Congress opened at Tan Trao, a locality in Thai Nhuyen province, in the liberated zones. Sixty representatives from all parts of the country came to learn additional details on the order for the General Revolution. The home and foreign policies of the Revolutionary

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Government were mapped out and the Viet Nam people's Liberation Committee, which became later the Provisional Government of the Viet Nam Democratic Republic, was created.

"At this historical gathering, the Viet Minh Party laid down a clear-cut program which bore on the following points:

- a) to disarm the Japs before the entry of Allied forces into Indochina;
- b) to wrest the power from the hands of the enemy;
- c) to be in a position of authority when receiving the Allied Forces.

"In some areas, the order for the general revolution was not received. Acting on their own initiative, members of the Viet Minh Front ordered a general mobilization and led the population into the fight for power. Thus, on August 11, our compatriots of Ha Tinh took up arms against the Japanese fascists while uprisings also took place at Quang Ngai.

"On August 14 and 15, our forces seized numerous enemy advanced positions in the vicinity of the liberated zones.

"On August 16, with the news of the Japanese capitulation, millions of people throughout the country rose up to the occasion and a general attack on Japanese barracks and military establishments began.

"On August 17-18, huge demonstrations took place in the capital city of Hanoi. The fight for power effectively started here, on the 19, with the local militia forces going over to the Revolutionists' side. Spearheaded by youth formations, the people's army under the command of the Viet Minh forced their way into the compounds of the Home Ministry Building. Governor Phan ke Toai had already fled with his closest collaborators. The Tran trong Kim puppet government promptly gave way while at the former capital of Annam, Emperor Bao Dai signed his act of abdication in the presence of representatives of the Viet Minh Central Headquarters.

"Thus, a new Power came into being, as the people's Revolutionary Government was officially proclaimed and was given the unqualified support of the entire population.

"A few days later, members of the National Liberation Committee met in session in Hanoi. In view of the changed situation, the New Power was re-organized and a provisional Government which included several non-party members was established with Ho Chi Minh as its president." 29/

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Ho Chi Minh issued an "Appeal for General Insurrection" following the August 16 conference:

"...This is a great advance in the history of the struggle waged for nearly a century by our people for their liberation.

"This is a fact that enraptures our compatriots and fills me with great joy.

"However, we cannot consider this as good enough. Our struggle will be a long and hard one. Because the Japanese are defeated, we shall not be liberated overnight. We still have to make further efforts and carry on the struggle. Only a united struggle will bring us independence.

"The Viet Minh Front is at present the basis of the struggle and solidarity of our people. Join the Viet Minh Front, support it, make it greater and stronger!

"At present, the National Liberation Committee is, so to speak, in itself our provisional government. Unite around it and see to it that its policies and orders are carried out throughout the country!

"In this way, our Fatherland will certainly win independence and our people will certainly win freedom soon.

"The decisive hour in the destiny of our people has struck. Let us stand up with all our strength to free ourselves!

"Many oppressed peoples the world over are vying with each other in the march to win back their independence. We cannot allow ourselves to lag behind.

"Forward! Forward! Under the banner of the Viet Minh Front, move forward courageously!" 30/

The hapless Bao Dai -- the first Vietnamese to govern a nominally united, independent nation in nearly a century -- on August 18, 1945, dispatched to General de Gaulle of France the following poignant and prophetic message:

"I address myself to the people of France, to the country of my youth. I address myself as well to the nation's leader and liberator and I wish to speak as a friend rather than as Head of State.

"You have suffered too much during four deadly years not to understand that the Vietnamese people, who have a history of twenty centuries and an often glorious past, no longer wish,

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can no longer support any foreign domination or foreign administration.

"You could understand even better if you were able to see what is happening here, if you were able to sense this desire for independence which has been smoldering in the bottom of all hearts, and which no human force can any longer hold back. Even if you were to arrive to re-establish a French administration here, it would no longer be obeyed; each village would be a nest of resistance, every former friend an enemy, and your officials and colonists themselves would ask to depart from this unbreathable atmosphere.

"I beg you to understand that the only way to safeguard French interests and the spiritual influence of France in Indochina is to recognize frankly the independence of Vietnam and to renounce any idea of re-establishing French sovereignty or administration here in whatever form it may be.

"You would be able to listen to us so easily and become our friends if you would stop aspiring to become our masters again.

"Making this appeal to the well recognized idealism of the French people and the great wisdom of their leader, we hope that peace and the joy which has rung for all the people of the world will be guaranteed equally to all people who live in Indochina, native as well as foreign." 31/

De Gaulle never replied; the message was in any event moot, because within a week Bao Dai formally ceded his powers to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and thereafter France was faced in North Vietnam not by the Francophile mandarin-king, but by Ho Chi Minh, the implacable professional revolutionary -- dedicated nationalist-communist.

(6) The Liberation of South Vietnam

The overturning of Japanese power in Cochinchina followed a separate course. Bao Dai's government had waited until August 14, 1945 to proclaim the incorporation of Cochinchina into a united Vietnam, but this move came much too late to have any impact. The first effective steps toward consolidating the disunited Vietnamese political groups in the South was undertaken by the Trotskyist "Struggle" faction and formerly collaborationist parties, who merged on August 14, 1945, to form a "United National Front" (Mat Tran Quoc Thong Nhut). Participants included the Cao Dai League, the Hoa Hao Sect, and the Buddhist League. The United National Front adopted the Trotskyist platform, and directed its energies principally against Bao Dai's representatives in Saigon. The Viet Minh seems to have delayed until 24 August to launch its program in Cochinchina, apparently moving at that time in response to the seizure of power by the Viet Minh in Annam and Tonkin. In the meantime, the ICP, led by Tran Van Giau, quietly seized

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power. On 25 August 1945, the Viet Minh sponsored a meeting at which a government entitled "Provisional Executive Committee of the Southern Vietnam Republic" was formed. The Committee of the South, though dominated by Tran Van Giau and other members of the ICP, purported to represent both the Viet Minh and the United National Front, and to be the southern arm of Ho Chi Minh's Hanoi government. The United National Front was represented at the 25 August meeting, but formal negotiations for an alliance between the Viet Minh and the Front did not commence until 30 August. The following is purported to be a transcript of the proceedings of this meeting, following a report by Tran Van Giau as Chairman of the Executive Committee of the South:

"Huynh Phu So (Hoa Hao leader) - 'Will Mr. Giau let us know what groups formerly secretly collaborated with the Viet Minh, and later publicly participated in it?'

"Tran Van Giau - 'In Nambo (Cochinchina) during the underground stage, these were the parties in the Viet Minh Front: the Indochinese Communist Party, the New Vietnam Democratic Party (Tan Dan Chu Dang), the Youth for National Liberation (Than-Nien Cuu Quoc), the officials for National Liberation (Quan-Nhan Cuu Quoc), the Vietnam National Party (Viet-Nam Quoc Cia Dang), and now the United National Front.'

"Tran Van Thach (Trotskyist ["/>Struggle"/] leader) - 'When was the Executive Committee established and who chose it? Will Front policy be followed and will there be communication with the Front? And since this assembly is held today, would the Government act in line with the Assembly, or is this the only meeting to be held?'

"Tran Van Giau - 'Now, I will answer Mr. Thach. The establishment of the Executive Committee was not my sole decision. It was established some time ago in order to take over the government. The Executive Committee is only a temporary one, pending the national election. In the interim, no one is willing to take power or obey orders. Although Mr. Thach's questions was not fully explained, I can tell what is in his mind. He would like to ask why a man like himself did not have a position in the government. Isn't that so, Mr. Thach? I repeat that this Government is only a temporary one. Later on when we have the general elections, if he is capable, Mr. Thach needn't worry about not having a seat in the Government. As for the work of the parties, between you and me, we will meet again.'

"Huynh Van Phuong (Intellectual Group) - 'Due to the circumstances that now face us, the United National Front felt that there should not be two fronts in the country. For this reason,

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the United National Front called all parties and groups to meet together and selected Phan Van Hum, as its representative, to negotiate with the Viet Minh in order to fuse the two fronts into one.

'After negotiating, Mr. Hum returned and reported that the Viet Minh has refused to dissolve into the United National Front. They state that the Viet Minh is already a consolidated front in the eyes of the nation and has fought against Japanese imperialism. Today, in order to unite our strength, the United National Front has to affiliate with the Viet Minh.

'Since the Viet Minh view point was sound, after hearing Mr. Hum's views, the United National Front affiliated with the Viet Minh...'

"Tran Van Giau - 'The Viet Minh does not wish to race for power. If a man is able, no one will stand in his way. The United National Front represents many parties and groups which are affiliated to the Viet Minh...'" 32/

Although the 30 August meeting produced no formal merger, on 7 September 1946 the Viet Minh was able to announce the forming of a "national bloc committee" with the United National Front. It was Tran Van Giau's Committee of the South which was the de facto government in Saigon when the British occupation forces arrived.

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2. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam

a. Establishment of the Republic

On 26 August in a ceremony at Hue, the Emperor Bao Dai relinquished his power to Ho Chi Minh's representatives. He spoke of "mighty democratic forces in the north of Our Realm," and of apprehension that "conflict between the North and the South should be inevitable." To avoid such conflict, and to deny an invader opportunities to capitalize on internal struggle, he would assume the status of "free citizen of an independent country." Bao Dai called upon "all parties and groups, all classes of society as well as the Royal Family to strengthen and support unreservedly the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in order to consolidate our national independence." 33/ Bao Dai adopted the name Vinh Thuy, and accepted the title of "Supreme Political Adviser" to Ho Chi Minh's government.

On 2 September 1945 -- the day Japan signed the surrender instrument -- Ho proclaimed the foundation of a new state, issuing the following "Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam":

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

"This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the 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 Viet-Nam 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 practiced 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.

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"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 Viet-Nam, more than two million of our fellow citizens died from starvation. On March 9 [1945], 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 Viet Minh 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 Viet Minh members that before fleeing they massacred a great number of our political prisoners detained at Yen Bay and Cao Bang.

"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 Viet Minh 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 Viet-Nam.

"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.

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"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 Viet-Nam, 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 Teheran and San Francisco have acknowledged the principles of self-determination and equality of nations, will not refuse to acknowledge the independence of Viet-Nam.

"A people who have courageously opposed French domination for more than eighty 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 Viet-Nam, solemnly declare to the world that Viet-Nam has the right to be a free and independent country -- and in fact it 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." 34/

b. Short-lived Independence in Cochinchina

September 2, 1945, found South Vietnam in profound political disorder. The successive collapse of French, then Japanese power, followed by the dissension among the political factions in Saigon had been accompanied by widespread violence in the countryside. The Cao Dai set up a state at Tay Ninh; the Hoa Hao established a capital in Can Tho; jacquerie flared, and a number of rural officials and landlords were murdered. On September 2, violence in Saigon took the lives of a French priest on the threshold of the Cathedral, several other French, and a number of Vietnamese; French homes were sacked, and an atmosphere of fear-ridden tension descended upon the city.

On 12 September 1945, the first British troops arrived in Saigon -- a Gurkha battalion; they were accompanied by a company of Free French soldiers. General Douglas D. Gracey, commanding, arrived on 13 September. Prior to his departure from India, Gracey had announced that:

"The question of the government of Indochina is exclusively French. Civil and military control by the French is only a matter of weeks." 35/

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It appears that Gracey's instructions from the Allied Command in Southeast Asia explicitly limited his mission to the disarming of the Japanese, and certainly did not require him to undertake revision of the Vietnamese political system. <sup>36/</sup> But in fact, General Gracey used his troops and his position to overturn the Committee of the South. Neither communism nor Viet nationalism seems to have concerned the British commander. On 10 September, the Viet Minh had accepted a reorganization of the Committee of the South in which Tran Van Giau was replaced as Chairman by Phan Van Bach, a prominent independent nationalist, and ICP members occupied only four of thirteen Committee seats. Gracey apparently regarded the Vietnamese government with disdain, if not contempt, not because of its political complexion, but because of its lack of authority from the French, and because of the civil disorder over which it presided. The British commander ordered the Japanese to assist in maintaining order, and directed the disarming of Vietnamese; both directives were ignored, but added to the mounting tension.

The attitude of the occupation forces reinforced the position of the Trotskyites who had denounced the Viet Minh, the ICP, and the Committee of the South as a "bourgeois-democratic government, even though the communists are now in power," and decried any attempts to cooperate with the Allies. The Trotskyite International Communist League called for the arming of the people, and incited the populace against the British. Beginning on 12 September, the Vietnamese police in Saigon launched a violent campaign to suppress the Trotskyites, in which many Trotskyite leaders were killed. In the rural areas, fighting broke out between Viet Minh troops and the forces of the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao. The spreading intra-Viet violence rendered futile further attempts to draw together the Vietnamese factions, and heightened apprehension among Westerners in Saigon.

On 17 September 1945, the Committee of the South called a general strike to protest the Allied lack of cooperation, and arrested some sixteen French. The French then importuned Gracey to permit them to step in to restore order. On 19 September, the French "Commissioner" for Cochinchina, Cedile, announced that there would be no negotiations with Vietnamese nationalists until civil order was restored. On 20 September, General Gracey suspended all Vietnamese newspapers, and took over the Vietnamese police force. On 21 September, martial law was declared, outlawing all demonstrations, and the bearing by Vietnamese of any weapon whatsoever, including bamboo rods. On 22 September, the British freed some 1400 French parachutists that had been incarcerated outside Saigon by the Japanese, and these promptly descended on the city to beat Vietnamese wherever they could lay their hands on them. On the morning of 23 September, French troops occupied the police stations, the post office, and other public buildings, and began to arrest Vietnamese politicians and public officials, although members of the Committee of the South escaped. The official British account noted that:

"It was indeed unfortunate that the manner in which this coup d'etat was executed together with the behavior of the

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French citizens during the morning of Sunday, 23 September, absolutely ensured that countermeasures would be taken by the Annamites [Vietnamese]. The more emotional of the French citizens, who, after all, had suffered considerably at the hands of the Annamites during the past few months, unfortunately took this opportunity of taking what reprisals they could. Annamites were arrested for no other reason than that they were Annamites; their treatment after arrest, though not actively brutal, was unnecessarily violent." 37/

The following day, the Vietnamese struck back: the economic life of Saigon was paralyzed by strikes, and that night groups of Vietnamese -- principally a gangster sect called the Binh Xuyen -- began a series of attacks on municipal utilities. On 25 September, in an assault through a French residential district, over one hundred Westerners were killed, and others carried off as hostages; on 26 September, the U.S. commander of the O.S.S. in Cochinchina was killed. Thus, the Indochina War began in Cochinchina in late September, 1945, and American blood was shed in its opening hours.

The Committee of the South issued a statement deploring the British actions:

"Suppression of the press, which was unanimously defending the independence of Vietnam, prevented us...from controlling and directing public opinion at a time when the mob was already exasperated by provocations of the French...The British Army, to accomplish its mission of disarming the Japanese forces, had no need to disarm our police force and suppress our government as it did. Yet we have demonstrated by our actions that our government is most cordial in its desire to lend every possible assistance to the British Army in the accomplishment of its task." 38/

At that juncture, the ICP in Cochinchina was in a particularly vulnerable position. The ICP -- the core of the Viet Minh -- had permitted the Independence League to pose as the arm of the Allies, and had supported cooperation with the British and amnesty for the French. The Party had even undertaken, through the Committee of the South, to repress the Trotskyites. It was apparent that advocacy of political moderation, public order, and negotiations with the French -- by the ICP, by the Viet Minh, or by the Committee of the South -- was quite futile. Further, the ICP was apparently assured by French communists that they would receive no assistance from Party brethren abroad. An American correspondent in Saigon was shown a document dated 25 September 1945, which:

"...advised the Annamite [Vietnamese] Communists to be sure, before they acted too rashly, that their struggle 'meets the requirements of Soviet policy.' It warned that any 'premature adventures' in Annamite independence might 'not be in line with

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Soviet perspectives.' These perspectives might well include France as a firm ally of the USSR in Europe, in which case the Annamite independence movement would be an embarrassment. Therefore, it urged upon the Annamite comrades a policy of 'patience.' It advised them in particular to wait upon the results of the French elections, coming up the following month, in October, when additional Communist strength might assure the Annamites a better settlement. In the meantime, it baldly proposed that an emissary be sent not only to contact the French Communist Party but also the Russians 'in order to acquaint yourselves with the perspectives of coming event.'" 39/

Whether the circumstances were propitious or not, conflict had been thrust upon the Vietnamese of Cochinchina. The question before the communists there was how to respond, and apparently the Party leadership determined that violence was the sole recourse, and that to regain leadership of the nationalist movement they had to make the Viet Minh the foremost proponent of war, the most unbending foe of compromise with the French. General Gracey, on the urgings of Admiral Lord Mountbatten's Allied Command, made a determined effort to effect a compromise with the Viet Minh, and succeeded in obtaining a truce on 2 October. But this broke down quickly in the face of truculence on both sides. French reinforcements under General Leclerc began pouring into Saigon, bolstering French resolve. A representative from Ho's Hanoi government arrived to buttress the Viet Minh's position with tales of Viet Minh ascendancy in Annam and Tonkin. The French sought to negotiate on the premise that they would rule, and allow some Viet participation; the Viet Minh demanded return to the status quo prior to 22 September, and eventual French evacuation. On October 9, 1945, France and the U.K. concluded an agreement in London in which the British formally recognized the French civil administration in Indochina as the sole legitimate authority south of the sixteenth parallel. Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin described to the House of Commons of Vietnamese disorder and looting, and of the difficulties presented by clashes between French troops under Gracey's command and Vietnamese forces. Britain, he announced, would assist in transporting to Vietnam enough French troops to permit them to take over from Gracey, and that in the interim British policy would support "close and friendly cooperation between the British and French commanders." 40/ On 11 October, the truce broke down, and fighting resumed. On 25 October, the French under General Leclerc thrust southward from Saigon to My Tho, the temporary capital of the Committee of the South, and, victorious there, to the northwest into Tay Ninh, where they subdued the Cao Dai. The Viet Minh opened a guerrilla campaign which greatly slowed the French, and demonstrated almost at once that neither French air power nor armor would suffice for pacification against that determined foe. The eminent French journalist, Philippe Devillers, who accompanied Leclerc's initial forays, wrote that:

"From this time on the work of pacifying the country revealed an aspect it would never lose again: to be forever put in question. The Viet Minh would suddenly start shooting at night at a village protected by one of our posts...to pull

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defenders to one side while on the other set fire to the houses and killed all suspicious persons. If we departed, believing a region pacified, they would arrive on our heels and the terror would start again. There was only one possible defense: to multiply the posts, to fortify them, to arm the villagers, and to train them for a coordinated and enlightened self-defense through a thorough job of information and policing.

"But this required men and weapons. What was needed was not 35,000 men (of which Leclerc was then disposed) but 100,000, and Cochinchina was not the only problem." 41/

c. Nationalist Government in North Vietnam, 1945-1946

(1) The Government of 2 September 1945

The salient problem other than Cochinchina facing the French in the fall of 1945 was the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The Hanoi government of Ho Chi Minh claimed dominion over all of Vietnam, but as far as French challenge to its authority was concerned, ruled in fact only in Annam and Tonkin. The DRV was neither wholly Viet Minh nor communist composition. Despite the vigor and initiative of the Viet Minh, the salient political fact of life in North Vietnam was Chinese Nationalist army of occupation, and the Chinese presence had forced Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh to accommodate Chinese-backed Viet Nationalists, and defer to Chinese policy in other respects.

The numbers of Chinese who entered North Vietnam is not known precisely, the totals having been obscured not only by inadequate reports, but by the Nationalists' use of Tonkin for passage of troops from Yunnan and Kwangsi en route to other parts of China. French estimates ran as high as 180,000, but the Chinese occupation forces per se probably numbered about 50,000. 42/ Even fewer foreign troops would have gravely overburdened North Vietnam, where because of a bad crop year, and war-disturbed commerce, famine was rampant. Most of the Chinese troops were ill-disciplined and poorly-equipped, living, perforce, off the land. Their exactions of the peasantry stirred the traditional animosities of the Vietnamese for the Chinese -- resentments untempered by gratitude to the Chinese as liberators, since the Vietnamese believed they had already been liberated by the Viet Minh. And the transgressions of the Chinese troops were matched by the Chinese high command; the warlords promptly began to plunder North Vietnam. The Chinese dollar was made legal tender at an exorbitant rate of exchange with the Vietnamese piastre, which exacerbated an already serious inflation, and opened new vistas for the black market. Chinese profiteers began large scale buying of French and Vietnamese enterprises and real estate. 43/

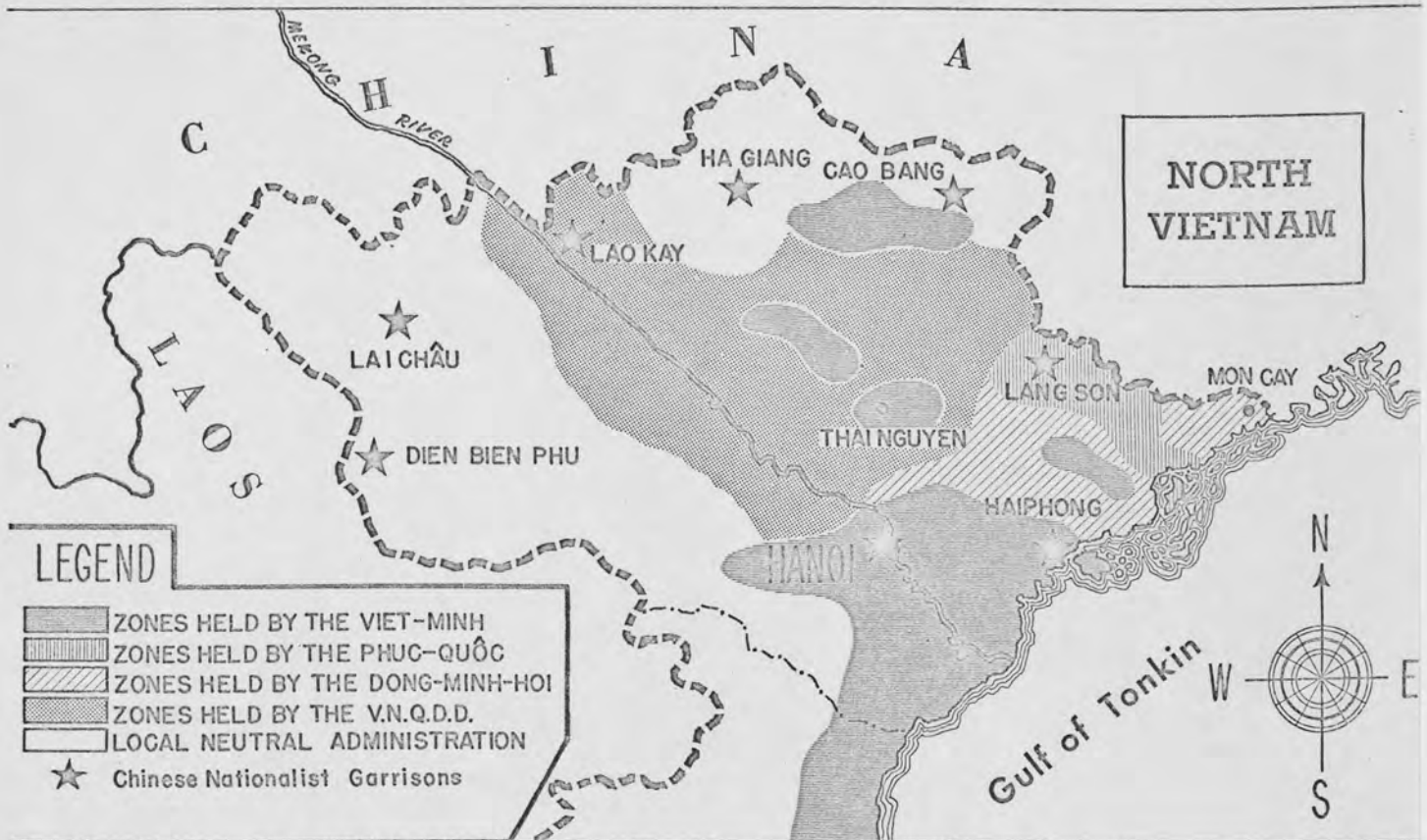
As the Chinese forces marched into North Vietnam, they ousted local Viet Minh governments, and replaced them with VNQDD, and Dong Minh Hoi groups; Phuc-Quoc (Restoration League) groups seized power elsewhere.

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POLITICS IN  
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Backed by Chinese troops, and drawing on Chinese funds, the VNQDD and the Dong Minh Hoi opened newspapers, and launched a political campaign against the Viet Minh and the DRV government. The resultant situation in North Vietnam in autumn, 1945, is depicted in Figure 4.



Map of the political situation in North Vietnam in September-October 1945.

Source: Cooper, Killigrew, and LaCharite',  
Case Studies in Insurgency and  
Revolutionary Warfare: Vietnam  
1941-1954 (Washington: SORO, 1964).

FIGURE 4



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The realities of the Chinese presence alone required Ho Chi Minh to use circumspection in dealing with rival nationalist groups. Why the Chinese did not follow through, and simply oust Ho's government in favor of a VNQDD/Dong Minh Hoi coalition is not known. It appears that venality played a part -- Chiang Fa Kuei and other warlords were direct beneficiaries of an official DRV "gold week" in September, 1945, in which the state appealed to the citizenry for scraps of gold as "a contribution to the finance of national defense." 44/ Allegedly this campaign produced some 800 pounds of gold and 20 million piastres, and for it the DRV received from the warlords, besides toleration, weapons the Japanese had in their possession -- a reported 40,000 arms, including mortars, artillery pieces, and 18 tanks. 45/

But Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh were constrained to go well beyond bribery. In setting up the government of 2 September 1945, they had been carefully to include non-Viet Minh politicians, and to hold ICP representation to 6 to 16 cabinet seats. On 23 October, the Viet Minh signed a pact with a dissident faction of the Dong Minh Hoi, purportedly in the interest of the "common struggle against the aggressive attempts of the colonial French, in order to defend the liberty and independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam." 46/ But other elements of the Dong Minh Hoi and the VNQDD persisted in their attack on the Viet Minh, making a particular point of communist domination.

Ho Chi Minh and the ICP then decided on a drastic move. Following a three day ICP conclave of 9 to 11 November, 1945, the ICP leadership issued the following declaration:

"1. Whereas, in consideration of the given historical situation, both internationally and internally, the present moment is precisely an exceptional occasion for Viet Nam to reconquer her unitary independence;

"2. Whereas, in order to complete the Party's task in this immense movement of the Vietnamese people's emancipation, a national union conceived without distinction of class and parties is an indispensable factor;

"3. Wishing to prove that the communists, in so far as they are advance guard militants of the Vietnamese people, are always ready to make the greatest sacrifices for national liberation, are always disposed to put the interest of the country above that of classes, and to give up the interests of the Party to serve those of the Vietnamese people;

"4. In order to destroy all misunderstandings, domestic and foreign, which can hinder the liberation of our country, the Central Executive Committee of the Indochina Communist Party in meeting assembled on November 11, 1945, has decided to voluntarily dissolve the Indochina Communist Party.

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"Those followers of communism desirous of continuing their theoretical studies will affiliate with the Indochina Association of Marxist Studies.

CENTRAL COMMITTEE INDOCHINA COMMUNIST PARTY  
November 11, 1945" 47/

The dissolution of the ICP was opposed by Tran Van Giau and others from Cochinchina, where the ICP rather than the Viet Minh, as such, had constituted the primary political organization among the people, but Ho's views prevailed.

Evidently Ho was also compelled by the opposition's constant demands for representation in the government to schedule national elections for January, 1946. However, fearful of Viet Minh control of the polls, and respectful of its popular strength, the VNQDD and the Dong Minh Hoi on 23 December, 1945, negotiated with the Viet Minh an agreement to seat, irrespective of the vote, 50 VNQDD and 20 Dong Minh Hoi delegates among some 300-360 members of the National Assembly. 48/ The elections were held as scheduled, openly in Tonkin and Annam, and clandestinely in Cochinchina.

The chief of the American O.S.S. group in Hanoi from 22 August to 12 December, 1945, in a debriefing in the Department of State on 30 January 1946, described the political situation in North Vietnam as follows:

"General Gallagher pointed out that little love was lost between the Chinese and the French; that the presence of the American group in Hanoi restrained anti-French Chinese action; and that he himself had influenced General Lu Han (Commanding General of Chinese armed forces in Indochina) to bring Sainteny and Ho Chi Minh together and confront both with a strong directive that order must be maintained. The existence of a vacuum in the north with neither French nor Chinese troops present would be extremely dangerous, for the Annamese would react strongly against all French in the area, who would be helpless in protecting themselves. To take over successfully, the French would need a sufficient force to cover the whole north. One or two modern French divisions could, in General Gallagher's opinion, defeat the Annamese.

"In response to the question whether the French could do more than take key cities, he admitted that the Annamese would take to the hills and continue guerrilla warfare. Even in Saigon, he pointed out, things are far from peaceful despite British and French claims to the contrary. Establishment of French control could be speeded up if they were able to make large-scale air drops throughout the north. The Annamese, however, are well organized and, so far as small arms go, are quite well armed, although they have no navy, shore batteries and probably little artillery.

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"The question was raised whether the French mission in Hanoi was in fact negotiating with Ho Chi Minh. General Gallagher replied that the Viet Minh Provisional Government was at first willing to negotiate; then in October, after de Gaulle's pronouncements on colonial policy, the Annamese refused to negotiate with the French and reacted vigorously against all French nationals in Hanoi. The Chinese may succeed in putting in a less anti-French Annamese government so that negotiation might go forward. All French efforts to stimulate a palace revolution against Ho were of no avail. Ho himself will not deal with the French. The Viet Minh is strong and, regardless of possible superficial changes in the Provisional Government, Ho will be behind any continuing Annamese movement. General Gallagher said that Sainteny had told him he expected peaceful agreement between the French and the Annamese would be reached by negotiation.

"General Gallagher was asked how effective the Viet Minh administration would be with neither French nor Chinese forces present. He replied that on the whole he was impressed by the remarkably effective Annamese administration. There was an able personnel; they were all enthusiastic and young, but there were too few of them. Whatever their technical skill, they perhaps lack executive ability and experience since the technical services in Hanoi were at first very well run but gradually deteriorated. Trained people for the government and at the municipal level are lacking. In General Gallagher's opinion the Annamese are not yet ready for self-government and in full-fledged competition with other nations they would 'lost their shirts.' However, the demand for independence is widespread and even in the villages the peasants refer to the example of the Philippines.

"Ho is willing to cooperate with Great Britain, USSR, or the United States and would perhaps even settle for French tutelage if that were subordinated to control by the other nations. French control alone, however, will be strongly resisted. The deep-seated hatred for the French has been fanned by exceedingly clever Viet Minh propaganda.

"General Gallagher was asked whether the Annamese were realistic regarding their ability to stand up against French military force. While they are too enthusiastic and too naive, he said, they probably know that they will be licked. They are strong on parades and reiterate their willingness 'to fight to the last man,' but they would be slaughtered and they have been told that and probably know it. The Annamese would be no match for forces with modern arms even if they themselves have some, which they may have since the Chinese found no Japanese rolling artillery and numerous Japanese anti-aircraft guns seem to have completely disappeared. United States Army representatives never did learn the extent of arms controlled by the Viet Minh. Certainly the Chinese are not turning Japanese arms over to them. Before V-J Day the Japanese undoubtedly had

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armed and trained many Annamese. A Japanese general claimed they had taken over on March 9 simply because the French could no longer control the Annamese, but this statement General Gallagher characterized as a lie. He had heard that under the pretext of arming Annamese gendarmes for police duty in Hanoi, the Japanese had actually armed three distinct contingents, dismissing each group when armed and bringing in a new one to be armed and trained. Furthermore, the Annamese had acquired Japanese arms from arsenals which had been opened. General Gallagher did not know whether or not Tai Li (Deputy Director, Bureau of Investigation and Statistics, Chinese National Commission of Military Affairs) was sending arms to the Viet Minh.

"General Gallagher was asked whether the presence of French hostages in the north would restrain French forces when they enter the region. He pointed out that only a few French civilians had been removed by air. All the rest, besides some five thousand disarmed French troops, were still to be removed. The Chinese cannot take them out nor would Lu Han even permit their evacuation to the Do Son Peninsula. Their presence had been a constant restraining influence on Sainteny. Asked whether the Annamese would let these French be evacuated, General Gallagher replied that they would have to if the Chinese were still there, but that these French nationals would be a real problem if the Chinese were moved out. The American Army group had to exert considerable pressure on the Chinese to get them to give any freedom at all to French civilians in Haiphong, Hue and other centers besides Hanoi. However, the Chinese and French alone had arranged for shipments of food from the south. The American group, incidentally, had to intervene to prevent the monopoly by the French of such food or of food distributed by the U.S. Army. The French nationals could be evacuated from Hongai and Tourane by the United States when the Japanese were removed if the Chinese would concentrate them at those ports. However, General Gallagher noted, that would place us in a position of working against the Annamese.

"Originally, General Gallagher explained, the French expected the United States to play the same role in the north that the British were playing in the south. When they found us neutral they became more and more antagonistic and did everything possible to persuade United States personnel to favor the French position. They had no appreciation of the actual help which the American group gave to the prisoners of war and some of the civilian French in the form of food, medical aid, and so on. The Annamese, too, expected American help originally, having been thoroughly indoctrinated with the Atlantic Charter and other ideological pronouncements. In our neutral role we were thus a disappointment to both sides....

"At the present time the Hanoi radio is controlled by the Chinese so that there is communication between Hanoi and Saigon. A British

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military and civilian liaison team was sent to Hanoi and a Chinese counterpart to Saigon. The British in Hanoi at first made little progress with the Chinese but General Gallagher understands they have since made more headway.

"The Chinese 60th Army in the south of the Chinese zone and the 93rd Army around Hanoi, both totalling some 50 thousand men, have been told to concentrate for removal to Manchuria, but whether they have actually moved out or not General Gallagher does not know. By December, however, the Chinese 53rd Army had begun to come in from Yunnan and would probably provide replacements for the other two Armies.

"General Gallagher noted that magnetic mines have not been entirely cleared at least from the northern ports and that the threat provided by these mines has helped and would continue to help keep the French from undertaking large-scale landing operations in that area. He felt that regular rail communications between Saigon and Hanoi might not be opened for another year." \*

In early 1946, Ho Chi Minh attempted to bring Ngo Dinh Diem into his government, but Diem, whose brother, Ngo Dinh Khoi, had been killed by the Viet Minh, refused. In February, attacks on Ho from both the communist left and the non-Viet Minh nationalists reached such intensity that Ho reportedly proposed his own resignation, and the forming of a state under Bao Dai. <sup>49/</sup> The Bao Dai substitution, Ho felt, would not only mollify his internal foes, but improve the DRV's position with the Americans and French: to the U.S. Ho had sent a series of unanswered appeals for internationalizing Vietnam; and with the French, Ho had opened talks trending toward a French-protected, French-recognized, independent DRV.

(2) The Government of 2 March 1946

The National Assembly "elected in January met on 2 March 1946, and approved the new DRV government at its opening session. Its top echelon of 12 contained only 2 ICP members, but 3 VNQDD and 1 Dong Minh Hoi; Ho remained President, but his Vice President was the leader of the Dong Minh Hoi, and the key portfolios of Interior and Defense went to neutrals.

The new government faced at the outset a crisis in relations with France. Though General Leclerc's "pacification" operations in South Vietnam had fallen short of expectations, French troops and shipping had arrived in Indochina in sufficient quantity for them to contemplate operations in North Vietnam. Simultaneously, the French undertook negotiations with the Chinese, seeking to have them relinquish their occupation of North Vietnam, and with the DRV, seeking to have it accept the reintroduction

\* Reproduced from Memorandum of Conversation by Mr. Richard L. Sharp, of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs, Department of State, dated January 30, 1946.

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of French forces. In the meantime, the British withdrew from Cochinchina; on 4 March 1946, the Allied Southeast Asia Command deactivated Indochina as a territory within its purview. In February, the French deployed an amphibious task force prepared for operations in North Vietnam. On 28 February, they obtained Chinese agreement (from Chungking, not the Chinese satraps in North Vietnam) to turn over the occupation to France by April. Ho Chi Minh, faced with French military power and Chinese withdrawal, and denied succor from the United Nations or the U.S., had no recourse save to negotiate with the French.

The Accord signed by Ho with the French on 6 March, 1946, taxed Ho's popularity to the utmost. The VNQDD had vehemently opposed compromise, and even negotiations with the French, but Ho was careful to bring opposition representatives into his talks with Sainteny, the French spokesman, and to see to it that the March 6 Accord was signed not only by Ho and Sainteny, but also by Vu Kong Kanh, the leader of the VNQDD. Still, feeling ran high against the French, and it took all of Ho's prestige to prevent rebellion against the Viet Minh. On 7 March, Ho and Vo Nguyen Giap defended the Accord before a crowd of 100,000 in Hanoi, in which Ho assured his people that: "You know that I would rather die than sell our country." 50/ On 8 March French troops landed in Haiphong, and re-entered Hanoi ten days later.

Upon French return -- Ho's coalition cabinet and Vu Kong Kanh's signature on the March 6 Accord notwithstanding -- a number of VNQDD leaders withdrew their support of Ho's government in protest against what they termed a "pro-French" policy of the Viet Minh. The Emperor Bao Dai left the country on 18 March, the day the French entered Hanoi. Ho, thereupon, moved to merge the Viet Minh into a larger, more embracing Front organization, which would consolidate the several parties of the DRV, and thereby ease political stress. On 27 May 1946, the formation of the Popular National Front (Lien Hiep Quoc Dan Viet Nam) -- subsequently known as the Lien Viet -- was announced, to bring about "independence and democracy." Prominent leaders of all political parties were among the founders, and they jointly pledged "to safeguard our autonomy, so as to later attain complete independence." 51/ The Viet Minh, VNQDD, the Dong Minh Hoi, the Socialist Party and the Democratic Party were all roofed under the Lien Viet, but maintained separate organizations.

(3) Chinese Withdrawal

Agreement among the several parties in the Lien Viet lived, however, only so long as the Chinese remained in North Vietnam. Despite Chungking's contract to withdraw by April, 1946, the warlords lingered at their looting into June. On June 10, 1946, Chinese Nationalist troops evacuated Hanoi, and on June 15, the last detachments embarked at Haiphong. On June 19, the official Lien Viet organ Qui Quoc published a sharp rebuke of "reactionary saboteurs of the March agreement," pointedly directed at the VNQDD. Reaffirming a policy of cooperation with France,

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the Vietnamese government invited the French to join in a campaign against "enemies of the peace." The French, recognizing in the Lien Viet their sole Vietnamese support, willingly acceded.

One of the more remarkable chapters in the tragic history of Vietnamese nationalism then ensued. On the heels of the withdrawing Chinese, Vo Nguyen Giap's DRV troops struck into the regions governed by the Dong Minh Hoi, VNQDD, and Phuc Quoc. In a series of skirmishes, they routed the partisan bands, and overturned the civil administrations of the opposition parties. The French not only provided equipment, but in some instances actually maneuvered their own forces with, and furnished artillery support for, the Vietnamese. Some strongholds held out for months -- Lao Kay on the Yunnan border remained in VNQDD hands until November, 1946 -- but the issue was decided before the end of July. 52/

On July 11 to 13, in a series of raids in Hanoi, DRV forces with French armor in support occupied the opposition party headquarters and printing plants, and arrested over 100 political figures. With that, most of the opposition leaders returned to exile in China whence they had come less than a year before. Among these were Nguyen Hai Than of the Dong Minh Hoi -- Ho's Vice President -- and Vu Khong Khanh and Nguyen Tuong of the VNQDD -- the former one of the three signatories of the March 6 Accord, the latter Ho's Minister of foreign Affairs and one of the negotiators of the Accord.

The U.S. Vice Consul in Hanoi submitted the following report to the Department of State concerning the political situation at that juncture:

"Please pass to General Marshall for information.

"There are three important political parties in Viet Nam.

"They are Viet Minh League, composed of former Indo-Chinese Communist Party (PCI dissolved itself November 30, 1945) and Democratic Party, son [sic] Vietnam Cach Menh Dong Minh Hoi, generally referred to as Dong Minh Hoi or DMH; and Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang.

"There are in addition several splinter parties which seem to serve chiefly as vehicles for organized banditry.

"Both Dong Minh Hoi and Quoc Dan Dang seem have support of Chinese. Most active part of Viet Minh is factor composed of former PCI members.

"Viet Minh strength seems to be spread throughout northern

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Indo-China. Dong Minh Hoi and Quoc Dan Dang control territory in Moncay, Langson, Vinh Yen area.

"As yet no Catholic party has appeared nor do Catholics appear to be committed to support of any one party. Viet Minh League has been making tentative moves to capture Catholic support but is said to be too radical to obtain full cooperation from church. In view of fact church claims million members in Tonking and Annam (large percentage believed to be 'rice Christians'), it seems probable that Catholics as group will [not?] remain long absent from politics." \*

In July, the same source reported that Viet Minh was steadily eliminating the Dong Minh Hoi and VNQDD as organized opposition. \*\*

Ho Chi Minh was absent from Vietnam during the summer and early fall of 1946, engaged first by the abortive Fontainebleau negotiations and then by their aftermath, the modus vivendi he signed with France on 14 September 1946. During Ho's absence, Vo Nguyen Giap -- Acting Minister of the Interior and Minister of National Defense -- policed the Vietnamese political battlefield, arranging for the VNQDD and other "opposition" parties to survive -- suitably disarmed and manned with cooperative nationalists -- within the Lien Viet. The Lien Viet proceeded to forge new "unity" within the Front, and to tighten Front control over the DRV. On Ho's return, the National Assembly was called back into session, presented with a reorganized government and a new constitution.

(4) The Government of 3 November 1946

The National Assembly elected in January, 1946 -- in dubiously honest elections -- convened in Hanoi in late October. Of the original membership, 291 delegates presented themselves. The composition at opening was as follows:

\* Telegram, Hanoi 20 to State, 20 May 1946

\*\* Telegram, Hanoi 69 to State, 26 July 1946



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DRV  
Political Parties in the DRV National Assembly 53/  
October 28, 1946

Independents	90
Democratic	45
Socialist	24
Marxist	15
Lien Viet	80
Dong Minh Hoi	17
VNQDD	20
	<u>291</u>

The VNQDD and the Dong Minh Hoi, allocated 50 and 20 seats respectively, were thus less than 50% represented, and the Marxists group, the smallest in the Assembly, was, according to all surviving evidence, the most active and influential. During the two weeks the Assembly was in session, a number of opposition members were arrested and charged with criminal offenses. When the Assembly closed, 20 Dong Minh Hoi and VNQDD members remained, and of these, only 2 registered dissenting votes.

The new constitution, ratified on 8 November 1946 by the National Assembly with a vote of 240 to 2, ordained in phrases reminiscent of Jefferson and Rousseau a state of guaranteed civic freedoms, of delineated duties and rights of citizens, and of a people's parliament supreme in power. Thereafter, the Assembly adjourned until late 1953, and never did get around to transforming itself into constitutionally prescribed form. 54/ The 1946 Constitution declared Vietnam to be a democratic republic in which all power belonged to the people "without distinction of race, class, creed, wealth, or sex." Its territory, "composed of Bac-Bo, or Northern Viet Nam (Tonkin), Trung-Bo or Central Viet Nam (Annam), and Nam-Bo or Southern Viet Nam (Cochinchina) is one and indivisible... The capital of Viet Nam is Hanoi." 55/ However, the Constitution of 1946 never became institutionalized; instead, the exigencies of the war with the French eventuated in a government which was literally an administrative extension of a rigidly disciplined politico-military apparatus headed by Ho Chi Minh, and a cadre of his old comrades from the Indochina Communist Party. 56/

The government approved by the National Assembly on 3 November 1946, however, preserved some of the facade of coalition; although the key cabinet positions were filled by communists, the government included independents, democrats, socialists and even one nominal VNQDD. Figure 5 presents the several Vietnamese governments in the period 1945-1949. Ho Chi Minh throughout that period preserved coalition, at least pro forma; the DRV government in 1949 was still composed of a minority of ICP members and included one VNQDD and one Dong Minh Hoi. (The chart ignores the Lien Viet, using the more familiar Viet Minh throughout; the Vietnamese Nationalist Party is the VNQDD.)

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VIET  
GOVERNMENTS  
1945 - 1949

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VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENTS 1945 - 1949

<u>Government</u>	<u>Date Established</u>	<u>Capital</u>	<u>Cabinet Composition</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Incumbent</u>	<u>Party</u>
State of Vietnam	10 March 1945	HUE	Not Available	Prime Minister	Tran Trong Kim	Conservative Nationalist
[ Bao Dai, Emperor, abdicated on 26 August 1945 in favor of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam ]						
People's Liberation Committee	16 August 1945	Hanoi	12 Viet Minh (6 ICP) 2 VN Democratic Party	Not Available		
[ Superseded by Prov Gov't DRV, 2 September 1945 ]						
Provisional Executive Committee of the Southern Vietnam Republic	25 August 1945	Saigon	6 Viet Minh (4 ICP) 1 VN Democratic Party 2 Non-party 1 National Independence Party	Chairman	Tran Van Giau	ICP
[ Overthrown by French Coup d'etat 23 September 1945 ]						
Provisional Gov't of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam	2 Sep 1945	Hanoi	9 Viet Minh (6 ICP) 4 VN Democratic Party 1 Catholic 2 Non-Party	President Minister of Foreign Affairs Minister of Interior Minister of Propaganda Minister of National Defense Minister of Youth Minister of National Economy Minister of Social Welfare Minister of Justice Minister of Health Minister of Public Works & Communications Minister of Labor Minister of Finance Minister of National Education Minister without Portfolio Minister without Portfolio	Ho Chi Minh Ho chi Minh Vo nguyen Giap Tran huy Lieu Chu van Tan Duong duc Hien Nguyen manh Ha Nguyen van To Vu trong Khanh Pham ngoc Thach Dao trong Kim Le van Hien Pham van Dong Vu dinh Hoe Cu Huy Can Nguyen van Xuan	Communist-Viet Minh Communist-Viet Minh Communist-Viet Minh Communist-Viet Minh Viet Minh Democrat Catholic Non-party Democrat Viet Minh Non-party Communist-Viet Minh Communist-Viet Minh Democrat Democrat Democrat Viet Minh
[ Superseded by Gov't DRV, 2 March 1946 ]						
Government of South Vietnam	14 Feb 1946	Saigon	4 French 8 Vietnamese	Consultative Council of Cochinchina		

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VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT 1945 - 1949 (CONT'D)

<u>Government</u>	<u>Date Established</u>	<u>Capital</u>	<u>Cabinet Composition</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Incumbent</u>	<u>Party</u>	
Democratic Republic of Vietnam	2 March 1946	Hanoi	2	ICP	President	Ho chi Minh	Communist-Viet Minh
					Vice President	Nguyen hai Than	Dong Minh Hoi
					Minister of Foreign Affairs	Nguyen tuong Tam	Vietnam Nationalist Party
			3	VN Nationalist	Minister of Interior	Huynh thuc Khang	Independent
					Minister of National Defense	Phan Anh	Socialist
					Minister of National Economy	Chu ba Phuong	Vietnam Nationalist Party
			1	Dong Minh Hoi	Minister of Justice	Vu dinh Hoo	Democrat
			2	Democrats	Minister of Education	Dang thai Mai	Viet Minh *
					Minister of Agriculture	Bo xuan Luat	Dong Minh Hoi**
			1	Socialists	Minister of Social Welfare	Truong dinh Tri	Vietnam Nationalist Party
			3	Independents	Minister of Finance	Lo van Hien	Communist-Viet Minh
					Minister of Public Works & Communications	Tran dang Khoa	Democrat

\* The post of Minister of National Education was held only temporarily by Dang thai Mai for Cao van Thinh (Independent).  
 \*\* Bo xuan Luat became Vice Minister of Agriculture and Huynh thien Loc (Independent) assumed the Ministry.

The Vice Ministries were divided as follows:

Vice Minister of Interior	Hoang minh Giam	Socialist
Vice Minister of National Defense	Ta quang Bau	Independent
Vice Minister of Justice	Nguyen van Huong	Independent
Vice minister of Public Works & Communications	Dang phuc Thong	Viet Minh
Vice Minister of Finance	Trinh Van Binh	Independent
Vice Minister of National Education	Do duc Duc	Democrat
Vice Minister of Agriculture	Bo Xuan Luat	Dong Minh Hoi
Vice Minister of Social Welfare	Do Tiep	Dong Minh Hoi
Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs	Nghiem ko To	Vietnam Nationalist Party

[ Reorganized under constitution adopted by National Assembly, November 1946 ]

In addition, the following were elected: (1) a Consultative High Council headed by Nguyen vinh Thuy (ex-emperor Bai Dai); (2) A supreme council of National Defense with Vo nguyen Giap (Communist) as president and Vu khong Khanh (Nationalist Party) as vice-president; (3) the President of the National Assembly, Ngo tu Ha (Catholic); (4) the permanent Committee of the Assembly headed by Bui bang Doan (Independent)

Republic of Cochinchina	1 June 1946	Saigon	All French Appointees	President	Nguyen van Thinh	Democratic
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VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT 1945 - 1949 (CONT'D)

<u>Government</u>	<u>Date Established</u>	<u>Capital</u>	<u>Cabinet Composition</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Incumbent</u>	<u>Party</u>	
Democratic Republic of Vietnam	3 Nov 1946	Hanoi	5 ICP	President	Ho chi Minh	Communist-Viet Minh	
				Vice-President	Vacant*		
				Minister of Foreign Affairs	Ho chi Minh	Communist-Viet Minh	
				Minister of Interior	Huynh thuc Khang	Independent	
				Minister of National Defense	Vo nguyen Giap	Communist-Viet Minh	
				5 Independents	Minister of National Economy	Vacant*	
				2 Democrat	Minister of Justice	Vu dinh Hoe	Democrat
				1 Socialist	Minister of Finance	Lo van Hien	Communist-Viet Minh
				1 Nationalist	Minister of National Education	Nguyen van Huyen	Socialist
				2 Vacant	Minister of Agriculture	Ngo tan Hnon	Independent
					Minister of Communications & Public Works	Tran dang Khoa	Democrat
					Minister of Labor	Nguyen van Tao	Communist-Viet Minh
					Minister of Health	Hoang tinh Tri	Independent
					Minister of Social Welfare	Chu ba Phuong	Vietnam Nationalist Party
					Minister without Portfolio	Nguyen Van To	Independent
					Minister without Portfolio	Bo xuan Luat	Independent
					Supreme Councillor	Nguyen vinh Thuy (Eao Dai)	
					Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs	Hoang minh Giam	Socialist
					Vice Minister of Interior	Hoang huu Nam	Communist-Viet Minh
					Vice Minister of National Defense	Ta quang Dau	Independent
					Vice Minister of National Economy	Pham van Dong	Communist-Viet Minh
					Vice Minister of Agriculture	Cu huy Can	Democrat
					Vice Minister of Justice	Tran cong Tuong	Democrat
					Vice Minister of Finance	Trinh van Binh	Independent
					Vice Minister of National Education	Nguyen khanh Toan	Communist-Viet Minh
					Vice Minister of Communication & Public Works	Dang phue Thong	Socialist
					Vice Minister of Health	Vacant***	
	Vice Minister of Labor	Vacant					
	Vice Minister of Social Welfare	Vacant					

\* Pham ngoc Thach (Viet Minh) apparently acted as assistant to Ho chi Minh in the cabinet. The Vice-president was not filled until July 1949, when Pham van Dong (Communist-Viet Minh) was given the post.  
 \*\* Phan Anh (Socialist) was appointed Minister of National Economy on January 26, 1947.  
 \*\*\* Nguyen kinh Chi (Independent) was appointed to the Vice Ministry of Health.

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VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT 1945 - 1949 (CONT'D)

<u>Government</u>	<u>Date Established</u>	<u>Capital</u>	<u>Cabinet Composition</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Incumbent</u>	<u>Party</u>
Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Cont'd)				Vice Minister of Health	Ton that Tung	Independent
				Vice Minister of Labor	Vacant	
				Vice Minister of Social Welfare	Vacant	
				Vice Minister of War Veterans and Invalids	Ngo tu Ba	Independent (Catholic)
Provisional Government of South Vietnam	13 Oct 1947	Saigon		French-sponsored regime Nguyen Van Xuan, President		
Administrative Committee of Tonkin	May 1947	Hanoi		French-sponsored regime		
Administrative Committee of Annam	May 1947	Hue		French-sponsored regime		
Provisional Vietnam Central Government	6 June 1948	Hanoi		Nguyen Van Xuan, President		
Government of Vietnam	1 July 1949	Saigon		Emperor Bao Dai, Head of State		

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VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT 1945 - 1949 (CONT'D)

<u>Government</u>	<u>Date Established</u>	<u>Capital</u>	<u>Cabinet Composition</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Incumbent</u>	<u>Party</u>
Democratic Republic of Vietnam	<u>As of July 1949</u>		5 ICP	President	Ho chi Minh	Communist-Viet Minh
			5 Independent	Vice President	Phan van Dong	Communist-Viet Minh
			2 Democrat	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Hoang minh Giam	Socialist
			3 Socialist	Minister of Interior	Phan ke Toai	Independent
			1 Nationalist	Minister of National Defense	Vo nguyen Giap	Communist-Viet Minh
			1 Dong Min Hoi	Minister of National Economy	Phan Anh	Socialist
				Minister of Justice	Vu dinh Hoe	Democrat
				Minister of Finance	Lo van Hien	Communist-Viet Minh
				Minister of National Education	Nguyen van Huyen	Socialist
				Minister of Agriculture	Ngo tan Nhon	Independent
				Minister of Communications & Public Works	Tran dang Khoa	Democrat
				Minister of Labor	Nguyen van Tao	Communist-Viet Minh
				Minister of Health	Hoang tinh Tri	Independent
				Minister of Social Welfare	Chu ba Phuong	Vietnam Nationalist Party
				Minister of War Veterans & Invalids	Vu dinh Tung	Independent (Catholic)
				Minister without Portfolio	Bo xuan Luat	Dong Minh Hoi
				Minister without Portfolio	Dang van Huong	Independent (Buddhist)

Vice Ministers were divided as follows:

Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs	Vacant	
Vice Minister of Interior	Tran duy Hung	Independent
Vice Minister of National Defense	Ta quang Bau	Independent
Vice Minister of National Economy	Cu huy Can	Democrat
Vice Minister of Agriculture	Nghiem xuan Yem	Independent
Vice Minister of Justice	Tran cong Tuong	Democrat
Vice Minister of Finance	Trinh van Binh	Independent
Vice Minister of National Education	Nguyen khanh Toan	Communist-Viet Minh
Vice Minister of Communication & Public Works	Dang phuo Thong	Socialist





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3. Nationalism During the Franco-Viet Minh War

Both the DRV constitution and the government of November, 1946, were soon submerged as the Viet Minh geared for war with France. A series of armed incidents in November, followed by large scale fighting in Hanoi in late December, destroyed what was left of the Franco-Viet modus vivendi. The DRV government took to the hills to assume a status of shadow state. The Viet Minh -- properly, the Lien Viet -- transformed itself into a semi-covert resistance organization, and committed itself to the military defeat of the French. During the opening year of the war, 1947, the DRV took steps to enhance its coalition nature, and to broaden the appeal of the Viet Minh. Communists, including Vo Nguyen Giap, were removed from the cabinet, and prominent Catholics and independents added. Thereafter, the government shifted steadily leftward. In the summer of 1948, Giap was reappointed Minister of National Defense, and a year later, Pham Van Dong, top communist, became Vice President. Moreover, while at first resistance against the French was offered by disparate political groups, eventually the Viet Minh, by superior organization and leadership, recaptured their monopoly over revolutionary nationalism.

Following is a survey of the principal Vietnamese political movements in the period 1947-1950. Two main groupings existed: the communist-centered Viet Minh and its auxiliaries in resistance to the French, and those nationalists finding common cause in the restoration of Bao Dai.

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VIET POLITICA  
MOVEMENTS  
1947 - 1950

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Vietnamese Political Movements, 1947-1950

<u>PARTY or FACTION</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
<u>The Resistance Groups</u>	
<u>Viet Minh (or Lien Viet)</u> <u>(Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi)</u>	Only political apparatus which extended throughout Vietnam and Vietnamese society. Drew on World War II reputation, but created new doctrine for political and military action. Leadership effective, and capitalized well on Ho's prestige as pre-eminent nationalist. Formally merged with the Lien Viet in March, 1949.
<u>Communist Party</u> <u>(Viet Nam Cong San Dang)</u>	Ostensibly dissolved, but evidently functioning as the core of the Viet Minh. CIA estimates membership grew over the years as follows:  1931: 1500      1946: 50,000      1950: 400,000  Party adhered strictly to "popular front" line, remaining covert, and working through the Viet Minh.
<u>Vietnam Democratic Party</u> <u>(Viet Nam Dan Chu Dang)</u>	A small, middle class, largely Tonkinese group within the Viet Minh, loyal to Ho Chi Minh, and solid supporters of the DRV government.
<u>Vietnam Socialist Party</u> <u>(Viet Nam Xa Hoi Dang)</u>	A Hanoi-echo of European Social-Democratic parties, narrowly based and small in numbers; created in 1946 within the Viet Minh, and a consistent supporter of the DRV government.
<u>Vietnam Nationalist Party</u> <u>(VNQDD)</u>	A small, unimportant faction of the VNQDD, operating within the Viet Minh.
<u>Vietnam Revolutionary League</u> <u>(Dong Minh Hoi)</u>	A second splinter group of little political power.

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<u>PARTY or FACTION</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
<u>Resistance Groups (Continued)</u>	
<u>Trotskyist Movement</u>	A Saigon centered, left-wing communist faction opposed to the French and to the Viet Minh alike. Principal significance was its continued impairment of communist effectiveness in Cochinchina.
<u>The Bao Dai Restoration Movements</u>	
<u>National Union Front</u> ( <u>Mat Tran Thong</u> <u>Nhut Quoc</u> <u>Gia Lien Hiep</u> )	Formed in Nanking in February, 1947, by VNQDD and Dong Minh Hoi leaders; gained support of Tran Trong Kim (Bao Dai's premier in the March-August 1945 government), Nguyen Hai Than (Ho's onetime Dong Minh Hoi Vice President), and Nguyen Tuong Tam (VNQDD, sometime Foreign Minister of the DRV). Claimed to unite the VNQDD, the Dong Minh Hoi, the Cao Dai, and the Buddhists behind Bao Dai, but splintered with withdrawal of sect supporters, and under impact of French political maneuvers.
<u>Vietnam Revolutionary League</u> ( <u>Dong Minh Hoi</u> )	Re-established in China in 1946, but never again influential in Vietnam; probably numbered 5,000 or less. When war broke out, sought reconciliation with Viet Minh, but was rebuffed. Swung to Bao Dai, although supporting a hard line with the French.
<u>Vietnam Nationalist Party</u> (VNQDD)	Enjoyed prestige of tradition dating to 1930's, but fortunes waned with Chiang Kai-shek's, with whom it had associated itself closely. Probably numbered 5,000 or less, and influence within Vietnam largely confined to Hanoi, and to northern Tonkin, in Viet Minh heartland. Support for Bao Dai highly tentative and heavily conditioned.

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<u>PARTY or FACTION</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
<u>The Bao Dai Restoration Movements (Continued)</u>	
<u>Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party</u> ( <u>Viet Nam Dan Chu Xa Hoi Dang</u> )	A Cochinchinese faction which splintered from the Viet Minh over quarrels with Viet Minh leaders. Included Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Binh Xuyen leaders, and participated in the National Union Front. Party fractured in November, 1947, over dispute with Hoa Hao, and thereafter became defunct.
<u>Popular Movement</u> ( <u>Doan The Dan Chung</u> )	A Hanoi-centered anti-DRV Tonkinese movement which acquired no widespread following, and by 1949 seemed to have fallen apart.
<u>Vietnam Nationalist Youth Alliance</u> ( <u>Viet Nam Quoc Gia Thanh Nien Doan</u> )	Another small Tonkinese movement which was of little significance.
<u>Cao Dai League</u> ( <u>Doan The Cao Dai</u> )	Headed by Pham Cong Tac, the Cao Dai Pope (in 1946 returned by the French from exile in Madagascar). The League claimed 1,000,000 to 2,000,000 adherents in Cochinchina and maintained (with some French aid) armed forces. Clashes between the Cao Dai and Viet Minh troops were frequent within the regions governed by the Cao Dai. The Cao Dai were divided on the issue of French support, since xenophobia was common within the sect. In January, 1948, the Cao Dai signed a peace with the Hoa Hao, and pledged support for Bao Dai. Pham Cong Tac openly aligned himself with the Bao Dai government in July, 1949. Nonetheless, the sect remained religiously, rather than politically oriented, and harbored a wide range of political opinion. The principal commitment remained Cao Daism.
<u>Hoa Hao</u> ( <u>Phat Giao Hoa Hao</u> )	Another Cochinchinese armed sect with a following of 200,000 to 1,000,000. During World War II the sect, with Japanese support,

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<u>PARTY or FACTION</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
<u>The Bao Dai Restoration Movements (Continued)</u>	
<u>Hoa Hao (Continued)</u> <u>(Phat Giao Hoa Hao)</u>	preached an anti-foreigner creed, and in 1945 joined the anti-French, anti-British resistance. In 1947, Huynh Phu So, the sect's leader, was executed by the Viet Minh, which led to the defection of the Hoa Hao from the resistance, and the sect's support of Bao Dai's restoration. Relations with the French, and with rival Vietnamese factions, remained strained.
<u>Buddhist Group</u> <u>(Tinh Do Cu Si)</u>	A movement centered chiefly on the overseas Chinese community, and advocated passive resistance to the Viet Minh.
<u>Vietnam Catholic League</u> <u>(Viet Nam Lien Doan</u> <u>Cong Giao)</u>	Organized by and around the Catholic clergy, the League exercised varying degrees of influence over some 2,000,000 Catholics, chiefly in Annam. The League supported the DRV in 1945 and 1946, and approved struggle for Vietnam's independence. Ngo Dinh Diem led the League into the National Union Front, but the League split with the Front over the desire of the majority to back the resistance, and the repugnance of the remainder, including Diem, at Bao Dai's inability to break France's control over Vietnam.
<u>Binh Xuyen</u> <u>(Lien Khu Binh Xuyen)</u>	A Saigon-sited gangster apparatus which originally fought as allies of the Viet Minh, but -- like the Hoa Hao -- were disaffected by the Viet Minh's shooting of several of their leaders. Provided tepid support for Bao Dai, and remained wary of the French.
<u>Vietnam National Rally</u> <u>(Viet Nam Quoc Gia Lien Hiep)</u>	An outgrowth of the National Union Front formed in December, 1947, in Hanoi, the Rally attempted to merge the various pro-Bao Dai parties in Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin. Such success as it enjoyed was a matter of form rather than substance, and its influence was quite limited.

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<u>PARTY or FACTION</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
<u>The Bao Dai Restoration Movements (Continued)</u>	
<u>Vietnam Restoration League</u> <u>(Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong</u> <u>Minh Hoi)</u>	Revived in 1947, the descendant of Japanese-oriented nationalist groups, the Phuc Quoc, under Prince Cuong De, at first attempted to offer an alternative to both the Viet Minh and Bao Dai. In June, 1947, and May, 1948, Prince Cuong De vainly solicited aid from the President of the United States against the French, and urged reconciliation between Ho Chi Minh and Bao Dai. The party remained chiefly in exile, and was unable to exert any appreciable influence over events in Vietnam.
<u>French Sponsored Movements</u>	With French encouragement, a number of Vietnamese parties were formed to give body to the several governments established by the French. These included the Indochinese Democratic Party, the Cochinese Democratic Party, the Popular Front of Indochina, and the Popular Movement of Cochinchina. In general, these parties supported the French policies of maintaining Cochinchina separate from Annam and Tonkin, and of strong ties with France. Eventually, such minimal popular support as they commanded was thrown behind the "Bao Dai solution."

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The foregoing demonstrates the poverty of Vietnamese nationalist movements in the period 1946-1950; only the Viet Minh can be said to have been a "national" movement at the outset of the war with France, and it built its popularity throughout the years of struggle. The Viet Minh stressed the primacy of political action among the people and the careful preparation of bases as preconditions for military action. Their careful attention to the former included extraordinary efforts to inculcate in their troops attitudes and habits which would win the respect, and eventually the cooperation of the populace. The following extracts from Viet Minh doctrine are dated 1948:

"TWELVE RECOMMENDATIONS

"The nation has its root in the people.

"In the Resistance war and national reconstruction, the main force lies in the people. Therefore, all the people in the army, administration, and mass organizations who are in contact or live with the people, must remember and carry out the following recommendations:

"Six forbiddances:

1 - Not to do what is likely to damage the land and crops or spoil the houses and belongings of the people.

2 - Not to insist on buying or borrowing what the people are not willing to sell or lend.

3 - Not to bring living hens into mountainous people's houses.

4 - Never to break our word.

5 - Not to give offense to people's faith and customs (such as to lie down before the altar, to raise feet over the hearth, to play music in the house, etc.)

6 - Not to do or speak what is likely to make people believe that we hold them in contempt.

"Six permissibles:

1 - To help the people in their daily work (harvesting, fetching firewood, carrying water, sewing, etc.)

2 - Whenever possible to buy commodities for those who live far from markets (knife, salt, needle, thread, pen, paper, etc.)

3 - In spare time, to tell amusing, simple, and short stories useful to the Resistance, but not to betray secrets.

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4 - To teach the population the national script and elementary hygiene.

5 - To study the customs of each region so as to be acquainted with them in order to create an atmosphere of sympathy first, then gradually to explain to the people to abate their superstitions.

6 - To show to the people that you are correct, diligent, and disciplined."

"STIMULATING POEM

The above-mentioned twelve recommendations  
Are feasible to all.

He who loves his country,  
Will never forget them.  
When the people have a habit,  
All are like one man,  
With good army men and good people,  
Everything will be crowned with success.  
Only when the root is firm, can the tree live long,  
And victory is built with the people as foundations.

April 5, 1948" 57/

Appraisals of Vietnamese nationalist parties available to the U.S. Department of State in 1949, on the eve of U.S. involvement in the Indochina war, were, on the whole, perceptive. A paper submitted in February, 1949, by George M. Abbott, one of the few American diplomats who had talked with Ho face to face, summarized issues in the following terms:

"C. International Relations.

1. United States - Post war relations between the United States and Indochina got off to a bad start with President Roosevelt's views on international trusteeship for strategic areas in the hands of powers unable to defend them, followed by the overenthusiastic activities of certain OSS agents in the period just before and after the Japanese surrender. The belief that the policy of the United States is to throw the French out of Indochina still persists in many circles both in Indochina and in France. We are also blamed for permitting the Chinese and English to occupy the northern and southern halves of the country to disarm Japanese troops. Our persistent refusal to supply equipment and arms for French military operations in Indochina is a sore subject with most French army officers. Another source of irritation has been the almost universal tendency of American correspondents visiting Indochina to write articles extremely critical of the French...

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"In recent weeks the French have actively supported proposals for four power cooperation in Southeast Asia to prevent the spread of communism, and there has been much talk about the strategic importance of Indochina as a bastion against the southward spread of Chinese Communists.

"As far as the Annamites are concerned, they were encouraged to believe that after the defeat of Japan we would assist them in obtaining independence. As it became apparent that our sympathies were tempered by strategic considerations in Europe, the popularity of the United States has diminished. Nevertheless, the prestige of the United States is still high, and even Ho Chi Minh has been careful to prevent any public anti-American propaganda...

"No one knows how many communists there are in Indochina, but the number of real party members is certainly small. The highest estimate is 20% of the troops fighting with Ho Chi Minh and this includes sympathizers. However, the number is undoubtedly growing, and at the same time non-communist military units are being steadily infiltrated with secret agents. Units under communist command are generally better armed. Thus the problem for the leader contemplating changing sides is not an easy one.

"Another point on which definite information is lacking is the channel of communications with Moscow and the center of regional control...Certainly satisfactory communications exist since Moscow publications of fairly recent date are frequently seized by the French...

"One peculiar thing about Vietnam Communism is that there has been very little anti-American propaganda. It is obvious that this is not due to ignorance of the current party line. It apparently represents a hope on the part of Ho Chi Minh that he may still obtain American support for or at least acceptance of a Viet Minh government under his leadership. Evidence that this hope is diminishing is furnished in a regional party directive dated in November 1948 which stated that active anti-American propaganda should be conducted in party circles and by word of mouth among the people but should not yet appear on the radio, in the press, or in public speeches...

"Opposed to the French forces are about 75,000 Vietnamese troops of various political complexions, largely under communist dominated leadership. There is considerable French-furnished evidence of communist political commissars and indoctrination extending down to company strength levels. It is certain that the disciplined communist element has been the largest factor

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in maintaining the vigor and cohesiveness of the resistance. In this, they have been greatly helped by French indecision and bad faith, and the terrorism of French troops.

"In spite of arms captures and occasional defections, there is no sign of large scale weakening of Vietnamese resistance abilities or morale. The large areas under Vietnamese control lack luxuries and medicines, but are wholly self-sufficient in the basic necessities and tolerably well administered, according to what few reports are available. They continue to form a source of supplies and of fresh troops that are only limited in numbers by the arms available.

"Although there are rumors of a Chinese Communist treaty with Ho Chi Minh, and of a Chinese Communist general and his staff in Northern Tonkin, there is little evidence, as yet, that the Chinese are of any considerable help in the resistance. French sources feel that there is little danger of a Chinese Communist 5th column in Cochinchina, or of an invitation on the part of Ho Chi Minh to the troops of the age-old national enemy to enter Indochina in force, in spite of the communist link. All French military sources consulted, however, feel that a large scale Chinese Communist invasion would make most, if not all, of Tonkin, militarily untenable.

"For many months past, observers feel that the resistance has not put forth its maximum effort, perhaps because the leaders are waiting for the outcome of political negotiations going on between the High Commissariat, the French Government and the Xuan-Bao Dai elements. If these should break down, the resistance will be greatly strengthened by the adhesion of many now neutral or pro-French elements. If the negotiations are successful, the resistance army is sure to be a dominant factor in any form of Vietnamese self-government..." 58/

An extensive State Department intelligence report on "Political Alignments of Vietnamese Nationalists" 59/ of October, 1949, highlighted the importance of the Viet Minh:

"The Viet Minh. The Vietnam Independence League (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi), or Viet Minh, is the most influential political organization within the Vietnam Government [DRV]. It is the only political group whose organization extends down to the smallest villages. Its members include both individuals and parties, i.e., the Vietnam Socialist Party, the Vietnam Democratic Party, etc. As a League, it groups together a wide coalition of political personalities from moderate nationalists to doctrinaire communists. It most closely resembles the Chinese Kuomintang

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during the period 1924-26, when the communists and Chang Kai-shek collaborated in China's nationalist movement.

"The Viet Minh Executive Committee, or Tongbo, is the real repository of power in Vietnam territory. The influential government paper, National Salvation (Cuu Quoc), is the organ of the Tongbo and reflects the line of the government. A majority of the Tongbo members are believed to be former members of the dissolved Indochinese Communist Party. Within the mass nationalist movement, the communists are undoubtedly the most cohesive political factor. President Ho Chi Minh is a communist but has great prestige as a nationalist leader among the mass of Vietnamese. He is the outstanding political personality in Indochina. He plays down his past communist connections, emphasizes the nationalistic aspects of his program, and is popularly considered a man above parties.

"The Viet Minh exercises its control over the mass nationalist movement through a variety of 'national welfare' organizations of women, youth, peasants, soldiers, etc., which in their totality embrace most of the population of Vietnam. Hoang Quoc Viet, the General Secretary of the Viet Minh, claims that the organization has a total membership of nine million..."

The collapse of the Chinese nationalists in 1949 reverberated within the Vietnamese nationalist movements. The Kuomintang-oriented parties -- principally the VNQDD -- were severely discredited, and the exile movements in China dispersed. The DRV began to shift into the communist bloc in search of material support, and there was a concomitant further leftward movement within the Viet Minh. By 1951, the Communist Party was "legalized." The Lao Dong Party (Dang Lao Dong Viet Nam, or Vietnamese Workers' Party) thereafter became the dominant political power within the DRV. The Lao Dong Party was expressly Marxist-Leninist, and proudly claimed an unbroken lineage to the Indochinese Communist Party founded by Ho Chi Minh, including leadership of all the major nationalist "front" movements through 1951. Vo Nguyen Giap explained in 1961 that:

"The Vietnamese people's war of liberation was victorious because we had a wide and firm National United Front...organized and led by the Party of the working class: the Indochinese Communist Party, now the Viet Nam Workers' [Lao Dong] Party. In the light of the principles of Marxism-Leninism...the Party found a correct solution to the problems..." 60/

The Lao Dong Party official history has credited communist machination for the key developments in Vietnamese history through 1951:

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"The policy of founding the Indochinese democratic front between 1936 and 1939, the Viet Minh front between 1941 and 1951, and the Lien Viet front [1946-1951]; the decision of signing the 6 March 1946...preliminary accord [Ho's accommodation with France]... -- all these are typical examples of the clever application of the...instruction of Lenin." 61/

In 1951, Ho Chi Minh himself set forth a Leninist account of the origins of the Viet Minh and its role in the forming of the DRV and the war against France. In February, 1951, addressing the Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (Lao Dong), Ho explained his political maneuvers over the previous decades. Reviewing the history of the Russian and Chinese revolutions, he pointed out that Vietnam, too, had felt the stirrings of change, and the Vietnamese working class "...began to struggle and needed a vanguard team, a general staff to lead it. On January 6, 1930, our Party came into being..." He described how the Party had brought about the formation of the Viet Minh, and the foundation of the DRV. Then in 1945 the French colonialists reappeared in South Vietnam and Chinese-sponsored reactionary government seemed in prospect in North Vietnam:

"In the face of that grave and pressing situation, our Party did everything possible to keep itself in existence, to work and develop to give discreet and more effective leadership in order to have the time gradually to consolidate the forces of the People's power and to strengthen the National United Front.

"At that time, the Party could not hesitate: Hesitation meant failure. The Party had to make quick decisions and to take measures -- painful ones -- to save the situation. The greatest worry was about the Party's proclamation of dissolution. But in reality it went underground. And though underground, the Party continued to lead the administration and the people...

"Mention should be made of the [agreements with the French in 1946] because they were considered as ultrarightist and caused much grumbling. But in the opinion of our comrades and compatriots in the South, they were correct. Indeed they were, because our comrades and compatriots cleverly availed themselves of the opportunity to build up and develop their forces.

"Lenin said that even if a compromise with bandits was advantageous to the revolution, he would do it..." 62/

Ho then went on to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the resistance against the French, to describe the world situation in terms of a monolithic bloc of "democratic" nations against which was arrayed the United States and other reactionary powers, and to depict, as part of that larger clash,

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Vietnam's war in common with Laotians and Cambodians against the French and the United States. He called for "a legal party appropriate to the situation in the world and at home in order to lead our people's struggle to victory. This party is the Vietnam Worker's Party [Lao Dong]. As regards its composition...it will admit the most enthusiastic and most enlightened workers, peasants, and intellectuals. As regards theory, it adheres to Marxism-Leninism. As regards discipline, it has an iron discipline..."

Thus ended the Viet Minh as a non-communist nationalist coalition.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled (New York: Praeger, 1967, 2 vols.), I, 172-174.
2. Ibid.
3. Data on Vietnamese political parties is drawn principally from U.S. Department of State, Political Alignments of Vietnamese Nationalists (Office of Intelligence Research, Report No. 3708, October 1, 1949), passim.
4. Ibid., 138 ff.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 31-32.
7. Ibid., 36
8. Ibid., 138 ff.
9. Bernard B. Fall, ed., Ho Chi Minh on Revolution (New York: Praeger, 1967), 130-131.
10. The Hitler-Stalin Pact was signed in August, 1939. On 26 September 1939, France outlawed the Communist Party. Ibid., and Buttinger, op. cit., I, 224-226.
11. Ibid., 236-250.
12. Ibid., 242-244.
13. U.S. Dept of State, Political Alignments..., op. cit., 58.
14. Fall, ed., Ho Chi Minh on Revolution, op. cit., 133-134
15. George Modelski, "The Viet Minh Complex," in Cyril E. Black and Thomas P. Thorton, eds., Communism and Revolution (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 189-190. Cf. Bernard B. Fall, The Two Viet-Nams (New York: Praeger, 2nd Edition, 1963), 62.
16. Vo Nguyen Giap, People's War, People's Army (Hanoi, 1961), 75, quoted in ibid.
17. U.S. Dept of State, Political Alignments..., op. cit., 60.
18. Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, op. cit., 62-63.

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19. U.S. Dept of State, Political Alignments..., op. cit., 54-55.
20. Ibid.
21. I. Milton Sacks, "Marxism in Vietnam," in Frank N. Trager, ed., Marxism in Southeast Asia (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), 150.
22. Modelski, loc. cit., paraphrasing the official Vietnamese Communist Party history, Thirty Years of Struggle of the Party.
23. Bert Cooper, John Killigrew, Norman La Charité, Case Studies in Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare: Vietnam 1941-1954 (Washington: Special Operations Research Office, The American University, 1964), 87-88.
24. Modelski, op. cit., 189, quoting Thirty Years...
25. Cooper, et al., op. cit., 88-89. French sources estimated 50,000 Viet Minh in Tonkin as of August, 1944; U.S. Dept of State, Political Alignments..., op. cit., 61.
26. Cooper, et al., loc. cit.
27. Some French authors have been prone to credit the U.S. for Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh; e.g., Lucien Bodard, The Quicksand War (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), 221-222. The ranking American official in northern Vietnam in 1945, Brigadier General Philip E. Gallagher, has attested: "...throughout the months before the Japanese capitulation, O.S.S. officers and men operated behind Japanese lines, to arm, lead and train native guerrillas who were organized by the Viet Minh." (A situation report, undated, in the Gallagher Papers, quoted in Bert Cooper, John Killigrew, and Norman La Charité, Case Studies in Insurgency and Revolutionary Warfare: Vietnam 1941-1954 /Washington, D. C.: Special Operations Research Office, The American University, 1964/, 107.) But O.S.S. assistance to the Viet Minh-led guerrillas was quite limited, although it gave the Viet Minh the opportunity to proclaim that they were part of the Allied effort against the Japanese. Cf., Fall, Le Viet-Minh: La République Démocratique du Viet-Nam /Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1960/, 34. Fall, Two Viet-Nams, op. cit., 66-71, details the case for the postwar American aid and comfort to the Viet Minh, which adds up to a more substantial charge -- but similarly is without foundation in the record.
28. Quoted in ibid., 63.
29. U.S. Dept of State, Political Alignments..., op. cit., 66-67, quoting The Factual Record of the August Revolution (Hanoi, September, 1946).
30. Fall, ed., Ho Chi Minh on Revolution, op. cit., 141-142.
31. Buttinger, op. cit., I, 435-436.

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32. U.S. Dept of State, Political Alignments..., op. cit., 146-147.
33. Hammer, op. cit., 104.
34. Marvin E. Gettleman, ed., Viet Nam (New York: Fawcett, 1965), 57-59.
35. Buttinger, op. cit., I, 325-327.
36. Ibid., 328-331; Hammer, op. cit., 115-116.
37. Hammer, op. cit., 117, quoting Supreme Allied Command, Southeast Asia, Commission No. 1, Saigon, Political History of French Indochina South of 16°, 13 September - 11 October 1945.
38. U.S. Dept of State, Political Alignments..., op. cit., 73-74.
39. Hammer, op. cit., 117
40. Hammer, op. cit., 120.
41. Buttinger, op. cit., I, 337
42. Buttinger, op. cit., 351-354.
43. Ibid.
44. Buttinger, op. cit., 356, 634.
45. Ibid; Sacks, op. cit., 157; Fall, ed., Ho on Revolution, op. cit., 146.
46. Sacks, op. cit., 158.
47. Ibid.
48. U.S. Dept of State, Political Alignments..., 77-78.
49. Hammer, op. cit., 150.
50. Buttinger, op. cit., 371-372.
51. Ibid., 399-401; U.S. Dept of State, Political Alignments..., op. cit., 78; George A. Carver, Jr., "The Faceless Viet Cong," Foreign Affairs (Vol. 44, No. 3, April, 1966), 350.
52. Buttinger, op. cit., I, 402-403.
53. U.S. Dept of State, Political Alignments..., op. cit., 81-82.
54. Fall, Two Viet-Nams, op. cit., 131.
55. Hammer, op. cit., 179.

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56. Pham Van Dong (presently Premier, then Vice President) announced in 1950 that promulgation of the 1946 Constitution had been postponed "because several of its provisions require for their application the cessation of the state of war," and in 1951, after Ho had openly aligned with the Sino-Soviet powers, the Viet Minh radio explained that "a gang of traitors" had been evolved in its formulation, and hence a "progressive character was lacking." During the "Rectification of Errors," in late 1956, after the peasant uprisings of that year, the DRV set up a constitutional reform committee. In December, 1958, Ho invited the public to submit recommendations on a new draft basic law, and the second Constitution was promulgated in 1960.

Ibid., 178-181; U.S. Dept of the Army, Pamphlet 550-40, U.S. Army Area Handbook for Vietnam (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1962), 235.

57. Gettlemen, ed., op. cit., 88-89.
58. American Consulate General, Saigon, Despatch 34, February 12, 1949.
59. Op. cit., 90-91.
60. Vo Nguyen Giap, People's War, People's Army (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 35, also 67-108; Cf., "Let Us Step Up The Theory-Formulating Task of The Party," Hoc Tap (No. 9, September 1966), in Joint Publications Research Service, "Translations from Hoc Tap" (No. 38,660, November 16, 1966), 2.
61. Ibid.
62. Fall, Ho on Revolution, op. cit., 206 ff.

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VIET  
GOVERNMENTS  
1945 - 1949

C. Ho Chi Minh :  
Asian Tito?

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I. C.

HO CHI MINH: ASIAN TITO?

SUMMARY

Among the more cogent critiques of U.S. policy toward Vietnam is the contention that the U.S. failed to recognize in Ho Chi Minh a potential Asian "Tito." This view holds that Ho has always been more concerned with Vietnam's independence and sovereign viability than with following the interests and dictates of Moscow and Peking. With U.S. support, the argument runs, Ho would have adopted some form of neutrality in the East-West conflict and maintained the DRV as a natural and durable bulwark against Chinese expansion southward. Thus, were it not for "U.S. communist blinders," Ho would have served the larger purposes of American policy in Asia. Though the focus of inquiry in this study is the period immediately following World War II, when it would have been relatively easy to support an anti-Japanese, anti-colonial Ho, it is often argued that the U.S. neglected another opportunity after the Geneva Conference of 1954 -- and indeed, that U.S. acceptance of Ho, and a communist dominated Vietnam, may be the only path to peace in Southeast Asia today. The historical (1945-1954) argument has a persuasive ring. In the light of the present costs and repercussions of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, any prior way out can seem attractive. It is possible, however, that a dynamic and unified communist Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh could have been vigorously expansionist, thus causing unanticipated difficult problems in some ways comparable to current ones.

Many authors have advanced one version or another of the "Tito" hypothesis. Some develop the principal thesis that a different U.S. policy could have moved Ho to non-alignment and opposition to Peking; others stress the corollary that Ho was forced into dependence upon Peking and Moscow by American opposition or indifference. Whether Ho was a nationalist or a communist is not at issue; all of the authors quoted seem to accept that Ho was a communist, and that a communist Vietnam would probably have eventuated under his leadership. Rather, their arguments center on what they perceive to be Ho's willingness to subordinate communist goals, forms, and international discipline to attaining Vietnam's independence and unity. A few openly favor a communist Vietnam on the grounds that only a national communism led by Ho would be sufficiently strong to survive adjacent to China. They stress Ho's attempts in 1945 and 1946 to obtain Western backing, and point out that antipathy to China is a pillar of Viet nationalism. Many concede that the Tito analogy is not wholly appropriate. Unlike Tito, Ho came to power after the war without the aid of another communist state. More basically, there was no analogy to be made until late 1948, when the experiment with Tito seemed like it would work.



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Nonetheless, these authors point out that if the U.S. found it advantageous to set aside its repugnance to Tito's communism in the interest of stemming Russian expansion in Europe, it should have been willing to accommodate Ho Chi Minh's communism for similar ends in Asia. This critique generally ends with the accusation that the U.S. purpose in Southeast Asia is simply and solely to stop communism. (Tab 1)

An examination of Ho Chi Minh's political development through 1950 may provide a basis to narrow the range of speculation concerning Ho and U.S. policy. From such a review, it is evident that the man who in 1945 became President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was a mature, extraordinarily dedicated revolutionary who had undergone severe hardships serving the cause of Vietnam's freedom from France. Fifty-five years of age in 1945, he had been a communist for twenty-five years -- one of the founding members of the French Communist Party -- and a Comintern agent in Asia for fifteen years before World War II. He was originally of Nghe-An, a province traditionally a spawning ground of revolutionists; of a father imprisoned by the French for nationalist activism; and of a Hue school known for radical nationalism among its students. Exiled from Vietnam from 1910 to 1940, imprisoned in Hong Kong and in China, deprived of home, family, fame, fortune and companionship outside the Comintern's conspiratorial circles, he apparently devoted himself selflessly all those years to revolution in Vietnam. Ruth Fischer, a well-known German former communist who knew Ho during this period, has written, "It was Ho Chi Minh's nationalism which impressed us European Communists born and bred in a rather grey kind of abstract internationalism."

For Ho, now back in Asia, World War II opened new avenues to the attainment of his life-long goals. France discredited itself in Vietnam through Vichy's collaboration with the Japanese, and then in 1945 was toppled from power altogether by Japanese arms. In the meantime, Ho had built the Viet Minh into the only Vietnam-wide political organization capable of effective resistance to either the Japanese or the French. Ho was the only Vietnamese wartime leader with a national following, and he assured himself wider fealty among the Vietnamese people when in August-September, 1945, he overthrew the Japanese, obtained the abdication of Bao Dai, established the DRV, and staged receptions for incoming allied occupation forces -- in which the DRV acted as the incumbent Vietnamese government. For a few weeks in September 1945, Vietnam was -- for the first and only time in its modern history -- free of foreign domination, and united from north to south under Ho Chi Minh.

Ho became the focus of the nationalist fervor evoked by these and subsequent events. Leaders of the rival Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNQDD) and the Revolutionary League (Dong Minh Hoi), although admitted to the DRV government, commanded no grass-roots organizations, and since they were closely associated with the Chinese Nationalists, shared in

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full measure in the anti-Chinese odium among the people of North Vietnam. In South Vietnam, French intrigue, and Vietnamese disunity precluded the emergence of a competitor to Ho. When France resorted to force to restore its control over Vietnam, Ho again became the head of Viet resistance, and the Viet Minh became the primary nationalist protagonists. Hence, Ho Chi Minh, both on his own merits and out of lack of competition, became the personification of Vietnamese nationalism.

Ho, nonetheless, found himself, his movement, and his government under intense pressure. From within the nation, the Chinese-backed Viet parties attacked communist domination of his government. For the sake of national unity, Ho dissolved the Communist Party, avoided communist cant, announced general elections, and assured the contending factions representation in the government well out of proportion to their popular support. External pressures from France and from China proved more difficult. The French capitalized on the relative weakness of the Viet Minh in South Vietnam, and the dissension among the Vietnamese there to overthrow the DRV government in Saigon, and to force the Viet Minh to resort to guerrilla warfare. In famine-wracked North Vietnam, Chinese hordes under booty-minded warlords descended on the DRV, supplanting its local government with committees of their own sponsoring and systematically looting. Ho vainly sought aid abroad; not even the Soviet Union proved helpful. Ho eventually (March, 1946) negotiated with the French, accepting a French military presence in North Vietnam for a period of five years in return for vague French assurances to the DRV as a "Free State within the French Union." When Ho was attacked for this by the pro-Chinese elements within the DRV, he declared:

"You fools! Don't you realize what it means if the Chinese stay? Don't you remember your history? The last time the Chinese came, they stayed one thousand years!

"The French are foreigners. They are weak. Colonialism is dying out. Nothing will be able to withstand world pressure for independence. They may stay for a while, but they will have to go because the white man is finished in Asia. But if the Chinese stay now, they will never leave.

"As for me, I prefer to smell French shit for five years, rather than Chinese shit for the rest of my life."

The unresolved historic problem, of course, is to what extent Ho's nationalist goals over-rode his communist convictions in these maneuvers. Ho seemed to place the former above the latter not solely as a matter of dissemblance, as he might have done in the dissolution of the Party and the simultaneous formation of a "Marxist Association," but possibly as a result of doubts about communism as a political form suitable for Vietnam. Bao Dai is reputed to have said that: "I saw Ho Chi Minh suffer. He was fighting a battle within himself. Ho had his own struggle. He realized communism was not best for his country, but it was

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too late. Ultimately, he could not overcome his allegiance to communism." During negotiations for a modus vivendi with the French in Paris in autumn, 1946, Ho appealed to the French to "save him from the extremists" within the Viet Minh by some meaningful concession to Vietnamese independence, and he told the U.S. Ambassador that he was not a communist. He is reputed to have asserted at that time that Vietnam was not ready for communism, and described himself as a Marxist. In reply to a journalist's inquiry, Ho claimed that he could remain neutral, "like Switzerland" in the developing world power struggle between communism and the West. But these and other such statements could have come either from a proper Leninist or a dedicated nationalist. Ho's statements and actions after 1949, and his eventual close alignment with the Sino-Soviet Bloc, support the Leninist construction. But, then, U.S. insistence on Ho's being a doctrinaire communist may have been a self-fulfilling prophesy. (Tab 2)

There remains, however, the matter of Ho's direct appeals for U.S. intervention in Vietnam, at which even a Leninist might have scrupled. These occurred (late 1945, early 1946) just after France has reasserted itself militarily in South Vietnam, while Chinese Nationalist warlords were ensconced in Hanoi, and before the 6 March 1946 Accord with France. Desperately, Ho turned to the United States, among other powers, asking for "immediate interference" in Vietnam.

There were, at least, eight communications from Ho to the President of the United States, or to the Secretary of State, from October, 1945, to February, 1946. Ho had conveyed earlier, in August and September, 1945, via O.S.S. channels, proposals that Vietnam be accorded "the same status as the Philippines," for an undetermined period of tutelage preliminary to independence. With the outbreak of hostilities in South Vietnam, September-October 1945, he added formal requests for U.S. and U.N. intervention against French aggression, citing the Atlantic Charter, the U.N. Charter, and a foreign policy address of President Truman in October, 1945, endorsing national self-determination. Ho's last direct communication with the U.S. was in September, 1946, when he visited the U.S. Ambassador in Paris to ask vaguely for U.S. assistance in obtaining independence for Vietnam within the French Union.

There is no record of U.S. reply to any of Ho's appeals for aid. Extant instructions to a U.S. diplomat in contact with Ho in December, 1946, reveal U.S. preoccupation with his known communist background, and apprehension that he might establish a "communist-dominated, Moscow-oriented state." Two months later, when the Franco-Viet Minh war in North Vietnam was underway, Secretary of State Marshall emphasized that "we do not lose sight [of the] fact that Ho Chi Minh has direct Communist connections and it should be obvious that we are not interested in seeing colonial empire administrations supplanted by philosophy and political organizations emanating from and controlled by the Kremlin."

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In May, 1949, Secretary of State Acheson admitted that as a "theoretical possibility" the establishment of a "National Communist state on pattern Yugoslavia in any area beyond reach [of the] Soviet Army," but pointed out that:

"Question whether Ho as much nationalist as Commie is irrelevant. All Stalinists in colonial areas are nationalists. With achievement national aims (i.e., independence) their objective necessarily becomes subordination state to Commie purposes and ruthless extermination not only opposition groups but all elements suspected even slightest deviation...."

When, in early, 1950, Ho's DRV lay within reach of Mao's Chinese Army, and Ho had openly embraced communism, Secretary Acheson declared that bloc recognition of the DRV "should remove any illusion as to the nationalist character of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Vietnam."

But Ho's behavior in 1949-1950, however convincingly it endorsed U.S. policy at that juncture, does not necessarily explain away his earlier eagerness for U.S. and U.N. intervention in Vietnam, nor otherwise gainsay the "Tito" hypothesis as applied to the 1945-1947 period. Of that period, it can be said that the U.S. offered Ho only narrow options. He received no replies to his appeals. After 1946, not only were Ho's direct communications with the U.S. cut, but also the signals he received from the U.S. were hardly encouraging. By the time the Indochina war began in earnest in late 1946, U.S. military equipment had already been used by French forces against the Vietnamese, and the U.S. had arranged credit for France to purchase \$160 million worth of vehicles and miscellaneous industrial equipment for use in Indochina. Secretary of State George C. Marshall's public comment on the outbreak of war in January, 1947, was limited to a hope that "a pacific basis for adjustment of the difficulties could be found," and within six months the Marshall Plan threw even greater U.S. resources behind France.

The simple truth seems to be that the U.S. knew little of what was transpiring inside Vietnam, and certainly cared less about Vietnam than about France. Knowing little and caring less meant that real problems and variety of choices were perceived but dimly. For example, the U.S. could have asked itself -- "Did we really have to support France in Southeast Asia in order to support a non-communist France internally and in Europe?" Another question we could have asked ourselves was -- "If the U.S. choice in Vietnam really came down to either French colonialism or Ho Chi Minh, should Ho automatically be excluded?" Again, "If the U.S. choice was to be France, did France have any real chance of succeeding, and if so, at what cost?"

Even before World War II was over, Washington had placed the decision on Ho's fate in the hands of France. It can be argued, nonetheless,

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that the U.S. could have insisted that Paris buy Ho and provide Indochinese independence without endangering the more basic relationship between the U.S. and France in Europe. Just as the U.S. came to recognize the prime importance of Europe over any policy it pursued elsewhere, so the French government would have soon realized (if it had not already done so) that nothing should be done to impair seriously U.S. acceptance of common interests in European recovery and collective security. Moreover, it was not as if there were not sizeable segments of the French community which would not have supported graceful U.S. attempts to extricate France from Indochina. It may well be, however, that the "Tito hypothesis" assumes a compliance from France of which France was demonstrably incapable. No French government is likely to have survived a genuinely liberal policy toward Ho in 1945 or 1946; even French communists then favored redemption of control in Indochina. From '46 on, however, bloodshed hardened policy in France. As before, the Ho alternative was never seriously contemplated.

French representations to the contrary notwithstanding, Ho Chi Minh possessed real political strength among the people of Vietnam. While calling Ho another George Washington may be stretching the point, there is no doubt about his being the only popularly-recognized war-time leader of the Vietnamese resistance, and the head of the strongest and only Vietnam-wide political movement. There can be no doubt either that in a test by ballot only Ho's Viet Minh could have delivered votes at the hamlet level. Washington and Paris, however, did not focus on the fact of Ho's strength, only on the consequences of his rule. Paris viewed Ho as a threat to its regaining French economic, cultural and political prerogatives in Indochina. The U.S., wary of Ho's known communist background, was apprehensive that Ho would lead Vietnam into the Soviet, and later Chinese, orbit. President Eisenhower's later remark about Ho's winning a free election in Vietnam with an 80% vote shone through the darkness of our vision about Vietnam; but U.S. policy remained unilluminated.

In the last speculation, U.S. support for Ho Chi Minh would have involved perspicacity and risk. As clear as national or independent or neutral communism may seem today, it was a blurred vision in 1945-1948. Even with the benefit of seeing Tito successfully assert his independence, it would have been hard for Washington to make the leap from there to an analogy in Asia. Recourse to "national communism" in Vietnam as an eventual bulwark against China, indeed, would have called for a perspicacity unique in U.S. history. The risk was there, too. The reality of Ho's strength in Vietnam could have worked seriously against U.S. interests as well as against Chinese Communist interests. Ho's well-known leadership and drive, the iron discipline and effectiveness of the Viet Minh, the demonstrated fighting capability of his armies, a dynamic Vietnamese people under Ho's control, could have produced a dangerous period of Vietnamese expansionism. Laos and Cambodia would have been easy pickings for such a Vietnam. Ho, in fact, always

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considered his leadership to extend to Indochina as a whole, and his party was originally called the Indochinese Communist Party. Thailand, Malaya, Singapore, and even Indonesia, could have been next. It could have been the "domino theory" with Ho instead of Mao. And, it could have been the dominoes with Mao. This may seem implausible, but it is only slightly less of a bad dream than what has happened to Vietnam since. The path of prudence rather than the path of risk seemed the wiser choice. (Tab 3)

I.C.

DISCUSSION

Tab 1 - Versions of the "Asian Tito" Hypothesis

Tab 2 - A Political Biography of Ho Chi Minh, 1890-1950

Tab 3 - Ho Chi Minh's Communications With the U.S., 1945-1946

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I. C. 1. VERSIONS OF THE "ASIAN TITO" HYPOTHESIS

Following are extracts from authors who have advanced arguments that Ho Chi Minh, with the stimulus of U.S. support, might have adopted a non-aligned or, at least, counter-Peking foreign policy. The corollary contention is that Ho was forced to accept dependency on Moscow and Peking by American opposition or indifference.

Generalizations

(1) None argue that Ho was not a communist or that a communist Vietnam would not have eventuated under Ho's leadership.

(2) Rather, they point out that Ho demonstrated willingness to subordinate communist goals and forms to attaining nationalist objectives. They accept a communist Vietnam, indeed even favor it, on the grounds that only a national communism led by Ho would be sufficiently strong to maintain independence of the Chinese.

(3) They stress the historic Vietnamese antipathy to the Chinese as a pillar of Viet nationalism, and point to Ho's attempts in 1945 and 1946 to obtain Western backing.

(4) No really close parallel can be drawn between the origins of Ho Chi Minh and Tito, since unlike Tito, Ho fought his way to power in virtual isolation, without the intervention of an external communist power. However, it can be accurately said that U.S. policies in Europe have generally been directed at widening the split between Tito and Moscow, while in Asia, our policy has tended to force Ho into closer relations with Peking and Hanoi.

(5) The "Tito" issue raises pointedly the question of whether U.S. strategy in Asia is anti-communist or anti-Chinese. Since to block Soviet expansion in Europe the U.S. set aside its repugnance to Tito's communism, it is argued, the U.S. should similarly renounce its opposition to Ho to serve its larger strategic interests in Asia.

Synopses

Isaacs, Harold; No Peace for Asia.

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In 1947, Ho was motivated by a deep nationalism aimed principally at independence, and was sorely disenchanted with communism, having received little or no help or encouragement from foreign parties. Literally the U.S. was the only power to whom Viet nationalists could turn with hope, but even then the U.S. actions in support of France stood in contrast to its principled pronouncements in favor of self-determination and against colonialism..... C-11



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	<u>Page</u>
Shaplen, Robert; <u>The Lost Revolution</u> . There was a strong possibility in 1945 and 1946 that French and American policy could have "Titofied" Ho Chi Minh, and that Vietnam--albeit under left-wing leadership--might have been a bulwark against Communist Chinese expansion. But the possibility of Vietnam's now becoming a Yugoslavia is remote.....	C-14
Zinn, Howard; <u>Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal</u> . A Communist government in Vietnam is the best avenue for improving the lot of the Vietnamese; Ho Chi Minh's dictatorship would be preferable to any elitist dictatorship in South Vietnam. If the U.S. wants to contain China, the U.S. should recognize that Ho Chi Minh would strive to maintain his independence, and thus would accomplish what our military force cannot.....	C-18
Bator, Victor; <u>Vietnam: A Diplomatic Tragedy</u> . 1954: China is most important problem facing Vietnam. Double-satellite relationship affords the DRV potential independence. Diem's fanaticism obtruded.....	C-20
Sacks, Milton; "Marxism in Southeast Asia." 1946-1949: Ho attempted to preserve neutrality, although this conflicted with his desire for international support and recognition for DRV.....	C-21
Buttinger, Joseph; <u>Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled</u> . 1946-1947: Ho realized that he could not rally Vietnamese to his struggle for independence with the banner of communism. Hence, the facade of democracy to lend righteousness to the forceful communist campaign to align the people with the Viet Minh and the DRV.....	C-23
Kennedy, John F., quoted in Schlesinger, Arthur M., ed., <u>A Thousand Days</u> . 1951: U.S. has joined France in a desperate attempt to preserve empire. U.S. must not rely on arms alone to halt southward thrust of communism, but must harness nationalism..	C-24
Schlesinger, Arthur M.; <u>The Bitter Heritage</u> . The most effective bulwark against an aggressive communist state may well be national communism. A rational U.S. policy aimed at containing China could have recognized communist Vietnam in 1954, vice backing a shaky Saigon regime led by right-wing mandarins or generals.....	C-25
Fall, Bernard B.; <u>Viet-Nam Witness</u> . The Vietnamese Communists had to conduct their revolution without aid from abroad, even from French Communists.....	C-26

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- Eden, Anthony, Earl of Avon; Toward Peace in Indochina.  
The Ho-Peking relationship is not a close parallel to the Tito-Moscow one. Yet Ho has much to gain from neutrality, and much at risk in failing to maintain its Moscow links, or to open a way to American withdrawal.....C-27
- Fulbright, Senator J. William; The Arrogance of Power.  
Ho Chi Minh is the only truly national leader of the Vietnamese; he is also a communist. Vietnamese communism is perhaps the only potential bulwark against Chinese domination. Hence, the U.S. should try to come to terms....C-28
- Reischauer, Edwin O.; "What Choices Do We Have In Vietnam?"  
The U.S. could have taken a stand against colonialism in 1945, refused to support France in 1950, backed the Geneva settlement in 1954, and declined to increase its military commitment in 1961. Four Presidents rejected the alternative of furthering Ho Chi Minh's cause, but had any done so, the outcome would have been a highly nationalist Vietnam fiercely independent of China. Moreover, Ho's cordial World War II relations with the U.S. indicated a potential for a Tito-like U.S.-Vietnam relationship of no more baleful consequences for Southeast Asia than the present war-torn states. But a nationalist Vietnam would be far preferable, from the U.S. long-range viewpoint, to status quo.....C-29

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Excerpt from No Peace for Asia by Harold Isaacs, 1947, quoted in Viet Nam: History, Documents, and Opinions on a Major World Crisis, Marvin E. Gettleman, ed., 1965, pp. 49-50, 53-55.

Ho Chi Minh was born in the province of Vinh, in northern Annam. "The home of revolutionists," the Annamites call that place with its sparse hills and valleys, its thickly crowded population. From out of that mass grubbing in the soil to live has come a peculiarly large proportion of Indochina's greatest national leaders. As a boy of twelve, Ho began his revolutionary career as a courier, carrying messages from village to village for his conspiring elders. Today, at fifty-five, he likes to think of himself as a man who has cast aside parties and programs. He speaks not in class political terms but in nationalist terms. "My party is my country," he liked to say; "my program is independence." In long discussions we had of the problems of the Nationalist movement in general and in Indochina in particular, he would impatiently wave aside all misgivings. "Independence is the thing," he said. "What follows will follow. But independence must come first if there is to be anything to follow at all later on."

\* \* \*

Upon whom could [the Vietnamese now]...count? Certainly not now upon the Chinese. China was so immensely larger than the little Republic of Vietnam--and perhaps there would come a day when China would have realized her capacities and assumed her place as the leader of Asia. On that day Vietnam would profit, perhaps, from being China's neighbor. But China now was weak and assailed, rent by internal struggles and external pressures. It was ruled by the kind of men who were in northern Indochina now, sucking at the land like leeches. Because they held the French at arm's length, they were temporarily helpful. But that could not last. The Chinese were already negotiating their settlement with the French and would be interested only in gaining their own immediate ends. From those ends, Annamite nationalism had little enough to gain.

What of the Russians? Would they bring any strong political support to the Annamite cause? I met no Annamite who thought so; and I spoke to many Annamite Communists. The Annamite Communists, like all their fellow nationalists, suffered from a terrifying sense of their isolation. They were unusually frank and cynical about the Russians. Even the most orthodox among them, like shaggy-haired Dran Van Giau, the partisan organizer, granted that the Russians went in for "an excess of ideological compromise," and said he expected no help from that quarter, no matter how distant or verbal it might be. "The Russians are nationalists for Russia first and above all," another Annamite

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Communist said with some bitterness. "They would be interested in us only if we served some purpose of theirs. Right now, unfortunately, we do not seem to serve any such purpose."

"How about the French Communists?" I asked. He snorted with disgust. "The French Communists," he said, "are Frenchmen and colonialists first and Communists after. In principle they are for us, but in practice? Oho, that is quite another thing!" One of the top-ranking Annamite Communists spoke contemptuously of Thorez, who in a Paris speech has said he was in favor of the Annamites "finally arriving at their independence." He laughed sourly. "A fine rubber phrase, is it not? You can stretch it into any shape or any meaning. They are the dominant party in France now. And look what Frenchmen are doing now in Indochina."

"From the small handful of French Communists in Indochina, the Annamite comrades learned a remarkable lesson in their kind of politics. There were only twenty in the French Communist group in Saigon. "Of these only one," said my Annamite Communist companion, "only one solidarized with us. The rest stood aside." The French group prepared a document for the Indochinese Communist Party which bore the date of September 25--two days after the French had seized power in the city. I was able to read the document, but not to copy it, so the notes I made immediately afterward are not verbatim. But the substance was as follows: It advised the Annamite Communists to be sure, before they acted too rashly, that their struggle "meets the requirements of Soviet policy." It warned that any "premature adventures" in Annamite independence might "not be in line with Soviet perspectives." These perspectives might well include France as a firm ally of the USSR in Europe, in which case the Annamite independence movement would be an embarrassment. Therefore it urged upon the Annamite comrades a policy of "patience." It advised them in particular to wait upon the results of the French elections, coming up the following month, in October, when additional Communist strength might assure the Annamites a better settlement. In the meantime it baldly proposed that an emissary be sent not only to contact the French Communist Party but also the Russians "in order to acquaint yourselves with the perspectives of coming events."

This document displayed with remarkable and unusual bluntness the Communist Party's notion of the relation between a revolutionary movement and Soviet foreign policy. It apparently came as a shock to the Annamite Communists, who were thrown into considerable confusion by it. There was a sharp internal argument within the party which ended in a decision to dissolve the party entirely, to cease functioning within the Vietminh as a distinct unit but to work in it purely as individuals. In this way the party apparently figured on avoiding any responsibility at a time when its responsibility was the heaviest. I do not know what

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the internal development was in any detail, but I do know that the Annamite Communists I met were men bitten deeply with the bitterness of having been abandoned by their ideological comrades overseas. They had consequently taken refuge in a pure and simple nationalism. Ho Chi Minh was making no idle phrase when he said: "My party is my country." They were oppressed, in common with all the non-Communist Annamite nationalist leaders, by a fearful sense of loneliness. There seemed to be support for them against the French nowhere, none from the Chinese they could count on, none that could be anticipated from the Russians, none from the French Communists, who did gain enormous strength in those October elections without effecting any noticeable change in Indochinese affairs. What then of the United States?

Annamite nationalists spoke of the United States as men speak of a hope they know is forlorn but to which they desperately cling all the same. Could all the fine phrases of the Atlantic Charter, of the United Nations pact, of President Roosevelt and his successor, really have meant nothing at all? Nothing? All right, let us make allowances for expediency, for big-power politics, for all the shabby realities. Would not the United States still find it wiser for the sake of its position in the Far East to win support among the people rather than to cling to the rotten imperial system of the past? It seemed not. For the only indication the Annamites had of America's role in their struggle came in the form of lend-lease weapons and equipment being used against them by the French and British, and the stunning announcement of an American deal with France for the purchase of \$160,000,000 worth of vehicles and miscellaneous industrial equipment for the French in Indochina. To the Annamites this looked like American underwriting of the French reconquest. The Americans were democrats in words but no help in fact, just as the Russians were communists in words but no help in fact. "We apparently stand quite alone," said Ho Chi-minh simply. "We shall have to depend on ourselves."

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Excerpt from The Lost Revolution by Robert Shaplen

Chapter II - Ho Chi Minh - the Untried Gamble, pp. 27, 46-50

I have always shared the belief of many, if not most, observers who were in Indochina at the time that a serious mistake was made by both the French and the Americans, especially by the dominant French policymakers in Paris, in not dealing more realistically with Ho in 1945 and 1946, when there was a strong possibility that he might have been "Titofied" before Tito and Titoism were ever heard of; that the whole course of events might thereby have been altered and a great deal of bloodshed averted; and that today a unified Vietnam, even under some form of left-wing leadership, might have been the bulwark of a neutral bloc of Southeast Asian states seeking, above all, to avoid Chinese Communist domination. Some of the highest American officials have privately told me, in recent years, that they now believe the gamble with Ho should have been taken; in fact, a considerable number of them are again talking about Vietnam becoming a Southeast Asian Yugoslavia, a possibility that seems to me now rather remote.

\* \* \*

In Biarritz, where he first rested, in Paris and then at the conference in Fontainebleau, Ho enjoyed huge personal success. He charmed everyone, especially the press. He distributed roses to girl reporters, signed his name in blood for an American male correspondent. He was widely compared to Confucius, to the Buddha, to St. John the Baptist, to anyone's dotting grandfather, and it was noted that he was an ascetic, since, among other things, he refused to take a drink. Everywhere he went, whether to the opera, to a fancy reception, to a picnic, or to a press conference, he appeared in his simple, high-buttoned linen work suit. "As soon as one approaches this frail man, one shares the admiration of all men around him, over whom he towers with his serenity acquired from wide experience," wrote one reporter. Noting his "tormented face and his eyes of blue which burn with an inner light," another declared that he "hides a soul of steel behind a fragile body." His wit, his Oriental courtesy, his savoir-faire, his mixed profundity and playfulness in social intercourse, his open love for children, above all his seeming sincerity and simplicity, captured one and all.

Unfortunately, in point of accomplishment Ho's trip was far less successful. The fault, now generally admitted, was chiefly that of

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the French, who, while the conference went on, continued to violate its spirit by further fostering the idea of the separate south and central federation in Indochina....

When he and Sainteny finally flew up to Paris for the start of the talks, Sainteny described him as "pale, eyes brilliant, and tight-throated," and he quoted Ho as saying, when the plane was settling down, "Above all, don't leave me, whatever you do." As the conference dawdled in the shadow of defeat, by now the result of the activities of the Vietminh extremists in Hanoi as well as of the French maneuvers in Cochin China, Ho grew more and more restless. Sainteny agreed he ought to return to Hanoi as soon as possible. "What would I be able to do if I went home empty-handed?" Ho asked. "Don't let me leave this way," he begged Sainteny and Marius Moutet, the Socialist Minister of Overseas Territories. "Arm me against those who would seek to displace me. You will not regret it." It was a significant plea, as significant as what Ho said on another evening to Sainteny and Moutet, "If we have to fight, we will fight. You will kill ten of our men and we will kill one of yours, and in the end it will be you who will tire of it."

At midnight on September 14, 1946, the frail figure of Ho Chi Minh, in its military tunic, walked out of the Hotel Royal-Monceau in Paris (the Fontainebleau sessions had ended) and strolled to Moutet's house nearby. There Ho and Moutet signed a modus vivendi, which, while it underlined Vietnamese (and some French) concessions for safeguarding French rights in Indochina, only postponed agreement on basic political questions; it at least placed upon the French the responsibility for restoring order in Cochin China. This was nothing more than had been agreed to in the spring and been vitiated since, but Ho publicly called the modus vivendi "better than nothing." He murmured to a security officer who accompanied him back to the hotel early in the morning, however, "I have just signed my death warrant."

Despite the failure of his mission, Ho, in his true cosmopolitan fashion, had enjoyed his stay in Paris, a city he had always loved. Years before, standing on a bridge across the Seine, he had remarked to a Communist comrade, "What a wonderful city, what a wonderful scene!" When his friend had replied that Moscow was also beautiful, Ho had said, "Moscow is heroic, Paris is the joy of living." During the 1946 conference, Ho had revisited some of his former haunts and, mixing socially with several foreign correspondents, had talked freely about himself and his politics. "Everyone has the right to his own doctrine," he had said. "I studied and chose Marx. Jesus said two thousand years ago that one should love one's enemies. That dogma has not been realized. When will Marxism be realized? I cannot answer....To achieve a Communist society, big industrial and agricultural production is necessary....I do not know when that will be realized in Vietnam, where production is low. We are not yet in a position to meet the conditions."

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Ho's self-analysis, in relation to Indochina's development is a markedly honest one, in Marxist terms. From the outset, Marxism was far more than a blueprint for him. It was a logique, and as one of the keenest Indochina scholars, Paul Mus, has pointed out, it was acquired by Ho as a vital Western weapon, an arsenal in fact, with which, as an Asian, he could combat his French masters. Ho, as a Marxist, was quick to appreciate how his country was being robbed, kept in economic penury by a purposefully unimaginative colonial power. While the French took out rubber or rice or whatever else they wanted and sold it in the world market at a high profit, the Vietnamese lived under a system in which only human labor and not money, in any international sense, counted; goods were in effect bartered for subsistence. Such an economic condition became the fulcrum of Ho's anger and drove him way back, almost inevitably, to Marxism and thence to Communism. "Ho had to build on what every Asian must build per se," Mus says, "a Western logic to deal with us Europeans. Whether it be a profession such as the law or medicine or what have you, an Asian must find this logique or be lost. Ho found it first in Marxism and he became a Leninist, since Lenin was faced in Russia with the same problem of the vacuum at the village level. Ho was successful because he remained true to Leninism and Marxism. In this sense, straightforward according to his view, he belongs to a proper fraternity."

Along with Sainteny, Mus is one of those Frenchmen who admit that France and the Western world missed a proper opportunity with Ho in 1946. Mus himself, as a French negotiator, met Ho a year later, and he has the same queer fondness for him most men who knew him have retained. "I have no reason, as a Frenchman, to like Ho for what he has done," Mus told me long afterward, "but still I like him. I am not afraid to say so. I like him for his strong mind. Although he is a great actor--one cannot afford to be naive with him--he does not go back on his word. He believes in the truth as he sees it. But he is a Marxist, and that is where we part company." He quotes Ho as telling him, in 1947, "My only weapon is anger....I won't disarm my people until I trust you." Ho's willingness to deal with the French, Mus believes, was largely predicated on his need for French advice, above all for financial advisers. "Marxist doctrine calls for the proletarian state to use, at least temporarily, the accountancy of the bourgeois-capitalist countries," Mus says. Because of the inbred economy imposed by the Bank of Indochina, Ho knew that Vietnam could not stand on its own feet, either in terms of money or trade. He also knew he could not rely on the colonial French. His political approach was through metropolitan France. He wasn't convinced that this was his only chance, but he was determined to play the possibilities. He wavered between his affection and regard for France, which had given him his self in the Marxist image, and his new disillusion of 1946. "If we had supported



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him more strongly than," Mus added, "we might have won....We thought we could crush him if it came to war. We did not appreciate how hard he could fight. But we must not forget that he really wanted an agreement with France at the time of Fontainebleau because it would have served him. That part of his motivation afterward died, of course, but we should understand that it existed at the time and that he was truly disappointed."

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Excerpt from Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal, 1967, by Howard Zinn

Pages 101-102

The perspective of history suggests that a united Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh is preferable to the elitist dictatorship of the South, just as Maoist China with all its faults is preferable to the rule of Chiang, and Castro's Cuba to Batista's. We do not have pure choices in the present, although we should never surrender those values which can shape the future. Right now, for Vietnam, a Communist government is probably the best avenue available to that whole packet of human values which make up the common morality of mankind today; the preservation of human life, self-determination, economic security, the end of race and class oppression, and that freedom of speech and press which an educated population begins to demand.

In the debate on Vietnam, there has been little or no discussion on exactly what would be the evil consequences of a united Communist Vietnam. It has become an article of faith that what is good or bad in international relations is a matter of counting up the countries that are on the Communist side, and the number that are on our side. There is the black eye, and there is the feather in the cap. And the difference is worth a mountain of corpses.

We need to get accustomed to the idea that there will be more Communist countries in the world, and that this is not necessarily bad. The physical security of the United States is not diminished by that fact in itself; Communist nations in their international affairs behave very much like other nations (this is why they are so often disappointing to their sympathizers); some are friendly, some are hostile. Each is a unique resultant of Marxist theory and local conditions. The more there are, the greater diversity there will be among them. It is several years now since scholars in the field of Communist studies began taking note of "polycentrism," but American officials still often act as if there were one Communist center in the world.

One thing we should have learned by now is that Communist nations are as prone to the emotion of nationalism as other nations; they crave independence and resist domination by any other nation, whether capitalist or Communist. What this means is that a small but effective Communist nation which is neighbor to a large one can guard its independence far better than a non-Communist, semifeudal dictatorship. A Communist Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh can be expected to retain its independence as surely as Tito has maintained his.

The idea of "containment" has always been ambiguous: Is it our aim to contain China, or to contain Communism? And if it is both, then what do we do if the two aims turn out to be in conflict with one another?

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To base our entire Asian policy on "containing" China is to risk billions of dollars and thousands of lives on the idea that China plans to take over other countries by military expansion -- a hypothesis not supported either by her words or by the history of her behavior so far, and one that in the case of the Soviet Union turned out to be false. And to make the hypothesis doubly faulty, it assumes that even if China wanted to expand, she could.

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Excerpt from Vietnam: A Diplomatic Tragedy by Victor Bator, 1965

Pages 226-227

In spite of the dangerous geographic proximity of China and the earlier dependence of Ho Chi Minh on Chinese military support, there was, in 1954, some possibility that Ho Chi Minh's government might have been amenable to diplomatic contacts looking to real stabilization. He had in his government several non-Marxists who might have helped such an undertaking. Vietnam's millennial history is filled with intermittently successful attempts to free the country from Chinese domination. "The most important question facing both North and South Vietnam," wrote an anti-Diem and anti-Communist Vietnamese of high repute, "is how to safeguard the future of the whole Vietnamese nation now threatened by such number and such great dynamism (of the Chinese)."

North Vietnam's double-satellite relationship (to Moscow and Peking) potentially creates a limited measure of independence from both. The Vietnamese Communists turned to Russia and her European satellites for the help they needed after Geneva in order to recover from the devastations of a seven-year civil war. With this help North Vietnam may now be increasingly independent of China. Even if the rank and file of the leadership were impervious to the pride of independence, it is a safe assumption that Ho Chi Minh himself, now an "elder statesman" of the Communist world, is not unlike other national leaders: He most certainly does not enjoy being a mere puppet. He seems to have the talent and subtlety to maneuver between the Scylla and Charybdis of commitment to China and Russia. Thus, diplomacy directed at real neutralization of Vietnam, even if not fully approved by Peking, might have achieved some success in the years 1955-1960. Of course, to the irreconcilable fanatic, Diem, any contact with Ho Chi Minh would have been anathema. But American policy was not necessarily condemned to serve Mr. Diem's nervous system, especially since there was plenty of opposition to him among his own countrymen.

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Excerpt from "Marxism in Vietnam" by Milton Sacks, in Marxism in Southeast Asia, Frank N. Trager, ed., 1959.

Pages 163-164

During this same period (1946-1949), the Ho Chi Minh government carefully sought to maintain friendly relations with the Thai and Nationalist Chinese governments. In addition, a determined propaganda effort was made to enlist the sympathy of the other Southeast Asian states for the Vietnamese struggle. In the developing cold war situation that polarized international relations, the Viet Minh leadership publicly refused to take sides and announced a policy of neutrality. Even when the Soviet Union and the world Communist press affirmed that Ho Chi Minh was a Communist or stressed that the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam was part of the "world Democratic Front" fighting against "American imperialism," the Viet-Nam government itself maintained a discreet silence. The Vietnamese Communists did not feature the usual pro-Soviet, anti-American vituperative attacks so common to the world Communist movement. As late as March 1949, President Ho Chi Minh continued to denounce the charge of "communist domination" of the government he headed as "pure French imperialist propaganda."

This policy of denying links to Communism conflicted with the Ho Chi Minh government's practice of strengthening the ties between mass organizations in Viet-Nam and the agencies of international Communism. Supporters of the Viet Minh government claimed that this practice was the only way the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam was able to get some international recognition. The conflict was there nonetheless, and such participation in front organizations raised difficulties: for example, when representatives of the youth organizations in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam attended the regional meeting of the World Federation of Democratic Youth at Calcutta in February 1948. Since this meeting was used as a means of publicly emphasizing the new Communist strategy in Southeast Asia that led to Communist insurrections in Malaya, Burma and Indonesia, the Vietnamese representatives were placed in an ambiguous position. They could and did point with pride to the "liberation struggle" that they had been waging. Yet, at the same time, they did not repudiate the avowedly successful policy of coalition with the "national bourgeoisie" pursued in Viet-Nam. They simply avoided the issue posed by the new policy that stressed attacks on the "bourgeois nationalists," the need for Communist party leadership of liberation struggles, and the necessity of direct ties with the Soviet world camp.

This deviation from general Southeast Asian Communist policy during 1948-49 may be described as another demonstration of the tactical flexibility of Ho Chi Minh's leadership. The Viet Minh was already leading to a highly effective armed struggle against the French in Viet-Nam and enjoyed the support of many Vietnamese nationalists who believed the non-Communist declarations of the spokesmen for the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam. Moreover, its government had a measure of sympathy and

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support internationally from non-Communist, anticolonialist world opinion. To squander these assets simply to enunciate ideological statements commensurate with Communist-bloc pronouncements would have been a high price to pay at any time. Yet, the view may well be entertained that Ho Chi Minh and some other Viet Minh leaders wanted the greater measure of independence that nonalignment with either bloc would afford, and hoped perhaps to escape thereby the inevitable polarization of the nationalist movement in Viet-Nam with all its attendant negative consequences.

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Excerpts from Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled (Vol I: From Colonialism to the Viet Minh) by Joseph Buttinger, 1967

Pages 406-408

But no one knew better than Ho Chi Minh that the struggle for independence could not be conducted under the banner of Communism. The establishment of an open dictatorship of their party would only have brought about the collapse of the ingenious political edifice through which they dominated the entire nationalist movement. The more the regime evolved toward one-party rule, the greater became the need for democratic rhetoric and ritual, and for a splendid facade of democratic institutions. The constitution submitted to the Assembly was designed for this purpose. It was adopted, with 240 against 2 votes, on November 8 /1945/.

\* \* \*

If the lofty principles of this constitution had no influence on the political evolution of the Hanoi regime, the reason is not that the outbreak of the war several weeks later prevented the D.R.V.N. from realizing the promise contained in its name. The Communists determined the nature of the regime even more after the outbreak of the war than before, and as far as they were concerned, the purpose of the constitution was not to create the basis for a democratic regime: It was their contention, in Vietnam no less than in the "people's democracies" of Eastern Europe, that the regime they had set up was democratic, was in fact a "higher form of democracy" than existed in any Western state. Outsiders, and especially people who believe that Communist political theory is basically dishonest, find this hard to understand. But the democratic principles of the constitution were laid down not merely as a means to camouflage the progressive development of the regime toward a Communist-led one-party dictatorship. These freedoms were meant for the entire people, to be denied only to "reactionaries," "traitors," "collaborators," "troublemakers," and other "enemies of the people," in brief anyone whose political activities the Communists considered harmful to the national cause, the political and organizational custodian of which was the Viet Minh and later the Lien Viet.

Even before the armed conflict spread over the entire country, the Communists felt perfectly justified in demanding that their nationalist rivals exercise their political rights only in support of the Viet Minh regime. Opposition to the Viet Minh was synonymous with acting against the interests of the state. There is no denying that the Communists introduced radical democratic reforms such as Vietnam had never known before, and that they established almost every known type of democratic institution. But it is equally true that they had no compunction about imprisoning or even murdering people who tried to enjoy these reforms or use these institutions to oppose the Viet Minh.

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Excerpt from Arthur M. Schlesinger, A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1965, p. 321.

1951: "In Indochina," Kennedy said, on his return to Washington, "we have allied ourselves to the desperate effort of a French regime to hang on to the remnants of empire....To check the southern drive of communism makes sense but not only through reliance on the force of arms. The task is rather to build strong native non-communist sentiment within these areas and rely on that as a spearhead of defense rather than upon the legions of General de Lattre. To do this apart from and in defiance of innately nationalistic aims spells foredoomed failure." The trip gave Kennedy both a new sympathy for the problems of Asia and a new understanding of the power of nationalism in the underdeveloped world.



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Excerpt from The Bitter Heritage, 1967, by Arthur M. Schlesinger

Pages 75-76

...The two heaviest blows recently suffered by Peking -- the destruction of the Communist Party in Indonesia and the declaration of independence by North Korea -- took place without benefit of American patronage or rhetoric. Indeed, too overt American intervention may actually have the effect of smothering the forces of local nationalism or driving them to the other side and thereby ultimately weakening the containment of China.

In the unpredictable decades ahead, the most effective bulwark against an aggressive national communist state in some circumstances may well be national communism in surrounding states. A rational policy of containing China could have recognized that a communist Vietnam under Ho might be a better instrument of containment than a shaky Saigon regime led by right-wing mandarins or air force generals. Had Ho taken over all Vietnam in 1954, he might today be soliciting Soviet support to strengthen his resistance to Chinese pressure, and this situation, however appalling for the people of South Vietnam, would obviously be better for the United States than the one in which we are floundering today. And now, alas, it may be almost too late: the whole thrust of United States policy since 1954, and more than ever since the bombing of the north began, has been not to pry Peking and Hanoi apart but to drive them together.

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Excerpt from Viet-Nam Witness 1953-1966 by Bernard B. Fall

July 1965 - pages 119-120

It is vital to remember that, unlike any other successful communist movement, the Vietnamese party fought its way to ruling power in virtual isolation. In Eastern Europe, Soviet troops were always present in the countries where communist takeovers took place; in fact, they were an essential ingredient. In China, the turnover to the communists of vast stores of Japanese arms by the Soviet Forces in Manchuria was of vital importance to the CCPs military success, and the Russian military presence in North Korea ensured the creation of a "people's democracy" there. In Albania, Tito's partisans played the role of Soviet troops elsewhere. In the Viet-Nam of 1945, on the contrary, the D.R.V.N. had no such support from either the Soviets or even the Chinese Communists (then bottled-up in the hills of northwestern China); and connections with the French CP, then just emerging from four years of clandestinity, were probably nonexistent for the simple reason that the first postwar ships to go from France to Indochina only reached Saigon in late September 1945 -- and these were troop transports bringing the vanguard of the French Expeditionary Force. In other words, the Vietnamese Communists literally had to play their revolution alone and by ear.

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Excerpt from Toward Peace in Indochina, 1966, by Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon

Pages 22-24

If Peking is obsessed by its wrongful impression of American intentions, Hanoi's opinion may eventually prove less decided. Moscow's judgment has influence in North Vietnam which can at times balance Peking's. If China's support is the tougher and more resolutely proclaimed, a number of Hanoi's communist leaders are Moscow trained, including Ho Chi Minh himself. Moreover, historic instincts can be strong, however Left the leaders. The Vietnamese might not relish a fate which could relegate them to serve as China's southernmost imperial outpost, even for a time.

There are risks also for North Vietnam in the growing Sino-Soviet bitterness. Recently the Chinese Government have even ignored all anniversaries of friendship with their Vietnam campaign a cause of complaint against Russia, while dawdling Soviet supplies on their journey. That is not cozy for Hanoi, which has no wish to quarrel with either communist great power but could find the extreme Chinese demands increasingly prickly to live with.

The parallel which is sometimes drawn between Marshal Tito and Moscow and Ho Chi Minh and Peking is not, however, close. North Vietnam is at war and in no position to quarrel with its chief provider of arms and supplies. Even in less arduous conditions, China would still be the big neighbor, as well as the big brother, and difficult to defy, if such a thing could be even dreamed of. All the same there is more scope for eventual agreement with Hanoi than with Peking, despite the tragic trail of blood and suffering, or maybe because of it.

It is Vietnam, not China, which has had the losses in life and in wealth, from schools to communications. Some day, somehow this has to end. Moreover, even the North has much to gain from forming part of a girdle of neutral states, or at least from seeing such a girdle formed to the south and southwest of its territory. For this to be possible, Hanoi must accept two glimpses of reality, though they need never be publicly proclaimed. The first is that the United States cannot be beaten, the second is that while a United States military withdrawal might find its place in a phased timetable within an agreement, there is not a remote chance of even a partial American withdrawal unless North Vietnam plays its part, although a negative one, to make this possible.

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Excerpt from The Arrogance of Power, 1966, by Senator J. William Fulbright

Pages 111-114

At the heart of the Vietnam tragedy is the fact that the most powerful nationalist movement in that country is one which is also communist. Ho Chi Minh is not a mere agent of Communist China, much less of the "international communist conspiracy" that we used to hear so much about. He is a bona-fide nationalist revolutionary, the leader of his country's rebellion against French colonialism. He is also a communist, and that is the essential reason why since at least 1950 he has been regarded as an enemy by the United States.

\* \* \*

This outline, highly abbreviated though it is, illustrates a most important fact -- the merger of nationalism and communism in Vietnam under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. It is not meaningful to speak of the Viet Minh as more nationalist than communist or as more communist than nationalist; it is both. The merger is a misfortune from the viewpoint of American interests and preferences, but it is also a fact, a fact with which we can and should come to terms. Even today, after all that America has done to sustain the South Vietnamese government, there is only one politician whose name is known to peasants all over Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh.

It is important to be very clear about what is meant by "nationalism." It has been best described by Hans Kohn as a "state of mind" which regards the nation as "the ideal form of political organization and the nationality as the source of all creative cultural energy and of economic well being." Understood in this way, nationalism is not necessarily humane or democratic, socially constructive or responsive to individual needs. It is merely powerful -- powerful in a sense of being able to mobilize the loyalty and active support of vast numbers of ordinary people. When one describes Ho Chi Minh or the Viet Minh or the Viet Cong as "nationalist," it is not to be inferred that they are regarded as saints. Far from it: they have demonstrated again and again that they are fanatical and cruel, but they have also shown that they are patriots, that they have identified themselves with the nation and its mystique, with that "state of mind" which more than any other in our time inspires ordinary people to acts of loyalty, bravery, and self-sacrifice.

For our purposes, the significance of Ho Chi Minh's nationalism is that it is associated with what Bernard Fall has called "the 2,000-year-old distrust in Vietnam of everything Chinese." Vietnamese communism is therefore a potential bulwark -- perhaps the only potential bulwark -- against Chinese domination of Vietnam. It is for this reason that I believe that we should try, if it is not yet too late, to come to terms with North Vietnam and the Viet Cong.

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Excerpt from "What Choices Do We Have in Vietnam?" by Edwin O. Reischauer

Look, September 19, 1967, page 27

The obvious alternative was to allow Ho and his Communist-dominated Vietminh to take over the whole of Vietnam. This would have happened early if the United States had made quite clear in 1945 that it did not approve of the revival of colonialism in Asia and would give it no support. It would still have happened if we had not given massive aid to the French war effort after 1949. It would have happened if we had been willing in 1954 to support the Geneva agreements and had not tried to build up a permanent regime under Diem in South Vietnam. It would have happened if we had not steadily increased our military commitments to South Vietnam between 1960 and 1963. It would have happened if we had decided against massive participation in the war in the winter of 1964-'65. Thus, under each of our last four Presidents, decisions were clearly made, even if not fully thought out, to reject this one obvious alternative.

What would have happened if, at any of these moments of decision, we had chosen the alternative? If we had clearly favored Vietnamese nationalism over French colonialism in 1945, it seems obvious that Ho, in short order, would have established effective control over the whole of Vietnam. He probably would have set up the same sort of dictatorial, oppressive, Communist rule over all Vietnam that he actually did over the North. He would probably have encountered much the same sort of problems he did in the North, and the economic progress of Vietnam would have been slow, though, of course, not as slow as in a war-torn land.

The society and government of this unified Vietnam would probably not have been something we would have approved of, but we have not found much we could approve of in the society and government of a divided Vietnam either. Quite possibly, a unified Vietnam under Ho, spared the ravages of war, would have gone at least as far toward the evolution of a stable and reasonably just society as has the divided, war-torn land we know today. For us, however, the question is what that sort of Vietnam would have meant in international politics. I believe it would be safe to assume that it would have been a highly nationalistic Vietnam. By the same token, I believe it also would have been free of Chinese domination. The Vietnamese have instinctive fears of their great northern neighbor. While they have always admired and imitated China, for more than a millennium they have had a deep national tradition of resistance to its domination. If they had had no specific reason to fear or resent us, the chances are that their fears and resentments would have come to focus on China, whether or not it, too, were Communist.

It seems highly probable that Ho's Communist-dominated regime, if it had been allowed by us to take over all Vietnam at the end of the war, would have moved to a position with relation to China not unlike that of Tito's

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Yugoslavia toward the Soviet Union. Ho, like Tito, had had cordial wartime relations with us. He apparently expected our continued friendship and had more to hope for in economic aid from us than China. He and his associates were ardent nationalists and probably had deeper fears and suspicions of the Chinese than the Yugoslavs had of the Russians. While such a Vietnam might have been more circumspect and respectful toward China than Tito has been toward the Soviet Union, it would probably have been even more fiercely independent. The way in which Hanoi has sought to maintain its independence of Peking and Moscow, despite the military dependence on both, which was forced on it by the protracted war with us, suggests how strongly independent a Communist Vietnam would have been, if not pushed by these military necessities.

Would such a Communist regime in all Vietnam have been a serious menace to its neighbors or to world peace? I doubt it. A Communist take-over in all Vietnam shortly after the end of the war would probably have seemed to the rest of the world no more of a Communist triumph than the successive victories of Communists over anti-Communists that have taken place in Vietnam since 1945. It is hard to believe that a united Communist Vietnam would have had any more harmful an influence on Laos than a divided war-torn Vietnam has had. Laos and Cambodia might have fallen under Vietnamese influence, but this at least would have kept them out of Chinese control. Or, possibly, Cambodia's traditional animosity toward Vietnam would have induced it to veer further away than it has from association with the Communist nations, if South Vietnam, too, had been Communist. Thailand would probably have been less adversely affected by an entirely Communist Vietnam than it has been by the prolonged war there. Meanwhile, a united, strongly nationalistic Vietnam, while paying lip service to Communist China, would probably have served as a far more effective dike against the southward extension of Chinese power and influence than have a North Vietnam forced into military dependence on China and an unstable South Vietnam. And this general situation in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, which would have been so much less unsatisfactory for us than what we have today, would have been achieved without any of the terrible costs that have mounted so high.

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I. C. 2.

A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY OF  
HO CHI MINH, 1890-1950

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I. C. 2. A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY OF HO CHI MINH, 1890-1950

There have been two periods in the life of Ho Chi Minh, President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), in which he ostensibly devoted himself wholly to Vietnamese Nationalism. The first period was in the early years before 1920 when Ho Chi Minh was an avid anti-colonialist, but not yet caught up in the communist revolution. The second period of seeming nationalist preoccupation was from 1945 to 1950, when Ho tried to negotiate with the French, appealed to the U.S., UK and China for intervention in Vietnam, denied being a communist, and avoided any ostensible link between the DRV and the Kremlin. The remainder of Ho Chi Minh's political life has been that of a classic communist, anti-colonial, nationalist revolutionary -- exile, Moscow schools, prison, covert operations, guerrilla warfare, party politics. A chronology of his career through 1950 is attached, (pp. C-48 ff).

1. Forming the Political Man

Ho Chi Minh was born Nguyen Van Thanh, 19 May 1890, in Kim-Lien in the northern Annam province of Nghe-An (in what is now North Vietnam). Ho was exposed early in life to bitter resentment of the French presence in Vietnam; his father was jailed at Poulo Condore for participation in nationalist activities. Ho's secondary education took place in a hotbed of nationalism, Hue's Lycee Quoc-Hoc. His schooling terminated around 1910 before he received a diploma, but still he acquired more education than most of his compatriots. His decision to work as a mess boy on a French liner in 1912 has been regarded by Bernard Fall as a key political decision -- that is, Fall held that Ho, unlike most conservative fellow Nationalists, thereby opted for the West (republicanism, democracy, popular sovereignty, etc.), against the East (militarism, mandarinal society, etc.). 1/ If the going to sea were a significant decision at all, it probably showed only that Ho was not inclined to follow the normal path of Vietnamese nationalism. This fact was borne out by Ho's break with his father, Nguyen Tat Sac, who had given him a letter for Phan Chu Trinh, a veteran Viet nationalist, in Paris. Sac had hoped Phan would tutor Ho in Vietnamese nationalism, but Ho could not accept Phan's "peaceful cooperation with the French," and left Paris; thereafter he severed his ties with his father. 2/

As a young Asian struggling to earn a living in pre-World War I Europe and America, Ho had been exposed to the racial inequalities of the Western civilization and perhaps sought security when he joined the Chinese-dominated Overseas Workers Association, a clandestine, anti-colonialist organization concerned with improving the working conditions of foreign laborers but increasingly a political force. Ho went to France from London in 1917 with the war in the forefront, and the Russian Leninist revolution in the background. Looking on himself as a political organizer and writer of sorts, Ho signed his articles Nguyen Ai Quoc (which means "Nguyen-the-Patriot") -- an alias by which all Vietnam came to know him until he became

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Ho Chi Minh in 1943. As a Paris writer, anti-colonialist nationalism was the major theme for his back room newspaper -- Viet Nam Hon (The Soul of Vietnam). Ho also produced a widely-read attack on French colonial policy called French Colonization on Trial, which purportedly became the "bible of nationalists" in Vietnam. 3/ Caught up in the patriotic fervor of the armistice, Ho produced an eight-point program to present at Versailles:

"Attracted by the promise of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, spokesmen of the various peoples who wanted independence followed the leaders of the victorious Allies to Paris in 1919. Along with the Indians, the Koreans, the Irish, and the Arabs, Ho Chi Minh came with a list of Vietnamese grievances and a plea for Vietnamese autonomy. He arrived at Versailles in rented evening clothes to deliver his appeal. But the statesmen assembled in Paris had no time for the problems of the subject peoples of the French Empire, and nothing came of it." 4/

This was Ho's last major fling at non-communist nationalism before 1920, since increasingly he began to move in the circles of Leon Blum, Marcel Cochin, Marius Moutet, and other left-wing political figures, and became a member of the French Socialist Party. In May, 1920, Ho was a delegate at the Socialist Congress in Tours, and joined in the founding of the French Communist Party. Ho much later in life recalled those days in describing "The Path Which Led Me To Leninism."\*

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

"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 or Communism.

"Heated discussions were then taking place in the branches of the Socialist Party, about the question of 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 thrice a week, and attentively listened to the discussions. First, I could not understand thoroughly.

\*Article written in April, 1960, for the Soviet review Problems of the East, for the 90th anniversary of Lenin's birth. From Fall, Ho on Revolution, 5-7.

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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 this 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'Humanite, 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 into 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 the path to our liberation!'

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

"Formerly, during the meetings of the Party branch, I 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 the 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.

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"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."

2. Comintern Agent

Later in 1920 Ho Chi Minh also attended the Baku Conference (First Conference of the Peoples of the Far East) on his first visit to Russia. It is also likely that he took part in the Conference of Workers of the Far East in 1922 in Moscow which was concerned with establishing communism in the Far East. He returned to France and

"Ho Chi Minh stayed on in France until 1923, when the French Communist Party chose him as its delegate to the Congress of the Peasant International (the Krestintern) which met in Moscow that October...he did not leave the Soviet Union after the meeting, but remained there for more than a year, studying Communism, its techniques, and its organization, first-hand. He came to know many of Communism's great and near-great during this period, as before he had come to know the leaders of the Left-Wing movement in Paris." 5/

In 1924, Ho became a student at the Eastern Workers University and studied Marxism-Leninism and bolshevik tactics. 6/

In 1925, he accompanied Michael Borodin, the Comintern delegate to the Kuomintang to Canton, China, as a Chinese translator to the Soviet consulate. After a few months, Ho had organized the Association of Vietnamese Revolutionary Young Comrades. 7/ The Whampoa Political and Military Academy in Canton, which had attracted revolutionaries, especially Vietnamese, was the center of Ho's training program of revolution and Marxism. Ho is alleged to have displayed political ruthlessness in exposing a rival nationalist, Pham Boi Chau, a renowned Vietnamese patriot and idealist; Ho is supposed to have received 100,000 piasters from the security police for his betrayal. Ho also set up a personnel security system which reputedly impaired other Vietnamese nationalist organizations. He and his assistant, one Lam Duc Thu, required two photographs of each incoming recruit to Whampoa Academy. Upon graduation, if the student had joined Ho's Youth League, he returned to Vietnam in secrecy. If the student displayed interest in other parties, Thu sold his photograph to the French consulate, which would then have the student arrested at the border. Thus Ho strengthened his own secret cells, while weakening his nationalist opposition. 8/ At Whampoa in 1926 Ho wrote that "only a communist party can [ultimately] insure the well-being of Annam." 9/

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In 1927, Chiang Kai-shek broke with the communists, and Borodin was forced to return to Moscow. Ho Chi Minh returned to Moscow with him, but before departing turned over leadership of the Youth League to a trusted assistant who was arrested within the year. The League leadership then fell to Thu, who was still living sumptuously in Hong Kong on French blood money. Thu called a congress in Hong Kong in 1929 which resulted in the Vietnam delegates walking out in disgust, and forming an Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in Tonkin. The émigré leadership of the League conceded the necessity of organizing a communist party, but in reality, was unwilling to deviate from the political line set by Ho Chi Minh -- which was to build a revolutionary nationalist party with socialist tendencies. 10/ As the ICP grew in strength, the Youth League adopted the name "Annamese Communist Party."

After leaving China in 1927, Ho Chi Minh travelled to Moscow, Berlin, and in 1929 was in Thailand working secretly with 30,000 Viet émigrés. Ho returned to Hong Kong in January, 1930, and resolved the disunity among the several Indochinese Communist factions. A new party was set up, with a central committee at Haiphong, named the Vietnam Communist Party. In October, 1930, at Comintern insistence, it was renamed the Indochinese Communist Party, to include Cambodian and Laotians; the Central Committee was transferred to Saigon. 11/ French police repression of communists shortly after nearly destroyed the organization; a number of Ho's lieutenants, Pham van Dong, Giap and others, were sent to Poulo Candou for long prison terms.

3. Prison and Obscurity

Ho, who had been sentenced to death in absentia by the French, was arrested in Hong Kong in 1931 by the British. Bernard Fall wrote this account:

"Legality, however, prevailed in the genteel world of Hong Kong's Anglo-Saxon law. Defended by Sir Stafford Cripps before Britain's Privy Court, Ho was found not subject to extradition since he was a political refugee. Still, the British did not want him and he was a marked man. He slipped out of Hong Kong, into the nearby but isolated Chinese province of Fukien.

"Somehow, only a year later, Ho was in Shanghai, the only foreign place in Asia then where a substantial Vietnamese community could be found. He was desperately seeking contact with the Comintern apparatus, which was now prudently concealing its operations in China. It was understandable that what was left of the Chinese Communist Party outside of Mao's forces was not about to advertise its presence all over Shanghai. But there may have been another reason as well for Ho's difficulties in making contact with the Communists: Ho had been released from British prison for reasons which a suspicious Communist might find difficult to swallow. To a Communist apparatus emerging from the blows it had been subjected to in the early Thirties, it was normal procedure to isolate Ho Chi Minh as a potential

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agent provocateur until more was known about what he had said and done while in British custody.

"Finally, Ho made contact and early in 1934 the Communist apparatus smuggled him back to Moscow, where he had been preceded by a fairly large group of Vietnamese trainees studying in many fields, from engineering to plain agitprop (agitation and propaganda). He naturally turned to the latter.

"Ho first attended the Institute for National and Colonial Questions in Moscow, and then the famous 'graduate school' for senior Communist leaders, the Lenin School. Moscow, in 1935-38, also provided an education of a far different sort: the Stalin purges. It would be interesting to know what Ho's feelings were as he saw some of his best friends accused, convicted, and executed for crimes which they patently had not committed. What is remarkable is that Ho, as a well-known member of the Comintern group, was not purged right along with them, for hundreds of thousands of people of lesser distinction than he became victims of Stalin's mania." 12/

The record of Ho's travels in the period of 1933-1939 is otherwise obscure; the communist movement in Vietnam was led by Tran Van Giau and others during those years.

Ho emerged from his retreats in 1939, a difficult year. Ho, as a disciplined communist had to follow the Party's tactical guidance, which was intended to safeguard the Soviet Union as the base of the international movement, even when this brought him into temporary conflict with his long term goals for Vietnam. Of the period just preceding World War II, Fall has written:

"...Ho probably was then unconditionally loyal to Stalin, and Stalin knew it. This became particularly clear when Nazism began to loom as a threat and the Communist parties decided in 1936 to apply the policy of 'popular fronts' with the Western democracies.

"This policy was a bitter pill for the colonial Communist governments such as that of Indochina, for it meant giving up advocacy of outright independence in favor of a policy of cooperation with the French colonial regime. But Ho, returning to Communist bases in Northwest China in 1937, gritted his teeth and rammed this line down the throat of his reluctant following in its most minute vagaries, and his report on the results, addressed to the Comintern in 1939, demonstrated his success.

"It was probably Ho's lowest point. He had to forswear publicly all he had stood for, had to cooperate with the French, the people he hated most, and had to sell out the Trotskyist

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allies who had helped the Communists from time to time in beating French-sponsored candidates for elections in CochinChina (a French colony, then part of the Federation of Indochina which, as a protectorate, enjoyed a measure of legislative representation). And the worst was not yet over. Not authorized by the Comintern to expose himself through a premature return to Vietnam, he now worked only as a low-level communications operator to the Chinese Communist 8th Route Army, then fighting the Japanese." 13/

4. Wartime Leader

In 1940 Ho was reported in Liuchow, Kwang-Si Province, South China, engaged in training guerrillas under the sponsorship of the local warlord. Shortly thereafter Ho, with the remnants of the central committee of the ICP, crossed into Vietnam, and in 1941 began organizing a resistance movement on a large scale. The ICP prepared for, and advocated, armed insurrection against French Imperialism and Japanese Fascism. However, Ho Chi Minh organized the Viet Minh as a Vietnamese nationalist movement of resistance. The Viet Minh program centered on collaboration with the Allies to defeat Japan and liberate Indochina. In the course of his work, Ho was arrested in May 1942 by Chinese nationalists, under mysterious circumstances, and in June 1943 was as mysteriously released. Ho re-joined the Viet Minh, re-entered Vietnam, and led the Viet Minh to power in August, 1945.

Ho, at the time he became President of the DRV, was undoubtedly a communist in the sense that he had spent twenty-five years in the embrace of Party discipline and doctrine, and that he had been an agent of the Communist International. He was also a dedicated revolutionary nationalist whose cause had exacted of him years of hardship, imprisonment, exile, and conspiratorial isolation. In his Notes from a Prison Diary, he wrote:

"People who come out of prison can build up a country.  
Misfortune is a test of people's fidelity.  
Those who protest at injustice are people of true merit.  
When the prison doors are opened, the real dragon will fly out." 14/

5. Head of State

Whatever else he was, Ho was a leader and organizer par excellence, an astute manipulator of men who had successfully threaded a way through the tangle of international intrigue in China to political power for himself and his followers of the ICP and the Viet Minh. He came to power in North Vietnam under the aegis of the Allies, and by popular acclaim. He did not establish a communist government, although besides himself in the Presidency, he had arranged that communist lieutenants would hold the portfolios of interior, national defense, finance, propaganda, education, and youth. The communists, although thus centrally placed, were in a minority, and full account had been taken of independents and several of the principal

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non-communist nationalist parties in determining representation on the cabinet. 15/

In November, 1945, Ho disestablished the Indochinese Communist Party; and Association for Marxist Studies was formed when the ICP was abolished, but it was not until 1951 that the Communist Party again asserted itself openly in DRV politics. 16/ Ho ostensibly threw his entire energies into the Viet Minh, which he described in 1945 as having:

"...millions of members from all social strata: intellectuals, peasants, workers, businessmen, soldiers, and from all nationalities in the country..." 17/

Subsequently, he moved to cut down the number of communists in cabinet posts within the government, and otherwise to enhance its coalition nature.

Ho, the Viet Minh, and the DRV government stressed their identity with the people, and their patriotic, democratic and nationalist goals, foregoing communist cant. Ho's own writings of the period are to point: 18/

"October, 1945: We must realize that all Government organs, from the Central to the Communal level, are the people's servants, that is to say they are appointed to work for the sake of the whole peoples interests.

"October, 1945: We neither dislike nor hate the French people. On the contrary, we respect them as a great people who were first to propagate the lofty ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

"November, 1945: The colonialists...have run counter to the promises concerning democracy and liberty that the Allied powers have proclaimed. They have of their own accord sabotaged their fathers' principles of liberty and equality. In consequence, it is for a just cause, for justice of the world, and for Vietnam's land and people that our compatriots throughout the country have risen to struggle, and are firmly determined to maintain their independence.

"January, 1946: With a view to winning complete independence and bringing about a close cooperation between the various political parties to further strengthen the Government, it is now named the Provisional Coalition Government. At this moment, if all parties unite together, the Government can overcome difficulties.

Political Objectives: To carry out satisfactorily the elections...to unify the various administrative organs according to democratic principles.

Economic Objectives: To endeavor to develop agriculture; to encourage cultivation and stock breeding in order to check famine.



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Military Objectives: To unify the various armed forces...

"October 1946: We must show to the French Government and people and to the world at large that the Vietnamese people are already in possession of all the required conditions to be independent and free, and that recognition of our freedom and independence is a necessity...

"December 1946: Compatriots! Rise up! Men and women, old and young, regardless of creeds, political parties, or nationalities, all the Vietnamese must stand up to fight the French colonialists to save the Fatherland...

"April 1948: The nation has its roots in the people. In the Resistance War and national reconstruction, the main force lies in the people..."

6. Ho, Again the Nationalist

The sincerity of Ho's nationalism, then and since, seems as beyond question as that of Stalin, or Harry Truman. Among his countrymen, Ho was preeminent among all nationalists. Ho had led the forces which welcomed the Allies as they entered Indochina to accept the surrender of Japanese forces there; Ho headed the DRV in 1945-1946 when national unity, independence, and peace seemed close at hand. Ho was popular, respected, even revered. He cultivated an image calculated to appeal to the peasant: venerable age, rustic austerity, and humility. He insisted on "Uncle Ho" in introducing himself, and it was an "Uncle Ho" that the countryside came to regard him. No other Vietnamese was so widely known, or so universally respected. 19/ Moreover, unlike any of his competitors, he had at his service a disciplined political organization of national scope, trained in the arts of revolution, and skilled in the techniques of mobilizing opinion and stimulating political action. In truth, then, Ho was, to the extent that such existed in 1945 or 1946, the embodiment of Vietnamese nationalism. 20/

The historical problem, of course, is to what extent Ho's nationalist goals might have modified his communist convictions. To many observers of the day, Ho seemed to place the former above the latter not solely as a matter of dissemblance, as he might have done in the simultaneous dissolution of the Party and the formation of the Marxist Association, but as a result of deeply held doubts about the validity of communism as a political form suitable for Vietnam. Sainteny who negotiated the 6 March 1946 Accord with Ho for France wrote that: "His proposals, his actions, his attitude, his real or assumed personality, all tended to convince that he found a solution by force repugnant..." Bao Dai is reputed to have said that: "I saw Ho Chi Minh suffer. He was fighting a battle within himself. Ho had his own struggle. He realized communism was not best for his country, but it was too late. Ultimately, he could not overcome his allegiance to communism." 21/ During the negotiations for a modus vivendi with the

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French in Paris in autumn, 1946, Ho appealed to the French to "save him from the extremists" within the Viet Minh by some meaningful concession to Vietnamese independence. 22/ In reply to a journalist's inquiry, Ho claimed that he could remain neutral, "like Switzerland" in the developing world power struggle between communism and the West. 23/

7. U.S. Perceptions of Ho

Personally, Ho was charming, and he was especially captivating with Americans. Ho's public statements resonated well with the anti-colonial sentiments of most Americans, and he presented an appealing figure, fragile, humble, ascetic, yet humorous and cosmopolitan. 24/ General Gallagher, who was the senior U.S. officer in contact with Ho in 1945, was impressed with Ho's resoluteness and nationalist dedication. Upon his return, he told State Department officials that "Ho was willing to cooperate with Great Britain, USSR, or the United States and would perhaps even settle for French tutelage if that were subordinated to control by other nations."

"Asked how 'communist' the Viet Minh were, General Gallagher replied that they were smart and successfully gave the impression of not being communist. Rather, they emphasized their interest in independence and their interest in independence and their Annamese patriotism. Their excellent organization and propaganda techniques, General Gallagher pointed out, would seem to have the earmarks of some Russian influence. General Gallagher stated that the minority Cao Dai group were definitely Communist. In his opinion, however, the Viet Minh should not be labeled full-fledged doctrinaire communist." \*

On 11 September, 1946, the U.S. Ambassador in Paris reported a visit from Ho:

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\* From Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Richard L. Sharp, of the Division of Southeast Affairs, Department of State, dated January 30, 1946.

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"I have the honor to report that at his request, I received a visit this morning from M. Ho Chi-minh, 'President of the Republic of Viet-Nam', who confirmed the news published in the local press that the Fontainebleau negotiations between the Viet-Nam representatives and the French representatives have practically broken down and the Viet-Nam delegation will be returning to Indochina within the next few days....He said that he and his party aspired to Viet-Nam 'independence' in an 'Union Francaise'. He said that they would like to receive some 'help' from us, but did not specify what he meant by that. He took occasion to say that he was not a communist.

"From the general fuzziness of his remarks, I gathered that he would like us to get into the game and he would be very pleased if he could use us in some way or other in his future negotiations with the French authorities.

"I expressed our interest in Indochina and the people of Indochina but made no commitments." 25/  
[underlining added]

Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson, for one, was not altogether persuaded by Ho's representations. In December, 1946, he cabled a U.S. diplomat in Hanoi the following instructions:

"Assume you will see Ho in Hanoi and offer following summary our present thinking as guide.

"Keep in mind Ho's clear record as agent international communism, absence evidence recantation Moscow affiliations, confused political situation France and support Ho receiving French Communist Party. Least desirable eventuality would be establishment Communist-dominated, Moscow-oriented state Indochina in view DEPT, which most interested INFO strength non-communist elements Vietnam. Report fully, repeating or requesting DEPT repeat Paris....

"If Ho takes stand non-implementation promise by French of Cochinchina referendum relieves Vietnam responsibility compliance with agreements, you might if you consider advisable raise question whether he believes referendum after such

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long disorder could produce worthwhile result and whether he considers compromise on status Cochinchina could possibly be reached through negotiation.

"May say American people have welcomed attainments Indochinese in efforts realize praiseworthy aspirations greater autonomy in framework democratic institutions and it would be regrettable should this interest and sympathy be imperilled by any tendency Vietnam administration force issues by intransigence and violence.

"May inform Ho [U.S. Ambassador, Paris] discussing situation French similar frankness....

"Avoid impression US Govt making formal intervention this juncture. Publicity any kind would be unfortunate." 26/

In response to Under Secretary Acheson's telegram, the following was reported to Washington on December 17, 1946 -- just before the outbreak of hostilities in Hanoi:

"After conversations with French and Vietnamese officials and British, Chinese and US Consuls Hanoi Mr. Abbot Moffat, who is at present in SEA, has developed views in which Consul Saigon concurs along the following lines:

"The Vietnam Government is in control of a small Communist group possibly in indirect touch with Moscow and direct touch with Yenan. A nationalist group is utilizing Communist party techniques and discipline with which they are familiar. The people are conservative landowners and attempts to communize the country are secondary and would await successful operation of a nationalist state. Apparently some leaders, like Ho Chi Minh, consider collaboration with the French essential; those like Giap (Vo Nguyen Giap, Minister of National Defense) would avoid collaboration fearing French domination but might not reject French influence and aid. Nationalist sentiment runs deep among the Vietnamese and does opposition to the French, and they might easily turn against all whites. French influence is important not only as an antidote to Soviet influence but to protect Vietnam and SEA from future Chinese imperialism. Delay in achieving a settlement will progressively diminish the possibility of ultimate French influence.

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"The honesty of both French and Vietnamese officials is questionable in connection with recent incidents. O'Sullivan (U.S. Vice-Consul, Hanoi) believes the Vietnamese were responsible for the November 20 incident, but it seems clear that with a different French commander at Haiphong than Colonel Debes, who is notorious for graft and brutality and who has admitted that he cannot control his own troops, the trouble might have been confined to the original incidents.

"According to the French, the Vietnamese enlarge their claims after each agreement and are so impractical and doctrinaire that all conversations are ineffectual. The Vietnamese feel that the French renege on each agreement and are trying to reestablish control. However, both say they have approximately the same objectives, although Giap says Vietnam opposes a political Indochinese federation but favors a federation dealing with common economic problems. Moffat has mentioned to the French three apparent basic troubles: (a) complete mutual distrust, (b) failure of the French to resolve their own views on 'free state within French Union', (c) almost childish Vietnamese attitude and knowledge of economic questions and vague groping for 'independence'. Agreement cannot be reached by trying to reach accords on incidental problems. Basic Vietnam powers and relations with France must first be established. Not only new faces are needed but neutral good offices or even mediation may be essential." \*

The U.S. official position remained essentially unchanged thereafter. A few months later, after fighting broke out in North Vietnam, Secretary of State Marshall stated that:

"Furthermore, there is no escape from fact that trend of times is to effect that colonial empires in XIX Century sense are rapidly becoming thing of past. Action Brit in India and Burma and Dutch in Indonesia are outstanding examples this

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\* U.S. Department of State Telegram, from Washington, 17 December 1946.

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trend, and French themselves took cognizance of it both in new Constitution and in their agreements with Vietnam. On other hand we do not lose sight fact that Ho Chi Minh has direct Communist connections and it should be obvious that we are not interested in seeing colonial empire administrations supplanted by philosophy and political organizations emanating from and controlled by Kremlin. Fact does remain, however, that a situation does exist in Indochina which can no longer be considered, if it ever was considered, to be of a local character. 27/

In May, 1949, Dean Acheson, then Secretary of State, instructed the U.S. representative in Hanoi to warn Vietnamese nationalists against any acceptance of a coalition with Ho and the Viet Minh:

"...You may take following line as representing consensus informed Americans:

"In light Ho's known background, no other assumptions possible but that he outright Commie so long as (1) he fails unequivocally repudiate Moscow connections and Commie doctrine and (2) remains personally singled out for praise by internat'l Commie press and receives its support. Moreover, US not impressed by nationalist character red flag with yellow stars. Question whether Ho as much nationalist as Commie is irrelevant. All Stalinists in colonial areas are nationalists. With achievement nat'l aims (i.e., independence) their objective necessarily becomes subordination state to Commie purposes and ruthless extermination not only opposition groups but all elements suspected even slightest deviation. On basis examples eastern Eur it must be assumed such wld be goal Ho and men his stamp if included Baodai Govt. To include them in order achieve reconciliation opposing polit elements and QTE national unity UNQTE wld merely postpone settlement issue whether Vietnam to be independent nation or Commie satellite until circumstances probably even less favorable nationalists than now. It must of course be conceded theoretical possibility exists estab National Communist state on pattern Yugoslavia in any

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area beyond reach Soviet army. However, US attitude cld take acct such possibility only if every other possible avenue closed to preservation area from Kremlin control. Moreover, while Vietnam out of reach Soviet army it will doubtless be by no means out of reach Chi Commie hatchet men and armed forces. 28/

8. Ho, Asian Neutral?

Ho may indeed have never been other than a crafty Leninist, seeking a passing accommodation with the French or the U.S. while he gathered strength. His word and deed after 1949 support such a construction: In January 1950, the DRV declared itself to be the "only lawful government of the entire Vietnamese people," 29/ joined the Sino-Soviet Bloc, and began attacks on the U.S. "imperialists" and "interventionists." 30/ Early in 1951, the DRV legalized the Lao Dong Party, expressly communist. 31/

There remains, however, irresolvable doubt concerning Ho's earlier predilection for neutralism, or even a western affiliation. It can be said that, whatever Ho might have preferred, he was offered only narrow options. No reputable Westerner is known to have interviewed Ho face to face from an abortive French attempt in 1947 to negotiate a Cochinchina settlement through late 1954. 32/ Ho had no direct means of communication with the U.S. after 1946, and the signals he received from the U.S. could hardly have been encouraging. 33/ By 1947, U.S. military equipment had already been used by French and British forces against the Vietnamese, and the U.S. had arranged credit for French purchase of \$160 million worth of vehicles and miscellaneous industrial equipment for use in Indochina. 34/ Secretary of State George C. Marshall's January, 1947, public statement on Vietnam had been confined to a hope that "a pacific basis for adjustment of the difficulties could be found," 35/ and the Marshall Plan for Europe definitely threw U.S. resources behind France. But assurances from the Russians were not materially stronger. While the Soviets excoriated colonial powers other than France, potential imminence of a French Communist government muffled even their verbal backing of Ho, let alone recognition and aid. 36/

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9. Ho, Realist

As a political realist, Ho must have been impressed that the DRV was as unlikely to rise in priority over France in U.S. foreign policy, as Vietnam was to assert claims on Soviet support over Russian preoccupation with Europe. In 1946 he put his plight in these terms: "We apparently stand quite alone; we shall have to depend on ourselves."<sup>37/</sup> After 1947, events conspired to alter Ho's isolation, for while prospects for U.S. support dimmed, and in 1950, vanished, Mao Tse Tung -- in whose service Ho had spent eight years -- was moving from triumph to triumph, and by late 1949, was in a position to render direct assistance to Ho across his northern border.<sup>38/</sup> Faced with an increasingly serious military threat, Ho gravitated quickly toward the Bloc. From Viet Minh jungle hideouts came blasts at the U.S. "Marshallization of the world," taking note that the Russians opposed "Marshallization."<sup>39/</sup> In 1949, after the U.S. had publicly welcomed the formation of Bao Dai's "new and unified state of Viet Nam," Ho sent delegates to a Peking conference where Liu Shao-Chi, in the keynote speech, declared that only the Communist Party could lead a "national liberation movement."<sup>40/</sup> Ho and Mao exchanged messages of amity, and neutralist Tito was taken under attack by the Viet Minh radio. In January, 1950, in response to Ho's declaration that the DRV was Vietnam's only legitimate government, Mao tendered formal recognition, and Stalin's followed immediately thereafter.<sup>41/</sup> The die was cast: U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson declared in February, 1950, that these recognitions "should remove any illusion as to the nationalist character of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina."<sup>42/</sup> Ho responded in August, 1950, to the first shipments of U.S. aid to French forces in Vietnam in the following sharp language.

"Since the beginning of the war the Americans have tried to help the French bandits. But now they have advanced one more step to direct intervention in Viet Nam. Thus we have now one principal opponent -- the French bandits -- and one more opponent -- the American interventionists....

"On our side, a few years of resistance have brought our country the greatest success in the history of Viet Nam -- recognition of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam as an equal in the world democratic family by the two biggest countries in the world -- the Soviet Union and democratic China -- and by the new democratic countries. That means that we are definitely on the democratic side and belong to the anti-imperialist bloc of 800 million people."<sup>43/</sup>

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HO CHI MINH  
CHRONOLOGY

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10. Ho Chi Minh Chronology

- 1890 On 19 May born Nguyen Van Thanh, youngest son of three children of Nguyen Tat Sac, a minor government official and revolutionary, in Kim Lien Village, Nghe An Province, Annam (Central Vietnam).
- 1895 Attended village school and French lycee at Vinh (14 miles from Kim Lien). Carried messages for anti-French underground. Noted for his political tirades (Fall).
- 1904-1905 (Russo-Japanese War. Japanese victory greatly influenced Vietnamese political developments.)
- 1905 Dismissed from school for reasons of politics (NVN historians), or poor grades (teachers).
- 1906-1910 Transferred to Lycee Quoc Hoc, a prestigious high school, in Hue. Quoc Hoc was a hotbed of Vietnamese resistance to outside influence; among its graduates were Ngo Dinh Diem, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Pham van Dong. (To this day, the students of Hue continue to strongly influence Vietnamese politics, e.g., Hue riots against Ky in 1966.)
- 1910-1911 Left school without a diploma; taught school at Lycee Dac-Thanh in Phan-Thiet. Left Phan Thiet in October to attend trade school (probably cooks and bakers) in Saigon.
- 1912 Worked as messboy aboard French liner SS Le Touche-Treville on Saigon-Marseille run. Ho carried letter of introduction to Phan Chu Trinh, prison mate of Ho's father at Poulo Condore and veteran nationalist of Dong Bao (Haircutters) movement in 1907. Failing to accept Trinh's nationalism, Ho returned to working on liners travelling the world.
- 1913 Worked in kitchens of Carlton Hotel in London under Escoffier, famous French chef. Joined Overseas Workers Union, a clandestine anti-colonialist group dominated by Chinese.
- 1914 )  
1915 )  
1916 ) (1914-1916 is an obscure period -- sometime during the period Ho went back to sea and visited New York, later writing on the U.S. race problem in La Race Noire.)
- 1917 Ho turned up in Paris, France, to spread influence of anti-colonialist nationalism to Indochinese conscripted for war service in France. Communist revolution in Russia under Lenin which promised national independence for colonials stimulated Ho to deeper involvement in politics.
- 1918 Conducted a photograph retouching business and advertised in Socialist Party's newspaper under the name of Nguyen Ai Quoc (The Patriot).

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- 1919 (A Vietnamese sailor, Ton Duc Thang, mutinied with another communist to turn over a French ship to Russia. Thang was imprisoned at Poulo Condore and today is Ho's Vice President in North Vietnam.) Ho prepared a 8-point program of colonial grievances to present to the Versailles Peace Conference, but his offerings were rejected.
- 1920 Attended Baku Conference (First Conference of the Peoples of the Far East) on first visit to USSR. On return to France, Ho attended 18th National Congress of the Socialist Party as an Indochinese Delegate in December. There he opted for the Third International over the Second, because of the former's position against colonialism, and thus became a founding member of the French Communist Party (PCF).
- 1921 Organized "Union Intercoloniale"-- started as a "front" to attract members to the Party from colonial territories -- which published periodical La Paria; edited Viet Nam Hon (Soul of Vietnam) which was smuggled to Indochina.
- 1922 Attended first Comintern-sponsored conclave (Conference of the Workers of the Far East) devoted to communist organization of the Far East in Moscow.
- 1923 Left France in June to attend several congresses of Kresintern (Peasants International) in Moscow as a PCF delegate in October. Lived in USSR for 18 months as colonial representative on Kresintern permanent directing committee.
- 1924 In Moscow Ho attended Eastern Workers' University and served on Kresintern.
- 1925 Assigned to Soviet consulate at Canton under Michael Borodin as "Chinese translator" -- a cover for organizing Indochina Communist Party into communist groups. Launched Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League (Viet Nam Cach Menh Thanh Nien Hoi), a training school for Indochinese students and emigres, in June. Ho published a brochure Le Proces de la Colonisation Francaise which was carried into Vietnam and became the student "nationalist" bible. Also in June, Ho is alleged to have betrayed Phan Boi Chau, a prominent Vietnamese nationalist leader, progenitor of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNQDD), to the French security police. Ho's intent said to be desire for martyr to produce a surge of patriotic sentiment for revolution in Annam -- which it did.
- 1926 Translated Marxist terminology into Sino-Annamite. Stated that "only a communist party can insure the well-being of Annam." Selected members of Ho's youth organization were enrolled in Whampoa Military Academy, where Chinese nationalists and communists were trained as future leaders for Kuomintang.

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- Conspired to betray Vietnamese "nationalist" students who did not join his Youth League at Whampoa.
- 1927 Departed Canton in April with Borodin after break between Chiang Kai-shek and Mao's communists. In Hong Kong transferred leadership of Youth League.
- 1928 Attended Communist Congress Against Imperialism at Brussels. Travelled to Thailand, and there often disguised himself as a Buddhist monk. Acted as an agent of Third International.
- 1929 In July, Ho worked in a colony of Vietnamese emigres numbering 30,000 in Thailand. Organized Annamite Fraternity of Siam (Hoi Than Ai Nguoi Annam O Xiem). Ordered to Hong Kong to organize Indochina Communist Party. His own Youth League the previous May had split into two factions -- one called "Indochinese Communist Party"; the other, later, the Annamese Communist Party.
- 1930 Ho arrived in Hong Kong in January. Fused Indochinese Communist Party, Annamese Communist Party and Indochinese Communist Alliance into Vietnam Communist Party (Viet Nam Cong San Dang) by March. Central Committee transferred to Haiphong. In October, per Comintern wishes, adopted new name of Indochinese Communist Party (Dong Duong Cong San Dang). Ho attended Third Conference of the South Seas Communist Party in Singapore in April. French sentenced Ho Chi Minh to death in absentia, probably as a result of the aftermath of the Yen Bay insurrection in February.
- 1931 Arrested by British in Hong Kong and imprisoned in June. British acted on French pressure which was suppressing communist/nationalist unrest in Vietnam at the time. Entire apparatus of Indochinese Communist Party was smashed.
- 1932 After series of trials in British courts (including appeal on Ho's behalf by Sir Stafford Cripps in England), Ho was released from Hong Kong Prison in late 1932. Went to Singapore, arrested again and sent back to Hong Kong. Admitted to hospital for tuberculosis.
- 1933 Nguyen Ai Quoc reported dead in Hong Kong by French records. Disappeared without a trace. Believed he was released to work secretly for British Intelligence Service.  
(Congress of ICP held in Ban-Mai, Thailand in April.)  
(Attempts to reconstitute ICP were under leadership of Tran van Giau, who had studied at Moscow's Oriental Institute.)

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- 1934 Ho returned to Moscow in early 1934 for attendance at political schools. First attended Institute for National and Political Questions in Moscow. Later attended "graduate school" for senior communist leaders, the Lenin School.  
(Stalin purges 1935-1938 did not involve Ho. Apparently, unconditionally loyal to Stalin, Ho had to adopt new party line of "popular front" as a result of emerging Nazism.)
- 1935 Moscow schools.
- 1936 Moscow schools.
- 1937 With Chinese Communist Eighth Route Army in China. Also located in Kunming at one time.
- 1938 With Eighth Route Army as communications operator. (Popular Front collapsed in France.)
- 1939 (French Communist Party dissolved in September at outbreak of World War II.) Ho addressed report to Comintern on success of "popular front" policy in Far East. ICP Central Committee at November congress adopted new Comintern "anti-war" line of Stalin-Hitler pact.
- 1940 In late 1940, Ho was Political Commissar of a Chinese Communist guerrilla training mission under General Yeh Chien-ying training nationalists at Liuchow, Kwang-Si Province.  
(In June, France fell to Hitler.)  
Ho headed external directing Bureau of ICP in Kunming, China, in September.  
(French crushed Saigon insurrection of ICP, 22 November 1940. Numerous arrests followed.)
- 1941 Ho turned up in Moscow, and thence travelled to Yenan with Nguyen Khanh Toan, Vietnamese teacher at Moscow University. Crossed into Vietnam at Cao Bang Province in February. Organized Viet Minh (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi) on 19 May, as a "united front" group of Vietnamese nationalists in China. Organized resistance movement in northern Tonkin.
- 1942 Ho was arrested by Chinese warlord on August 28 as a French spy (and jailed for 13 months) after crossing border into China to make contact with Chinese and emigre groups.  
(October 10, the KMT-controlled Vietnam Revolutionary League -- Dong Minh Hoi -- was recognized by Chinese Marshal Chang Fa-kuei.)
- 1943 In prison until 16 September, Ho was released to gather information on Japanese troop movements in Indochina for Chinese.

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Adopted the name "Ho Chi Minh" (He Who Enlightens). Still leader of Viet Minh, Ho became a member of Central Committee -- and temporary Chairman -- of Dong Minh Hoi (Vietnam Revolutionary League). Both groups received support from China and U.S. Ho returned to Tonkin clandestinely, devoting efforts to the Viet Minh.

1944

Ho operated in the jungles in North Vietnam. He constantly sought aid from the U.S. through the O.S.S.

1945

May 1945 established liberated zone of six provinces in Tonkin and was visited by U.S. officer of O.S.S. In June, Ho called for National Congress, but convening was postponed to August 16 at Tan Trao. Viet Minh program:

- (1) disarm Japs before Allied entry
- (2) wrest power from enemy
- (3) be in authority to receive Allied forces.

August 19, Governor fled, Bao Dai abdicated, and few days later National Liberation Committee proclaimed "provisional government" with Ho Chi Minh president.

September 2, Ho Chi Minh declared independence of Vietnam Democratic Republic.

(British land in Saigon-Chinese enter Hanoi.)

On November 11, Ho dissolved ICP and formed Marxist Study Group. Ho wrote to President Truman in October and November.

1946

Appealed to U.S., U.K. USSR and China in February. Wrote letters to President Truman on 16 and 18 February.

Ho formed "coalition" government under Chinese occupation on March 2, 1946. Exercised personal prestige to gain acceptance 6 March 1946 Agreement providing for French replacement of Chinese in Tonkin.

Ho at Dalat Conference in May, and Fontainebleau, France, in August, failed to produce negotiated settlement of differences with French. On 11 September, Ho told U.S. Ambassador Caffrey in Paris that he was not a communist. Ho signed modus vivendi on 14 September following breakdown of Fontainebleau talks, and returned to Hanoi.

French seized local government in Haiphong and Langson in November. DRV armed forces attacked French in Hanoi on 19 December 1946. Ho moved DRV government into mountains.

1947

On April 30, Ho relinquished the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to his Socialist Under Secretary. Ho had Vietnam government reshuffled twice to form broadest coalition possible against French and to avoid "extremist" label by foreigners.

(French negotiated with Bao Dai to split resistance.)

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- 1948 (Giap appointed Minister of National Defense by Ho.)
- 1949 In March, Ho denounced the charge of "Communist domination" of DRV as pure French imperialist propaganda.  
In interview by Franc-Tireur, Ho stated his ideology was "real unity and independence of our country."  
(Bao Dai established puppet government in July.)  
(Nationalist China falls to Mao Tse-tung; Chinese troops arrive on Sino-Tonkin border.)
- 1950 Ho appeals for international recognition of DRV.  
(Russia and China recognize DRV.)  
(On June 25, North Korea attacked South Korea.)

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I. C. 2.

FOOTNOTES

1. Bernard B. Fall, "Ho Chi Minh: Like It Or Not," Esquire, November, 1967, p. 121.
2. Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism, Frederick A. Praeger (New York: 1965), pp. 37-38.
3. Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina 1940-1954, Stanford University Press, Stanford, Calif., 1965, p. 76.
4. Bernard B. Fall, Ho Chi Minh: On Revolution, Frederick A. Praeger, New York: 1967, p. 27. This is a collection of selected writings by Ho Chi Minh, 1920-1966. Hereafter reference will be made to this volume as Ho Chi Minh on Revolution.
5. Hammer, op. cit., p. 76.
6. Hoang Van Chi, op. cit., p. 40.
7. Ibid., p. 42.
8. Ibid., p. 19-19.
9. U.S. Dept of State, Political Alignments of Vietnamese Nationalists, (OIR Report No. 3708, 1949), p. 30.
10. Ibid., p. 32.
11. Ibid., p. 34
12. Fall, op. cit., p. 204.
13. Ibid., p. 205.
14. Fall, ed., Ho On Revolution, p. 137.
15. Hammer, op. cit., pp. 98-105; Fall, Two Viet-Nams (New York: Praeger, 1964), pp. 83-103; Buttinger, Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled (New York: Praeger, 1967), I, pp. 292-300, 344-351.
16. Fall, ed., Ho On Revolution, p. 141; CIA, Biographic Handbook, CIA/CR BH 6.6, entry for Ho dated 21 January 1965.
17. Ibid.; George A. Carver, Jr., "The Faceless Viet Cong," Foreign Affairs (Vol 44, No. 3, April, 1966), pp. 349-351.
18. Fall, ed., Ho On Revolution, 150 ff. (by dates).



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19. Fall, Two Viet-Nams, pp. 101-103; Buttinger, op. cit., I, pp. 266-269; Central Intelligence Agency, "Probable Developments in North Vietnam to July 1956," (NIE 63.1-55, 19 July 1955), p. 4.
20. Ibid.; Robert Shaplen, The Lost Revolution (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), XIV.
21. Ibid., p. 52; Shaplen also quotes Ho as saying in 1946 "To achieve a communist society, big industrial and agricultural production is necessary...I do not know when that will be realized in Vietnam where production is low. We are not yet in a position to meet the conditions." Ibid., pp. 48-49. Buttinger, op. cit., I, pp. 266-269, 637 cf., Fall, Two Viet-Nams, op. cit., p. 101.
22. Shaplen, op. cit., p. 48; Hammer, op. cit., p. 173.
23. Shaplen, op. cit., p. 53.
24. E. g., Isaacs in Gettleman, ed., op. cit.; Fall, Two Viet-Nams, op. cit., pp. 81-82; Shaplen, pp. 28-35, 42-44, 47; CIA, Biographic Handbook, op. cit.
25. U.S. Dept of State telegram from Paris, 6131, to Acheson, September 11, 1945.
26. U.S. Dept of State telegram to Saigon, Acheson 305, December 5, 1945.
27. U.S. Dept of State telegram, Marshall 431 to Paris, February 3, 1947.
28. U.S. Dept of State telegram to Hanoi 36, May 20, 1949.
29. Fall, ed., Ho on Revolution, p. 198
30. Ibid., pp. 199-200
31. Carver, op. cit., p. 352; CIA, Biographic Handbook, op. cit.
32. U.S. Dept of State, Far Eastern Notes (No. 8, May 7, 1954), p. 6; Shaplen, op. cit., p. 52.
33. [Intelligence Files, OSD], Buttinger, op. cit., II, p. 699.
34. Gettleman, ed., op. cit., p. 55.
35. Ibid., p. 75; Hammer, op. cit., p. 202.
36. Buttinger, op. cit., p. 363; Hammer, op. cit., pp. 201-202.
37. Gettleman, op. cit., p. 55.
38. Shaplen, op. cit., p. 53; Hammer, op. cit., p. 250.

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39. Shaplen, op. cit., p. 52.
40. Hammer, op. cit., pp. 249-250.
41. Ibid.
42. Department of State Bulletin (February 13, 1950), p. 244.
43. Hammer, op. cit., p. 251.

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HO CHI MINH'S COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE U.S.  
1945-1946

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If I had to pick out one quality about that little old man sitting on his hill in the jungle, it was his gentleness.'

"He and John exchanged toasts and shared stewed tiger livers. John now admits his naiveté in being ready to believe that Ho was not a Communist. But even if he was, John felt certain that Ho was sincere in wanting to co-operate with the West, especially with France and the United States. Some of Ho's men impressed John less. 'They go charging around with great fervor shouting 'independence,' but seventy-five per cent of them don't know the meaning of the word,' he wrote in his diary. John still has two letters in English Ho sent him in the jungle. One of them, written soon after the Japanese surrender, when the Vietminh was about to seize control of the nationalist movement, reads as follows:

Dear Lt. [John],

I feel weaker since you left. Maybe I'd have to follow your advice--move to some other place where food is easy to get, to improve my health....

I'm sending you a bottle of wine, hope you like it.

Be so kind as to give me foreign news you got.

...Please be good enuf to send to your H.Q. the following wires.

1. Daiviet [an anti-Vietminh nationalist group] plans to exercise large terror against French and to push it upon shoulder of VML [Vietminh League]. VML ordered 2 millions members and all its population be watchful and stop Daiviet criminal plan when & if possible. VML declares before the world its aim is national independence. It fights with political & if necessary military means. But never resorts to criminal & dishonest act.

Signed--NATIONAL LIBERATION COMMITTEE  
OF VML

2. National Liberation Committee of VML begs U.S. authorities to inform United Nations the following. We were fighting Japs on the side of the United Nations. Now Japs surrendered. We beg United Nations to realize their solemn promise that all nationalities will be given democracy and independence. If United Nations forget their solemn promise & don't grant Indo-china full independence, we will keep fighting until we get it.

Signed--LIBERATION COMMITTEE OF VML

Thank you for all the troubles I give you....Best greetings!  
Yours sincerely, Hoo [sic]."

\* Robert Shaplen, The Lost Revolution (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 28-30.

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Similar representations were conveyed to the U.S. via Vietnamese in Kunming (see the memorandum from General Donovan, Director of the O.S.S., inclosed).

In October, warfare between Vietnamese and French forces began in South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh thereupon dispatched a series of communications to the U.S., to China, and to the other great powers, denying France's right to speak on behalf of Vietnam in the U.N. or other international forums, and denouncing its "aggression" in Vietnam. Ho, in a telegram on 17 October 1945, called President Truman's attention to the "facts" that establishment of the U.N. Far East Advisory Commission overlooked Vietnam membership, that France was not entitled to membership, and that the DRV qualified for nation status under the Atlantic Charter. Requesting the U.S. to convey his points to the United Nations, Ho threatened that absence of Vietnam would bring forth instability in the Far East. The telegram was referred from the White House to State which duly noted "SEA considers that no action should be taken...." Within a week, Ho Chi Minh appealed via Radio Hanoi to Truman, Attlee, and De Gaulle and stated that the "Annamite Nationalist Government" intended to hold a plebiscite to give a constitution to Indochina. (The French took the view that they were not opposed to Ho per se, but wanted assurance that Ho represented the entire population of Indochina.) Ho repeatedly referred to President Truman's Navy Day address on foreign policy of 27 October 1945, and pleaded for application of its principles to Vietnam and the DRV. In that speech, the President did not refer to Indochina in any fashion, but the following passage evidently stirred Ho's hopes:

"The foreign policy of the United States is based firmly on fundamental principles of righteousness and justice. In carrying out those principles we shall firmly adhere to what we believe to be right; and we shall not give our approval to any compromise with evil.

"But we know that we cannot attain perfection in this world overnight. We shall not let our search for perfection obstruct our steady progress toward international cooperation. We must be prepared to fulfill our responsibilities as best we can, within the framework of our fundamental principles, even though we recognize that we have to operate in an imperfect world.

"Let me restate the fundamentals of that foreign policy of the United States:

"1. We seek no territorial expansion or selfish advantage. We have no plans for aggression against any other state, large or small. We have no objective which need clash with the peaceful aims of any other nation.

"2. We believe in the eventual return of sovereign rights and self-government to all peoples who have been deprived of them by force.

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"3. We shall approve no territorial changes in any friendly part of the world unless they accord with the freely expressed wishes of the people concerned.

"4. We believe that all peoples who are prepared for self-government should be permitted to choose their own form of government by their own freely expressed choice, without interference from any foreign source. That is true in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, as well as in the Western Hemisphere.

"5. By the combined and cooperative action of our war allies, we shall help the defeated enemy states establish peaceful democratic governments of their own free choice. And we shall try to attain a world in which Nazism, Fascism, and military aggression cannot exist.

"6. We shall refuse to recognize any government imposed upon any nation by the force of any foreign power. In some cases it may be impossible to prevent forceful imposition of such a government. But the United States will not recognize any such government.

"7. We believe that all nations should have the freedom of the seas and equal rights to the navigation of boundary rivers and waterways and of rivers and waterways which pass through more than one country.

"8. We believe that all states which are accepted in the society of nations should have access on equal terms to the trade and the raw materials of the world.

"9. We believe that the sovereign states of the Western Hemisphere, without interference from outside the Western Hemisphere, must work together as good neighbors in the solution of their common problems.

"10. We believe that full economic collaboration between all nations, great and small, is essential to the improvement of living conditions all over the world, and to the establishment of freedom from fear and freedom from want.

"11. We shall continue to strive to promote freedom of expression and freedom of religion throughout the peace-loving areas of the world.

"12. We are convinced that the preservation of peace between nations requires a United Nations Organization composed of all the peace-loving nations of the world who are willing jointly to use force if necessary to insure peace." \*

\* Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States (Harry S. Truman, April-December 1945), 433-434.



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Ho Chi Minh forwarded to the Secretary of State the D.R.V. Declaration of Independence, Bao Dai's abdication rescript, general DRV foreign policy declarations, and its expressed position on the war in South Vietnam. He cited the Atlantic Charter as the "foundation of future Vietnam" and the San Francisco Charter as eradicating colonial oppression. Ho appealed for "immediate interference" and submitted several requests -- the key one being that the United Nations should recognize the full independence of Vietnam. Again, in November, he made three points: (1) the French had ignored all treaties at the end of the war and attacked Saigon in September; (2) the Vietnamese people were willing to support the United Nations, but would fight any French troops coming into Vietnamese territory; and (3) any bloodshed would be the responsibility of the French. Two weeks later, Ho appealed to President Truman and UNRRA for assistance to combat starvation caused by flood, drought, and French conflict. Also in November, Ho wrote to the Secretary of State asking to establish cultural relations with the U.S. by sending fifty Vietnamese students to the U.S., and to complain of the absence of Vietnamese representation at the Washington Conference for the Far East. Prompted by Truman's appointment of General Marshall as special representative in China, early in 1946 Ho Chi Minh again appealed for direct intervention by the U.S. to provide an immediate solution of the Vietnamese issue. On 16 February 1946, a tone of irritation was introduced: Ho wrote once more to President Truman implying "complicity, or at least, the connivance of the Great Democracies" in the French aggression; but still Ho pleaded with the U.S. to take a "decisive step" in support of Vietnamese independence asking only what had been "graciously granted to the Philippines." Ho then addressed an urgent broadcast appeal to the U.S., China, Russia, and Great Britain for "interference" by the Big Four to stop the bloodshed and to bring the Indochina issue before the United Nations.

It became abundantly clear, however, that the U.S. would do nothing to aid the Viet Minh. Assuming the sincerity of Ho Chi Minh's appeals, the most opportune time for the U.S. to have intervened in Vietnam passed in autumn, 1945, and prospects for U.S. action dimmed as DRV negotiations with the French proceeded in February-March 1946. Paradoxically, it was the possibility of communist accession to power in France that both added to Ho's incentive to negotiate with the French, and stimulated stronger U.S. support for France. Ultimately, the U.S. was deterred from backing Viet Minh anti-colonialism (though the U.S. pressured France for concessions to Viet nationalism) because its interests seemed more directly engaged in shoring up the French as a key part of its assistance to European recovery. On the other hand, Ho Chi Minh continued to hope for a new France, breaking away from its old colonialist policies under a Socialist or Communist government.

Ho Chi Minh's correspondence with the U.S. ceased after the 6 March 1946 Accord with France, although Ho Chi Minh did visit the U.S. Embassy in Paris on 11 September 1946.

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Synopses

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September 29, 1945: Telegram from U.S. Embassy, Chungking, to Secretary of State, dated October 18, 1945. Summarizes letter from Ho Chi Minh to President of U.S., expressing sympathy at the death of Colonel Peter Dewey, O.S.S. Commander in Saigon. Enjoins President to provide advance notice of movements of American nationals, but expresses appreciation for "U.S. stand for international justice and peace." .....	C-69
October 17, 1945: Telegram, Ho Chi Minh to President Truman. Appeals for DRV membership on UN Advisory Commission for the Far East, citing Atlantic Charter to advance its claims to membership vice those of France.....	C-71
October 22, 1945: Letter, Ho Chi Minh to U.S. Secretary of State, calls for immediate interference by the UN. Appealing to the Atlantic Charter and the UN Charter, and warning of general warfare in Far East, Ho calls for UN action to interfere with France, including an "Inquiry Commission"..	C-80
October 23, 1945: U.S. Ambassador in Paris reports newspaper reports of radio appeal of Ho to President Truman and other western leaders, announcing plan to hold plebescite. French government announces it would not oppose in principle such a plebescite if Ho Chi Minh represents all of Indochina and not merely Viet Minh.....	C-75
November 1, 1945: Letter from Ho Chi Minh to James Byrnes, Secretary of State, proposing to send a delegation of 50 Viet youths to the U.S. to promote friendly cultural relations and to study at U.S. universities.....	C-90

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November 5, 1945: Despatch, Philip D. Sprouse, U.S. Consul, Kunming, to Secretary of State. Incloses 22 October letter of Ho, surveys situation in Vietnam based on reports of Colonel Nordlinger, USA, and reports Ho and Bao Dai attempt to visit Chiang Kai-shek.....	C-76
November 8, 1945: U.S. Embassy, Chungking summarizes Ho Chi Minh letter addressed to President Truman and Chiang Kai-shek underscoring French loss of sovereignty, DRV acquisition of same, and aggression by French to regain it. Asserts French bear onus of resuming war of aggression in Far East.....	C-84
November 23, 1945: Telegram from U.S. Embassy, Chungking, paraphrases letters from Ho Chi Minh to President Truman and Director General of UNRRA, describing famine in North Vietnam, and appealing for relief.....	C-87
November 26, 1945: Despatch from U.S. Embassy, Chungking, inclosing Ho's letter of 1 November; letter of 28 October from Ho to Chiang Kai-shek urging Chiang to stop the British-French-Japanese action in Cochinchina; and an undated telegram to the Secretary of State protesting that France did not have the right to speak for Vietnam in international councils, and appealing to all free nations of the world to stop conflict in South Vietnam.....	C-89
January 18, 1946: Telegram from U.S. Embassy, Chungking, dated 13 February 1946, paraphrasing letter from Ho to President Truman, dated 18 January 1946, reminding that peace is indivisible and requesting President's intervention for immediate resolution of Vietnam issue. Telegram describes identical letter to General Marshall, same date.....	C-93
February 16, 1946: Letter signed by Ho Chi Minh to President of the U.S. cites the principles supported by the U.S. before, during and after the war, and in the UN, to call for U.S. aid to Vietnam in the face of French aggression. Ho asks what has been granted the Philippines -- "like the Philippines our goal is full independence and full cooperation with the UNITED STATES." .....	C-95

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- February 18, 1946: Note from the DRV to Governments of China, USA, USSR, and Great Britain, calls attention to Vichy-French collaboration with Japan in Indochina, and to policies which led to famine among the Vietnamese. Again on March 9, 1945, the French acceded to the Japanese seizure of power. By contrast, the Vietnamese resistance had fought the Japanese all through the years, and in August, 1945, ousted Nippon's regime, and founded the DRV. The DRV is based on principles enunciated by Sun Yat Sen and President Truman. Impressive progress has been achieved by the DRV in North Vietnam, but in South Vietnam, French aggression has obtruded. DRV urgently appeals for interference by allies to halt the conflict, and the placing of the Indochina issue before the UN..... C-98
- February 27, 1946: Telegram from Assistant Chief of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State (Landon), to the Secretary of State, from Hanoi, received in Washington February 27. Summarizes state of negotiations between French (Sainteny) and DRV. Reports that Ho Chi Minh handed Landon two letters addressed to President of the U.S., asserting that Vietnamese will fight until UN intervenes in Vietnam. Requests U.S. support Vietnamese independence "according to Philippines example." ..... C-101
- September 11, 1946: Memorandum of conversation with Ho Chi Minh by the First Secretary, U.S. Embassy, Paris, dated September 12, 1946. Ho describes his O.S.S. contacts, denies having communist connections and indicates that he hoped to obtain aid from the United States. He refers specifically to economic aid, but hints at military and naval assistance, e.g., mentions the naval base at Cam Ranh Bay..... C-102

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OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

SECRET

22 August 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF STATE:

The OSS representative in Kunming has transmitted the following information concerning the French attitude toward the Indo-Chinese Provisional Government. The Provisional Government was the subject of our two memoranda of 21 August.

The French Government has decided to adopt a passive diplomatic attitude toward the reoccupation of Indo-China because of their inability to make an entry with a powerful show of arms. A committee of three has been appointed by the French Government in Paris, composed of the chief of the Kunming DGER [French Intelligence Service], the Minister of Colonies, and the Administrator General of Colonies. Its mission is to contact Annamite leaders and negotiate with them on terms favorable to the Indo-Chinese, according to Major Sainteny, who will represent the committee in Hanoi. The French policy will be one of liberal administration in the capacity of advisors to the Indo-Chinese Provisional Government, to be established by the Kuomintang Annamite and the Vietminh, which together form a committee of national liberation. (The Vietminh is a 100% Communist party, with a membership of approximately 20% of the active political native element. The Kuomintang Party comprises six minority parties and a score of independent ones.) The French Committee has been charged with the task of negotiating directly with Indo-Chinese leaders and deciding on the best modus operandi. It has full powers of signing treaties in the name of France. The committee will in turn report to Paris, which retains the prerogative of making minor amendments to the general agreement. Annamite leaders in Kunming and representatives of the Central Liberation Committee recently from Hanoi, have expressed a desire to bring Imgin [Annam?] in Indo-China under the status of an American protectorate, and are hoping that the US will intercede with the United Nations for the exclusion of the French, as well as Chinese, from the reoccupation of Indo-China.

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Well-informed French and Annamese sources state that the Central Committee has been negotiating with local Japanese military authorities for the purchase of guns and ammunition, with the intent of using them, should either the French or Chinese attempt to reoccupy their areas. The Indo-Chinese fear a Chinese reoccupation because they feel the Chinese will become squatters living off the land, pillaging, raping, and looting. The French concur in this opinion only in so far as to wish exclusive administrative rights for themselves. The leader of the Annamite Kuomintang Party in China and a direct representative of the Central Liberation Committee in Hanoi, made the following statement on 15 August:

"Should the French attempt to return to Indo-China with the intention of governing the country, and to act once more as oppressors, the Indo-Chinese people are prepared to fight to the end against any such reoccupation. On the other hand, if they came as friends to establish commerce, industry and without aspirations to governmental rule, they will be welcomed the same as any other foreign power. The Central Committee wishes to make known to the United States Government that the Indo-Chinese people first of all desire the independence of Indo-China, and are hoping that the United States, as a champion of democracy, will assist her in securing this independence in the following manner:

(1) Prohibiting, or not assisting the French to enter Indo-China; (2) keeping the Chinese under control, in order that looting and pillaging will be kept to a minimum; (3) sending technical advisors to assist the Indo-Chinese to exploit the resources of the land; and (4) developing those industries that Indo-China is capable of supporting.

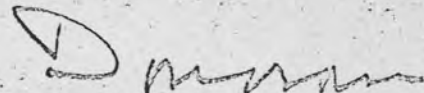
"In conclusion, the Indo-Chinese would like to be placed on the same status as the Philippines for an undetermined period."

The French representative in Kunming, Major Sainteny, is now receiving material aid from the Section Liaison Francaise--Extreme Orient (SLEEO) Calcutta in making arrangements and readying personnel for the re-entry into Indo-China. His group were prepared to leave on the morning of 17 August. However, on arrival

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at the airfield, they were confronted with Chinese and American military police posted about the plane, prohibiting them from leaving the airfield. In conversation later that day with Major Sainteny, he expressed the thought that the French had been betrayed by the Americans. He stated further that the Americans in China have right along been playing the Chinese game, although unwittingly. When questioned concerning his intentions from now on, he reluctantly stated there was nothing for the French to do but await instructions from Chungking. The French DGER in Kunming had infiltrated teams of men into Haiphong under the leadership of a Captain Blanchard. He has made contact with Lt. Col. Kamiya, former liaison officer between the Japanese military headquarters in Hanoi and Admiral Decoux' administration. Kamiya detained this team in Haiphong, confining their activities to transmitting messages concerning the surrender and meteorological data to the French headquarters in Kunming.

Reports from Kandy state that Col. Roos, Chief of the SLEEO in Calcutta, is now en route to Saigon to take part in the Japanese surrender on the staff of the British representatives. With Col. Roos is Col. Fay, formerly French Air Attache in Kunming, whose exact status is undetermined, but who is a member of Lord Mountbatten's staff.



William J. Donovan  
Director

SECRET

ACTION=CL,IFE

INFO:

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EC-1925-C  
This telegram must be  
closely paraphrased be-  
fore being communicated  
to anyone. (SECRET)

Chungking via War

Dated October 18, 1946

Rec'd 1 p.m.

Secretary of State

Washington

1820, October 18, 10 a.m.

There follows summary of letter dated at Hanoi  
September 29 addressed to President of US by Ho Chi Minh  
who signed as "President of Provisional Govt of Republic  
of Viet-Nam"; letter was delivered to US General Gallagher  
head of Chinese Combat Command Liaison Group with Chinese  
forces in North Indochina and forwarded to Embassy through  
US Army channels:

Saigon radio September 27 reported killing of US  
Colonel Peter Dewey in course of French instigated clash  
between Viet-Namense nationalists and French aggressors  
in Cochinchina. As Saigon is in hands of Franco-British  
forces report cannot be investigated now but we hope  
sincerely it is not true. But if correct incident may have  
been due to confusion in darkness or other unfortunate  
circumstances or may have been provoked by French or  
British.

SECRET



SECRET

-2- 1/1920, October 19, 10 a.m., from Chungking via War.

British. No matter what the case news moves us deeply and we will do utmost to search out culprits and punish them severely. Measures are being taken to prevent further such incidents. We assure you we are as profoundly affected by death of any American resident in this country as by that of dearest relatives.

We ask only of your representatives in this country to give us advance notice of movements of your nationals and to be more cautious in "trespassing" fighting areas. This will avoid accidents and aid in welcoming demonstrations. (Sent to Dept repeated to Paris)

I assure you of admiration and friendship we feel toward American people and its representatives here. That such friendly feelings have been exhibited not only to Americans themselves but also to impostors in American uniform is proof that US stand for international justice and peace is appreciated by entire Viet-Namese nation and "governing spheres".

I convey to you Mr. President and to American people expression of our great respect and admiration (END OF SUMMARY).

ROBERTSON

JU

SECRET

STANDARD FORM NO. 64

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

DATE: Nov. 15, 1945

TO : FE - Mr. Vincent

FROM : SEA - Mr. Moffat

SUBJECT: Telegram to President Truman from  
Ho Chi Minh.

SEA considers that no action should be taken on the attached telegram from Ho Chi Minh to the President requesting membership of the so-called Viet-Nam Republic on the Far Eastern Advisory Commission.

*Allen*

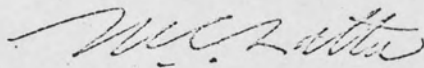
*30/2 (go) 5/13*  
NOV 16 1945

SEA:ALMoffat:oc

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

October 17, 1945

Respectfully referred to the  
Secretary of State.



M. C. LAETA  
Executive Clerk

TELEGRAM

The White House  
Washington

Office of the  
Director  
OCT 17 1945  
NOV 3 1945  
Department of State

T.N. RA. 349- VIA RCA

HANOI, VIA KUNMING, OCTOBER 17, 1945

M. HO CHI MINH PRESIDENT OF THE PROVISIONAL OF VIETNAM DEMOCRATIC  
REPUBLIC TO PRESIDENT TRUMAN, WASHINGTON.

ESTABLISHMENT OF ADVISORY COMMISSION FOR THE FAR EAST IS HEARTILY  
WELCOME BY VIETNAMESE PEOPLE IN PRINCIPLE STOP. TAKING INTO CONSIDER-  
TION 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 COLON

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 GROUNDED  
LESS EITHER DE JURE OR DE FACTO. STOP. DE JURE NO ALLEGIANCE EXISTS  
ANY MORE BETWEEN FRANCE AND VIETNAM COLON BAODAI ABOLISHED TREATIES  
OF 1884 AND 1863 COMMA BAODAI VOLUNTARILY ABDICATED TO HAND OVER  
GOVERNMENT TO DEMOCRATIC REPUBLICAN GOVERNMENT COMMA PROVISIONAL  
GOVERNMENT RECTORATED ABOLISHMENT OF TREATIES OF 1884 AND 1863 STOP  
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

TELEGRAM

The White House  
Washington

SECOND FRANCE IS NOT ENTITLED BECAUSE SHE HAD IGNOMINIOUSLY  
SOLD INDO CHINA TO JAPAN AND BETRAYED THE ALLIES THIRD VIETNAM  
IS QUALIFIED BY ATLANTIC CHARTER AND SUBSEQUENT PEACE AGREEMENT  
AND BY HER GOODWILL AND HER UNFLINCHING STAND FOR DEMOCRACY TO  
BE REPRESENTED AT THE ADVISORY COMMISSION. STOP WE ARE CONVINCED  
THAT VIETNAM AT COMMISSION WILL BE ABLE TO BRING EFFECTIVE CONTRI-  
BUTION TO SOLUTION OF PENDING PROBLEMS IN FAR EAST WHEREAS HER  
ABSENCE WOULD BRING FORTH UNSTABILITY AND TEMPORARY CHARACTER TO  
SOLUTIONS OTHERWISE REACH. THEREFORE WE EXPRESS EARNEST REQUEST  
TO TAKE PART IN ADVISORY COMMISSION FOR FAR EAST. STOP. 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.

RESPECTFULLY,

HOCUIMINS.

RECD/1120AM

DEPARTMENT  
OF  
STATE

INCOMING  
TELEGRAM

DIVISION OF  
CENTRAL SERVICES  
TELEGRAPH SECTION

ACTION: NOE

INFO: EP-1720-G

S This telegram must be  
U paraphrased before being  
C communicated to anyone  
ESC other than a Government  
EUR-3 Agency. (RESTRICTED)

Paris

Dated Oct. 23, 1945.

Rec'd 12:48 a.m., 24th.

FE  
DC/L-C

SFD-2 Secretary of State,

FC-14

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SPA

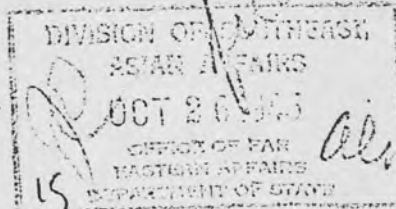
SA

SA/GN

SA/M-2

Washington.

6196, Oct. 23, 7 p.m.



Number of papers today carry similar article

reporting Ho Chin Minh, president of Viet Minh, has  
appealed over Hanoi radio to President Truman, Prime

Minister Attlee and General de Gaulle and announced  
"Annamite Nationalist Govt" intends to hold plebiscite  
within two months to give constitution to Indo-China.

Article continues "official French circles" re-  
mark it does not seem likely Viet Minh will be able  
to hold such plebiscite. However, French Govt is not  
opposed in principle to such plebiscite if Ho Chin Minh  
represents entire population of Indo-China and not  
merely Viet Minh Party.

Only contacts which French authorities have had  
with Viet Minh, concludes article, have been undertaken  
solely to stop bloodshed and it would be inexact to  
speak of real negotiations.

CAFFERY

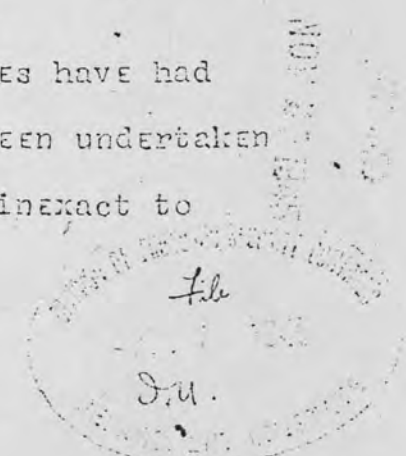
JMS

RESTRICTED

C-75

*Handwritten:* 10/25/45  
715 - K...

*Vertical stamp:* NOV 1 1945



No. 38  
SECRET

AMERICAN CONSULATE GENERAL  
Kunming, China, October 24, 1945.

Subject: Letters from Annamite Leaders;  
Situation in Indochina.

188A  
110E

JWW

The Honorable  
The Secretary of State,  
Washington, D. C.

DIVISION OF SOUTHEAST  
ASIAN AFFAIRS  
NOV 2 1945  
OFFICE OF THE  
ASIAN AFFAIRS  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

100  
288  
CPB  
11/5/45

Nov 26, 45

772

Sir:

Referring to the Consulate General's despatch No. 21 of September 27, 1945, in regard to the situation in Indochina, I have the honor to enclose: (a) copy of a letter addressed by HO Chi Minh, President of the "Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam", to the Secretary of State under date of October 22, 1945; (b) translation of a letter dated October 22, 1945, addressed by HSIAO Wen, Division of Overseas Affairs official serving with the Chinese Occupation Forces in Indochina, to General CHEN Cheng, Chinese Minister of War; and (c) translation of a letter dated October 22, 1945, addressed by Ho Chi Minh (Wade romanization written HU Chih-ming) and YUAN Yung-jui (Annamite ex-Emperor Pao Tai) to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.

The originals of these messages were brought to Kunming on October 24 by two United States Army officers who have been serving in the Hanoi area since the latter part of August as members of a G-5 Team for prisoner of war rescue work. Colonel Stephen Nordlinger, Commanding Officer of the Team, informs me that he is carrying with him to Washington the original of the letter to the Secretary of State for appropriate delivery upon his arrival there. The originals of the letters to General Chen Cheng and to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in a sealed envelope addressed by the senders to General Cheng are being forwarded by this office to the Embassy at Chungking for delivery through United States Army channels. The officers who brought these messages to Kunming were not told by Ho Chi Minh of the contents thereof and the information contained in the letters to General Cheng and the Generalissimo will ostensibly be known only to the Chinese authorities. The Consulate General was requested to make a translation of the letters in as much as it was believed that they might contain information of a military nature of concern to the United States Army authorities.

Summary of enclosures: In his letter to the Secretary of State, Ho Chi Minh states that he is forwarding various documents regarding the present situation in Indochina. (These documents are being forwarded as accompaniments to a separate despatch.) He refers to French oppression of the Annamites and the desire of the Annamites for realiza-

Oct 24, 1945

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
NOV 7 - 1945

10-10-1945

- 2 -

tion of the principles of the Atlantic and San Francisco Charters. He blames the French for the present disturbances in Indochina and asks for "immediate interference" by the United Nations lest the situation result in the spread of conflict throughout the Far East. He makes four requests: (1) The situation should be discussed at the first meeting of the Far Eastern Advisory Commission; (2) Annamite delegates should be allowed to present the views of the "Vietnamese Government"; (3) an investigation committee should be sent to Indochina; and (4) the United Nations should recognize Annamite independence.

The Chinese Overseas Affairs official states that Ho Chi Minh and Pao Tai desire to proceed secretly to Chungking to talk with the Generalissimo and asks that a plane be sent to Indochina for that purpose. In the letter from the Annamite leaders to the Generalissimo, they express their desire to proceed to Chungking to pay their respects to him and ask for a reply. End of Summary.

The United States Army officers describe conditions in Indochina as follows:

The situation is complicated by the food problem, aggravated by the failure of the Chinese Occupation Forces to bring food supplies with them. There are estimated to be approximately 100,000 Chinese troops in Indochina at present and they have taken over large rice stocks in the Haiphong area which otherwise might have been used to relieve the suffering. The French have expressed their willingness to transport rice from Saigon, which they wish to give to dealers in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas for sale, as the most effective method of distribution. Ho Chi Minh is willing to permit the transport of such rice and has agreed to see to its distribution as a gift of the French people but not as a gift from the French Government. Floods have caused a fifty percent loss in crops in the north while in Saigon there are large excess stocks of rice. The Chinese are now endeavoring to arrange for the transport of rice overland from Saigon but that will, of course, be a slow process, given the present condition of communications facilities.

The Annamites have been guilty of excesses, having killed 20 to 30 French women and children held as hostages at Saigon and having taken many other French hostages in the Hanoi-Haiphong and Vinh-Hue areas. In Hanoi Annamite armed squads are continually searching French homes for hidden weapons and the sight of Frenchmen standing against the wall outside their homes under guard by armed Annamites while others search the house is a frequent one.

Americans are extremely popular with the Annamites, who do everything possible to convince them of the justice of their cause. There are still evidences of pro-Vichy sentiment in the Hanoi area and those French who have not been held prisoner in the citadel are apt to be suspect to be those who played a part in the resistance movement.



- 3 -

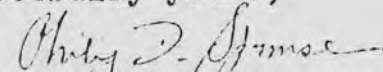
The reason for the failure of the French representative, General Alessandri, to participate in the Japanese surrender ceremonies at Hanoi was the display of the Annamites of all United Nations flags except that of the French at the place of the ceremony. The Annamites refused to display the French flag on the grounds that the French had collaborated with the Japanese in Indochina and the Chinese authorities supported the Annamites in the contention. This feeling against the French was seen in monster mass meetings held frequently in Hanoi, the Annamites having taken over all administration buildings and public utilities in that area. They placarded the city with signs and slogans, such as those reading "Kill the French" - some of them in English for the eyes of Americans.

The French can, of course, return to Indochina but it will be a mistake unless they are prepared to reenter in strength sufficient to overpower the Annamite resistance in short order. If the French attempt to return to Indochina without overwhelming forces and impressive air support, the struggle will be long and bloody. The Annamites have only light arms - rifles, carbines and hand grenades - and could not stand up against heavy weapons. These have been provided them by the Americans as well as by the Japanese, the American arms having been given for use against the Japanese prior to the latter's surrender. Trouble at present is confined largely to the Hanoi-Haiphong and Vinh-Hue areas with the Saigon area somewhat better because of the presence of large numbers of British troops. Laos and Cambodia are practically free of Annamite influence.

The Chinese occupation forces have been circumspect and have compelled the Annamites in some cases, at American suggestion, to release French political prisoners. They have given no arms to the Annamites, being interested in obtaining as many as possible for themselves. The Chinese have, however, now brought in their own Annamite puppet, one Ngu Yen Hai Tan, who is a member of the Annamite Revolutionary League sponsored by the Kuomintang in China. He is said to have been an exile in China for the past twenty-five years. He is associated with the independence movement, as is his party, but has no place in the Government.

Colonel Nordlinger, the source of most of the foregoing information, states that he is proceeding to Washington shortly and that he will call at the Department in connection with the delivery of Ho Chi Minh's letter to the Secretary of State.

Respectfully yours,

  
Philip D. Sprouse  
American Consul

Enclosures:

- 4 -

Enclosures: 3

1. Letter from Ho Chi Minh to the Secretary of State, October 22, 1945.
2. Translation of Letter from Hsiao Wen to General Chen Cheng, October 22, 1945.
3. Translation of Letter from Ho Chi Minh and Pao Tai to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, October 22, 1945.

Original and hectograph to the Department.  
Copy to Embassy, Chungking.

800 PDSprouse/pds

COPY 1  
PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THE DEMOCRATIC  
REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM

HANOI, October 22, 1945.

*to Mr. Acheson  
to Sec of State*

The Minister of Foreign Affairs  
to the SECRETARY OF STATE DEPARTMENT,  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

EXCELLENCY,

The situation in South Vietnam has reached its critical stage, and calls for immediate interference on the part of the United Nations. I wish by the present letter to bring your Excellency some more light on the case of Vietnam which has come for the last three weeks into the international limelight.

First of all, I beg to forward to your Government a few documentary data, among which our Declaration of Independence, the Imperial Rescript of Ex-Emperor BAO DAI on the occasion of his abdication, the declaration of our Government concerning its general foreign policy and a note defining our position towards the South Vietnam incident.

As these documents will show your Excellency, the Vietnamese people has known during the last few years an evolution which naturally brings the Vietnamese nation to its present situation. After 80 years of French oppression and unsuccessful though obstinate Vietnamese resistance, we at last saw France defeated in Europe, then her betrayal of the Allies successively on behalf of Germany and of Japan. Though the odds were at that time against the Allies, the Vietnamese, leaving aside all differences in political opinion, united in the Vietminh League and started on a ruthless fight against the Japanese. Meanwhile, the Atlantic Charter was concluded, defining the war aims of the Allies and laying the foundation of peace-work. The noble principles of international justice and equality of status laid down in that charter strongly appealed to the Vietnamese and contributed in making of the Vietminh resistance in the war zone a nation-wide anti-Japanese movement which found a powerful echo in the democratic aspirations of the people. The Atlantic Charter was looked upon as the foundation of future Vietnam. A nation-building program was drafted which was later found in keeping with San Francisco Charter and which has been fully carried out those last years: continuous fight against the Japanese bringing about the recovery of national independence on August 19th, voluntary abdication of Ex-Emperor Baodai, establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, assistance given to the Allies Nations in the disarmament of the Japanese, appointment of a provisional Government whose mission was to carry out the Atlantic ~~Charter~~ and San Francisco Charters and have them carried out by other nations.

As a matter of fact, the carrying out of the Atlantic and San Francisco Charters implies the eradication of imperialism and all forms of colonial oppression. This was unfortunately contrary to the interests of some Frenchmen, and

- 2 -

France, to whom the colonists have long concealed the truth on Indochina, instead of entering into peaceable negotiations, resorted to an aggressive invasion, with all the means at the command of a modern nation. Moreover, having persuaded the British that the Vietnamese are wishing for a return of the French rule, they obtained, first from the British command in Southeast Asia, then from London, a tacit recognition of their sovereignty and administrative responsibility as far as South Vietnam is concerned. The British gave to understand that they had agreed to this on the ground that the reestablishment of French administration and, consequently, of Franco-Vietnamese collaboration would help them to speed up the demobilization and the disarmament of the Japanese. But subsequent events will prove the fallacy of the argument. The whole Vietnamese nation rose up as one man against French aggression. The first street-sniping which was launched by the French in the small hours of September 23rd soon developed into real and organized warfare in which losses are heavy on both sides. The bringing in of French important reinforcements on board of the most powerful of their remaining warships will extend the war zone further. As murderous fighting is still going on in Indonesia, and as savage acts on the part of Frenchmen are reported every day, we may expect the flaring up of a general conflagration in the Far-East.

As it is, the situation in South Vietnam calls for immediate interference. The establishment of the Consultative Commission for the Far-East has been enthusiastically welcomed here as the first effective step towards an equitable settlement of the pending problems. The people of Vietnam, which only asks for full independence and for the respect of truth and justice, puts before your Excellency our following desiderata:

1o - the South Vietnam incident should be discussed at the first meeting of the Consultative Commission for the Far-East;

2o - Vietnamese delegates should be admitted to state the views of the Vietnamese Government;

3o - An Inquiry Commission should be sent to South Vietnam;

4o - the full independence of Vietnam should be recognized by the United Nations.

I avail myself of this opportunity to send your Excellency my best wishes.

Respectfully,

President HO CHI MINH

Enclosure no. 2 to despatch no. 39  
dated October 24, 1945 from Kunning

TRANSLATION

Division of Overseas Affairs,  
First Front Army,  
Hanoi, October 22, 1945.

The Honorable  
Minister Ch'en.

Sir:

I have the honor to report that all the officials and people as well as the various parties and factions throughout Indochina have been unanimously united. I have been approached by Mr. HU Chih-ming, Chairman of the Provisional Government of Indochina, and Mr. YUAN Yung-jui, who was formerly Emperor Pao Ta of Annam, with the request that arrangements be made whereby they may be secretly conducted to Chungking to call on you and to be introduced to His Excellency Chairman Chiang at an interview.

With your approval, I respectfully request that an airplane be sent to Indochina in order that I may accompany Messrs. Hu and Yuan on their trip to Chungking. The joint letter from Messrs. Hu and Yuan is transmitted herewith. Your instructions are requested for my guidance in the premises.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

(sealed) HSIAO WEN

pds

enclosure no. 3 to despatch no.  
33 dated October 24, 1945  
from Kuning

TRANSLATION.

Hanoi, October 22, 1945.

His Excellency  
Chairman Chiang Kai-shek,  
Care of Minister Chen.

Excellency:

We have the honor to state that we - HU Chih-ming,  
Chairman of the Provisional Government of the Democratic  
Republic of Indochina, and High Advisor YUAN Yung-jui  
(former Emperor Fao Ta) - desire to proceed to Chungking  
to pay our respects to your Excellency and to call on  
Minister Ch'en. If this meets with your approval, we  
shall appreciate your being good enough to favor us with  
a reply.

We have the honor to be, Your Excellency,

Your obedient servants,

HU CHIH-MING  
YUAN YUNG-JUI

pds

132

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

INCOMING TELEGRAM

DIVISION OF CENTRAL SERVICES TELEGRAPH SECTION

NOV 10 1945  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ACTION: WE, CA  
INFO:  
S  
U  
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SEA  
RCS-1835-K  
This telegram must be closely paraphrased before being communicated to anyone. (SECRET)

Chungking via Navy  
Dated November 8, 1945  
Rec'd 9:15 p.m., 9th

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

DIVISION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN AFFAIRS  
NOV 13 1945  
OFFICE OF FAR EASTERN AFFAIRS  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

1948, November 8, 6 p.m.

There follows substance of letter addressed to President Truman by Ho-Chi-Minh who signs as "President of Provisional Government of Republic of Viet-Nam": Letter was given to General Gallagher and forwarded to Embassy through U.S. Army channels: (Embassy's 1820 October 18 to Department repeated to Paris).

I wish to give following information concerning situation of Viet-Nam:

(1) When Japanese came to Indo-China from September 1940 to September 1941 France, by protocol July 1941 and secret military pact December 8, 1941, gave up sovereignty and took position opposed to Allies. On Japanese drive March 9, 1945 French either fled or surrendered

SECRET

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C-84

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DC/h

NOV 11 1945  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

NOV 21 1945  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

8 Nov 46

133

File Copy

183195

ACTION: WE, CA

INFO:

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MC-1948 -P CORRECTED PAGE TWO AND THREE  
This telegram must be  
closely paraphrased be-  
fore being communicated  
to anyone. (SECRET)

*183195*  
*11/10/48*

~~#2~~ #1948, November 8, 6 p.m. from Chungking, via Navy  
surrendered to Japanese contrary to pledges contained  
in protective treaties March 1874 and June 1884, thus  
breaking all legal and administrative ties with people  
of Indo-China. Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam was  
set up August 19, 1945 after independence of entire  
country was wrested from Japanese. After Japanese  
surrender, while Viet-Nam Provisional Government in  
capacity of an independent Government was carrying  
out a building-up program in conformity with Atlantic  
and San Francisco Charters, French, ignoring del-  
iberately all peace treaties concluded by United  
Nations at end of World War II, attacked us treacher-  
ously in Naigon, September 23, and are planning a war  
of aggression against Viet-Nam. (Sent to Department  
repeated to Paris).

(2) People of Viet-Nam are willing cooperate with  
United Nations in erection of lasting world peace and,  
having suffered so severely under direct domination of  
French and much more from bargain made by French with  
Japan. in.

SECRET

*Box 648-11*  
*Confidential File*



-3- #1948, November 8, 6 p.m. from Chungking via Navy

Japan in 1941, are determined never to permit French to return to Indo China. If French troops coming either from China where they fled during Japanese occupation of Indo-China or from other places put foot on any part of Viet-Nameese territory the people of Viet-Nam are determined to fight them under any circumstances.

(3) If, therefore, disorder, bloodshed or general conflagration due to causes mentioned above in paragraph (2) break out in Far Eastern Asia entire responsibility must be imputed to French. (End substance letter).

Identical message from Ho-Chi-Min addressed to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek has also been received by same army channels. Embassy will not deliver message to Gimo unless so directed by Department.

JMS

ROBERTSON



182

SECRET

-2- #2026, Nov 23, 4 p.m., from Chungking via Army

increases number of persons who must be fed with stocks already not sufficient. Also transport of rice from Cochinchina is made impossible by conflict provoked by French. Many people are starving and casualties increase every day. Everything possible has been done under these circumstances by Provisional Government of Vietnam Republic. Unless great world powers and international relief organizations bring us immediate assistance we face imminent catastrophe. I earnestly appeal to Your Excellency, therefore, for any available assistance. I request your Excellency to accept my heartfelt and anticipated thanks in name of my people.

ROBERTSON

WFS

SECRET

Nov 26, 1945

THE FOREIGN SERVICE  
RECEIVED OF THE  
DIVISION OF  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DEC 15 1945  
71K8

NOV DEC 11 1945  
Chungking, November 26, 1945

RECORDS SECTION  
NOV 27 1945  
67B  
NOV 15 1945

CONFIDENTIAL

No. 890

Subject: Transmittal of copies of communications from the "Provisional Government of the Republic of Vietnam".

The Charge d'Affaires a.i. has the honor to refer to recent telegrams from the Embassy regarding Indochina and to transmit copies of three communications from President Ho Chi-minh of the "Provisional Government of the Republic of Vietnam". These communications were delivered to General Gallagher, United States Army, head of the Chinese Combat Liaison Group with the Chinese forces in North Indochina, and forwarded to the Embassy through United States Army channels.

The communication for Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek will not be delivered to him by the Embassy unless so instructed by the Department.

Enclosures: *att. L.*

1. Copy of letter from President Ho Chi-minh, Vietnam Democratic Republic to Secretary of State dated November 1, 1945.
2. Copy of telegram to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek dated October 28, 1945.
3. Copy of telegram to Secretary of State, undated.

Original and hectograph to the Department.  
Copy for Embassy, Paris, through Department

JAN 5 - 1946

RLSmyth:cam  
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FEB 7 1946

OSIG. 01/11-2645

OS/VJ

Enclosure No. 1 to despatch no. 890 dated November 26, 1945  
from Embassy, Chungking, China

Hanoi 1st of November 1945

President Ho Chi Minh of Provisional Government of Viet-Nam  
Democratic Republic

to His Excellency James Byrnes  
Secretary of State Department of the United States of America  
Washington, D.C.

Excellency,

On behalf of the Vietnam cultural Association, I beg to express  
the desire of this Association to send to the United States of  
America a delegation of about fifty Vietnam youths with a view  
to establishing friendly cultural relations with the American  
youth on the one hand, and carrying on further studies in  
Engineering, Agriculture as well as other lines of special-  
isation on the other.

The desire which I am conveying to your Excellency has been  
expressed to me by all the Vietnam Engineers, Lawyers, Pro-  
fessors, as well as other representatives of our intelligentsia  
whom I have come across.

They have been all these years keenly interested in things  
American and earnestly desirous to get into touch with the  
American people whose fine stand for the noble ideals of  
international Justice and Humanity, and whose modern technical  
achievements have so strongly appealed to them.

I sincerely wish that this plan would be favored by your  
approbation and assistance and avail myself of this opportunity  
to express to your Excellency my best wishes.

President Ho-CHI-MINH

(signed) Ho Chi Minh

*Ho Chi Minh  
to  
Sec of State  
1 Nov, '45*

Enclosure No. 2 to despatch no. 890 dated November 26, 1945  
from Embassy, Chungking.

TELEGRAM

Hanoi October 28th 1945

HOCHUINH President of PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT of VIETNAM  
REPUBLIC

to Marshall CHIANG KAI SHEK Republic of CHINA

In the name of the Provisional Government of Vietnam  
Republic we emphatically protest against use of Japanese  
troops by British Indian army under command of General  
Gracey and by French army under command of General Leclerc  
in the repression of Vietnamese national liberation movement  
in South Indochina stop

Under pretence of disarming the Japanese Generals  
Gracey and Leclerc dispersed Japanese troops throughout  
South Vietnam provinces as vanguard to British Indian  
and French troops with view to reestablishing French  
domination over Indochina stop.

The Vietnamese people having ruthlessly fought against  
Japanese fascism and having just established democratic  
regime throughout its country feels greatest indignation  
in presence of such unjustifiable behaviour on the part of  
British and French stop

Therefore we strongly appeal to and eagerly request your  
Excellency to

primo issue order to stop massacre of a people  
defending its legitimate rights according to principles  
laid down in Atlantic and San Francisco charters

secundo recognize full independence of Vietnam  
Republic final stop

Respectfully

HQ CHI MINH

*H3*  
Enclosure to despatch no. 820, dated November 26, 1945 from  
Embassy, Chungking.

T E L E G R A M

*Hu Chi Minh  
to  
State  
Sec 1*

HochMinh President Provisional Government Vietnam Republic  
to His Excellency the Secretary of State Department Washington  
D.C.

On occasion of inauguration Washington Conference for the  
Far East we regret absence of Vietnamese delegation Stop Once  
again, we deny France every right to speak on behalf of Viet-  
namese people Stop France under cover of British-Indian and  
Japanese troops having perpetrated an aggression on Vietnamese  
Republic in order to impose her domination has deliberately  
violated all principles proclaimed in Atlantic and San Fran-  
cisco Charters Stop Vietnamese fighting for more than a  
month despite bloody opposition of Anglo-Indian French and  
Japanese Troops has proclaimed their will to live free and  
independent under democratic construction Stop The Vietnamese  
people expresses sincere hope that all free nations in world  
comma carrying out high ideal of generosity and humanity  
expressed in President Truman's speech comma recognise  
independence of Vietnam republic and put a stop to merderous  
conflict in South Vietnam Stop Respectfully HochiMinh

C-O-P-Y

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Incoming Telegram

PEM-P  
Paraphrase before communicating to anyone.

4936

Chungking via War

Dated February 13, 1946

SECRET

Rec'd 6:18 a.m., 14th

Secretary of State,

Washington.

281, Feb 13, 10 a.m.

There follows substance of letter dated Jan 18, 1946 addressed to President Truman by Ho Chi-Minh just received by Embassy through US Army channels: he extends congratulations to President on occasion of opening of first Assembly of United Nations in London, and on efforts of American Govt to maintain peace and security throughout world.

EMBTEL 1948 Nov 8, 6 p.m.

Since peace is indivisible and Far East is receiving particular consideration by appointment of General Marshall as Special Representative in China, he believes it his duty to inform President of developments in Indochina and consequences for world security of French aggression.

Sent Dept as 281 repeated Paris as 1.

In 1941 Vietnam rose up to oppose Japanese Fascism and sided with Allies. After Japan surrendered a provisional government was set up to eradicate Fascism in Vietnam and restore order. Supported by whole nation, it carried out a democratic program, and restored order and discipline. Under difficult circumstances general elections for national Congress were held on Jan 6, 1946. Ninety percent of the nine million electors voted. French colonialists on contrary surrendered to Japan in Sept 1941 and for four years cooperation with Japanese against the Allies and in oppression of Vietnam. By a second surrender March 9, 1945, five months before Japanese defeat, French lost all right and control in Indochina.

French attacked population of Saigon on Sept 23, 1945 while Vietnam Democratic Republic was endeavoring to carry out reconstruction program. It was followed by systematic destruction and murderous warfare. Each day brings new reports of looting, violence, assassination of civilians, and indiscriminate bombing of non-strategical places by military planes. It is French intention to invade entire country and reestablish their domination.

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C-O-P-Y  
SECRET

#281, Feb 13, 10 a.m., from Chungking via War

After "offer of interference (intervention?)" made by Mr. John Carter Vincent, people of Vietnam enthusiastically welcomed President Truman's address of October 28, 1945 in which he set forth the principles of self-determination and equality of status laid down in Atlantic and San Francisco Charters. Since then, French have greatly increased their fighting forces with result that millions will suffer, thousands will die and invaluable properties will be destroyed unless United States intervenes to stop bloodshed and unlawful aggression.

On behalf of people and Govt of Indochina, he requests President's intervention for an immediate solution of Vietnamese issue. People of Vietnam earnestly hope that the great American Republic will help them achieve full independence and support them in their reconstruction work.

Thus, with assistance of China and United States, in capital and technique, Vietnam Republic will be able to contribute her share to building up world peace and prosperity.

Another letter was received addressed to General Marshall which is identical with one addressed to President, except that opening paragraph extends Ho Chi-Minh's congratulations to General Marshall on his appointment to China and expressed conviction that an understanding of real situation in Vietnam can make some small contribution to task in China which confronts him.

SMITH

Shown to WO 8:45 p.m. Feb 14.

WTD

SECRET

C-O-P-Y

BỘ NGOẠI-GIAO

VIỆT-NAM DÂN-CHỦ CỘNG-HÒA  
ĐỘC-LẬP - TỰ-DO - HẠNH-PHÚC

Số

*Ho Chi Minh  
to HST.*

HANOI FEBRUARY 16 1946

President HO CHI MINH,  
Provisional Government of  
VIETNAM DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC,  
HANOI

To the PRESIDENT  
of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

DEAR MR PRESIDENT ,

I avail myself of this opportunity to thank you and the people of United States for the interest shown by your representatives at the United Nations Organization in favour of the dependent peoples.

Our VIETNAM people, as early as 1941, stood by the Allies' side and fought against the Japanese and their associates, the French colonialists.

From 1941 to 1945 we fought bitterly, sustained by the patriotism of our fellow-countrymen and by the promises made by the Allies at YALTA, SAN FRANCISCO and POSIDAN.

When the Japanese were defeated in August 1945, the whole Vietnam territory was united under a Provisional Republican Government which immediately set out to work. In five months, peace and order were restored, a democratic republic was established on legal bases, and adequate help was given to the Allies in the carrying out of their disarmament mission.

But the French colonialists, who had betrayed in war-time both the Allies and the Vietnamese, have come back and are waging on us a murderous and pitiless war in order to reestablish their domination. Their invasion has extended to South Vietnam and is menacing us in North Vietnam. It would take volumes to give even an abbreviated report of the crimes and assassinations

NGOẠI-GIAO

VIỆT-NAM DÂN-CHỦ CỘNG-HÒA  
ĐỘC-LẬP -- TỰ-DO -- HẠNH-PHÚC

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- 2 -

they are committing every day in the fighting area.

This aggression is contrary to all principles of international law and to the pledges made by the Allies during the world war. It is a challenge to the noble attitude shown before, during and after the war by the United States Government and People. It violently contrasts with the firm stand you have taken in your twelve point declaration, and with the idealistic loftiness and generosity expressed by your delegates to the United Nations Assembly, MR BYRNES, SIEBTINIUS and J.F. DILLIS.

The French aggression on a peace-loving people is a direct menace to world security. It implies the complicity, or at least, the connivance of the Great Democracies. The United Nations ought to keep their words. They ought to interfere to stop this unjust war, and to show that they mean to carry out in peace-time the principles for which they fought in war-time.

Our Vietnam people, after so many years of spoliation and devastation, is just beginning its building-up work. It needs security and freedom, first to achieve internal prosperity and welfare, and later to bring its small contribution to world-reconstruction.

These security and freedom can only be guaranteed by our independence from any colonial power, and our free cooperation with all other powers. It is with this firm conviction that we request of the United States as guardians and champions of World Justice to take a decisive step in support of our independence.

That we ask has been graciously granted to the Philippines.

NGOẠI-GIAO

VIỆT-NAM DÂN-CHỦ CỘNG-HÒA  
ĐỘC-LẬP - TỰ-DO - HẠNH-PHÚC

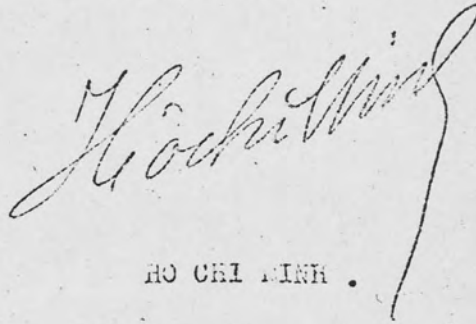
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- 5 -

Like the Philippines our goal is full independence and full cooperation with the UNITED STATES. We will do our best to make this independence and cooperation profitable to the whole world.

I am, Dear Mr PRESIDENT,

Respectfully Yours.



HO CHI MINH .

C-O-P-Y

Viet-Nam Dan Chu Cong Hoa

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

Chinh Phu Lam Thoi

BO NGOAI GIAO

NOTE

to the Governments of CHINA, UNITED STATES OF  
AMERICA, UNION OF SOCIALIST SOVIETIC REPUBLICS  
and GREAT-BRITAIN.

I.- In 1940, the French in Indochina betrayed the Allies. They deliberately opened the doors of Indochina to the Japanese troops, signed with the latter a military, political and economical pact. The Nippo-French cooperation policy, promoted and carried out with conviction and industry by JEAN DECOUX, former Governor-General of Indochina, was directed against the democratic movements inside Indochina and the Allied Nations outside. In fact the French put at the disposal of the Japanese forces the strategic bases, the economic and financial resources of Indochina. The technical services, especially the Indochinese Intelligence Service supplied the Japanese with precious informations. The French airfields of GIAIA, TAYSONNHAT and others were handed over to the Japanese Air Forces, new metallated tracts were created with the collaboration of French technicians at TRAI CUT, SONIA, PHUTHO, BACGIANG, PHANHHOA, PHUCTHO, PHUCYEN, VINHYEN. French colonialis launched violent propaganda campaigns against the Allies, and personal instructions were given by Governor-General Decoux to the I.P.P. (Information, Press, Propaganda Service) to that effect. The French administration requisitioned considerable stocks of rice, thus starving a population of 20 million inhabitants among whom 2,000,000 died of famine and hardships, in the course of five months (from January to May 1945), all this to feed the Japanese army in their Western and Southern operations.

In the meanwhile, the Vietnamese nationalist parties made repeated appeals to the French for a joint action against the Japanese. These appeals were ignored by the French Government.

On March 9, 1945, the French surrendered to the Japanese, after a sham fight which did not last a couple of days. Stocks of arms, ammunitions, fortifications, airfields, millions of liters of oil were handed over to the Japanese. This extraordinary carelessness denoted, if not complicity, at least an obvious goodwill on the part of the French. Thus, twice in the course of five years, the French have willingly helped the fascists in their fight against the democracies. Twice the French have willingly handed over to the Japanese capital strategic, economical and technical advantages, for the prosecution of the Pacific Battle.

II.- In August 1945, the Japanese surrendered to the Allies. The popular forces of Vietnam which, since 1940, had made incessant attacks on the Japanese forces, and which had, in 1944, succeeded in creating a "Free Zone" in Northern Indochina, went down to conquer the capital-city and the governing rule. The population, fired with democratic aspirations

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and spirit, enthusiastically welcomed them and manifested their desire to maintain their unity for the grandeur of the Fatherland once lost and now found again. On September 2, 1945, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was solemnly proclaimed. Twice, first through Emperor Bao-Dai of the NGUYEN Dynasty, then, through the solemn proclamation of the new Government on Independence Day, the new State abrogated all the treaties formerly forced upon us by the French victors. The new Republic of Vietnam, thus legally instituted, is in the reconstruction of the world a factor of peace and progress. She is entitled for her safeguard to refer to the most sacred principles of SAN FRANCISCO and ATLANTIC Charters. She is based on and draws her strength from, the first of SUN YAT SEN's Three Principles and the second, fourth, sixth points of President TRUMAN's twelve-point declaration.

III.- But, on September 23, 1945, the French troops attacked Saigon, starting an invasion which is now in its fifth month. That invasion is menacing North Vietnam and French troops have begun to filter through our Chinese frontier. That aggression, carried on by an experienced and numerous army, fully equipped with the most recent inventions of modern warfare, has brought about the destruction of our towns and villages, the assassination of our civilian population, the starving of a great part of our country. Untold atrocities have been committed, not as reprisals upon our guerrillas troops, but on women and children and unarmed old people. These atrocities are beyond imagination and beyond words, and remind one of the darkest ages: assault on the sanitary formations, on Red Cross personnel, bombing and machine-gunning of villages, raping of women, looting and indiscriminate pillaging of Vietnam and Chinese houses, etc... Yet, despite the maltreatments of the civilian population, we have, for 5 long months, opposed a stubborn resistance, fought in the worst conditions, without food, medicine and without clothings. And we shall carry on, sustained by our faith in international honour, and in our final victory.

IV.- In the free zone of our national territory, especially in the area under Chinese control, North of the 16th parallel, our civilians have set out to work. The results of these five months of building-up work are most favourable and give rise to the brightest hopes.

First of all, democracy has been established on solid foundations. On January 6 last, general elections were organized with the greatest success. In a few days 400 representatives of the entire country will hold the first session of the Constituent National Assembly. A new administrative organization has replaced the old mandarin system. The most unpopular taxes have been abolished. The anti-illiteracy campaign organized along efficient lines, has yielded unexpectedly optimistic results. The primary and secondary schools as well as the University have been reopened to more and more numerous students. Peace and order are restored and smoothly maintained.

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In the economic field, the situation is bettering every day. All the vexatory measures imposed by colonial planned economy have been abrogated. Commerce, production, the transformation and consummation of raw materials, once subjected to very strict regulations, are now operated on an entirely free basis. The shortage of rice, though still critical, has been relieved by the intensive production of other food-stuffs and the price of rice has been reduced some 40 % of its 1945 figures. Cereals, matches, salt, tobacco, once monopolized by speculators, are now offered on the normal markets at prices within reach of the common man. All public services have resumed their prewar activities, and the Vietnamese staff under their Vietnamese Directors, are working with industry and efficacy. The communications have been reestablished, the dam system not only mended but still fortified.

All this program was carried out while in the South, the French aggression has intensified every day. The Vietnam people, despite the difficulties of the present, and the heavy heritage of five years of Nippo-French condominium, has shown the world what it is worth. Foreign correspondents and members of the Allies Missions who have come to the country can bear witness to the new life in regenerated Vietnam, to our capacity to self-government, our desire to live free and independent, and our faith in the ATLANTIC and SAN FRANCISCO Charters.

CONCLUSION.-

For those reasons, we think it our duty to send this note to the Great Powers -- which had led the anti-fascist crusade to final victory and which had taken up the reconstruction of the world with a view to definitely outlawing war, oppression and exploitation on the one hand, misery, fear and injustice on the other. We request of these great powers:

a) To take all proper steps to stop by an urgent interference, the bloodshed that is taking place in South Vietnam, and to arrive at an urgent and fair settling of the Indochinese issue. We are confident in their mediation that may be given to us in this Pacific World a status worthy of a people that had fought and suffered for the democratic ideals. So doing, they will give a solid foundation to peace and security in this part of the world, and fulfill the hopes that the oppressed peoples had placed in them. While waiting with confidence for a positive measure from the Governments of WASHINGTON, MOSCOW, LONDON, and CHUNGKING, we have determined to fight to our last drop of blood against the reestablishment of French imperialism.

b) To bring the Indochinese issue before the United Nations' Organization. We only ask full independence, independence that is so far a fact, and that will enable us to cooperate with the other nations in the building-up of a better world and lasting peace. Such aspirations are but legitimate and the cause of world peace must be defended.

Hanoi, February 18, 1946.

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SECRET

HANOI, undated.  
[Received February 27 - 11:45 a.m.]

From Landon for Moffat and Culbertson.

1. Sainteny stated that in conversation with Ho Chi Minh he offered Annamese complete independence within French community: That this meant that Annamese would have benefit of French advisers in every department of Government: That for instance Annamese Foreign Office would express its policies through French channels: That Annamese Army and War Ministry would be coordinated with French Army and War Ministry: And that Annamese if [in?] Finance and Commerce Ministries would heed French advisers as Annamese were inexpert in these matters and might jeopardize [apparent garble] French investment. Sainteny said that Annamese in Cochin China would probably prefer to remain French Colony rather come under northern Annamese Government. In this connection Ho Chi Minh said that French officials had conferred with him but that they were vague in their comments and had avoided the real issues of Annamese independence so that he had asked them to get specific terms from Paris which would make clear whether the French really offered Annamese independence or were merely using new language to describe usual French control Annamese affairs.

2. Ho Chi Minh handed me two letters addressed to President of USA, China, Russia, and Britain, identical copies of which were stated to have been forwarded to other governments named. In two letters Ho Chi Minh requests USA as one of United Nations to support idea of Annamese independence according to Philippines example, to examine the case of the Annamese, and to take steps necessary to maintenance of world peace which is being endangered by French efforts to reconquer Indochina. He asserts that Annamese will fight until United Nations interfere in support of Annamese independence. The petition addressed to major United Nations contains:

a. Review of French relations with Japanese where French Indochina allegedly aided Japs:

b. Statement of establishment on 2 September 1945 of [Provisional Government of?] Democratic Republic of Viet Minh:

c. Summary of French conquest of Cochin China begun 23 Sept 1945 and still incomplete:

d. Outline of accomplishments of Annamese Government in Tonkin including popular elections, abolition of undesirable taxes, expansion of education and resumption as far as possible of normal economic activities:

e. Request to four powers: (1) to intervene and stop the war in Indochina in order to mediate fair settlement and (2) to bring the Indochinese issue before the United Nations Organization. The petition ends with statement that Annamese ask for full independence in fact and that in interim while awaiting UNO decision the Annamese will continue to fight the reestablishment of French imperialism. Letters and petition will be transmitted to Department soonest.

[LANDON]

C-101

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EMBASSY OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*file*  
*10-9-46*

Paris, September 12, 1946.

OFFICE OF LEGATION  
SEP 25 1946  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

No. 6141

SECRET

Subject: Transmitting Memorandum of  
Conversation with Ho Chi-minh.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
DIVISION OF FOREIGN  
REPORTING SERVICES  
SEP 23 1946  
RECEIVED DEPARTMENT OF STATE

The Honorable

The Secretary of State,

Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to refer to my despatch No. 6131

dated September 11, 1946, regarding my conversation  
with Ho Chi-minh, President of the Republic of Viet-Nam,  
and to enclose herewith a memorandum prepared by First  
Secretary George M. Abbott covering his conversation  
with Ho Chi-minh later in the day.

Respectfully yours,

*Jefferson Caffery*

Jefferson Caffery

Enclosure:

Memorandum of conversation  
with Ho Chi-minh prepared by  
First Secretary George M. Abbott

C-102

Original and hectograph to Department  
copies to Saigon, London, and Moscow

ACTION  
3 WE  
COPIES  
TO: SEA  
GOOD

1 DA  
1 EWE  
1 BC  
1 EE  
1 CS  
1 HC

DIVISION OF SOUTHEAST  
ASIAN AFFAIRS  
SEP 27 1946  
OFFICE OF FAR  
EASTERN AFFAIRS  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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*Yes - Mrs. Willis - PV - Mrs. Willis - WE*  
*made to want that no outside dist.*  
*10/3/46*

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*file*  
*10-9-46*

Paris, September 12, 1946.

MEMORÁNDUM

To: The Ambassador

From: George M. Abbott

In accordance with your request, I called last night on Ho Chi-minh and had a conversation lasting an hour.

Ho Chi-minh first discussed his contacts with Americans dating back to his guerrilla warfare against the Japanese when OSS and Army officers were parachuted into his jungle headquarters and culminating in his talk with you. He emphasized his admiration for the United States and the respect and affection for President Roosevelt which is found even in the remote villages of his country. He referred particularly to our policy toward the Philippines and pointed out that it was only natural that his people, seeing an independent Philippines on one side and India about to gain its freedom on the other, should expect France to understand that similar measures for Indochina are inevitable.

He then took up the question of his supposed Communist connections which he, of course, denied. Ho Chi-minh pointed out that there are no Communist ministers in his government and that the Viet-Nam constitution opens with a guarantee of personal liberties and the so-called rights of man and also guarantees the right to personal property. He admits that there are Communists in Annam but claims that the Communist Party as such dissolved itself several months ago.

The President then outlined his relations with France in general and the developments during the Fontainebleau Conference in particular. He pointed out that all of the various provisions of the preliminary agreement of March 6, 1946, had been fulfilled except the provisions regarding a referendum in Cochinchina. The Viet-Nam has its own government, its parliament, its army, and controls its finances. Regarding Cochinchina, however, the French have been unwilling to set any date for the referendum or to agree to the proposal that a joint Viet-Nam-French commission should be named to arrange for and supervise the referendum. At the same time the French authorities in Indochina have not respected the truce in Cochinchina and have continued military operations against resistance elements loyal to the Viet-Nam.

Ho Chi-minh realizes that the present French Government is a provisional one and that until a French constitution was adopted, the outlines of the French

Union established, and a permanent government chosen, it was difficult for French officials to sign any permanent treaty or agreement with the Viet-Nam. For that reason he was quite willing to adjourn the Fontainebleau Conference until January or thereabouts.

With regard to the modus vivendi which should have been signed September 10, 1946, Ho Chi-minh said that agreements had been reached regarding French economic and cultural rights in the Viet-Nam, a customs union for Indochina, and a common currency, although there had been some difficulty over the drafting since he refused to allow the phrase "Indochinese Federation", since it does not yet exist. The French, however, have not accepted the Viet-Nam demand that "democratic liberties" be restored in Cochinchina. Ho Chi-minh explained that by this he meant freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and the release of political prisoners. The Viet-Nam also insists that they be permitted to send a delegation to Cochinchina to make sure that the French live up to these provisions and to cooperate with the French in bringing about the end of guerrilla warfare. He admitted that there are many unsavory elements within the resistance movement in Cochinchina, but argued that if his representatives could go through the country and talk to local leaders it would be possible to distinguish between bandits and patriots, and the former could then be liquidated by either his or the French forces.

Ho Chi-minh stated that he still hoped to reach an agreement with the French before his departure on September 14, but that in any case he must return on that date since he had already been too long away from his country.

Ho Chi-minh spoke at various times of the aid which he hoped to get from the United States, but was vague except as regards economic aid. With regard to the latter, he explained that the riches of his country were largely undeveloped, that he felt that Indochina offered a fertile field for American capital and enterprise. He had resisted and would continue to resist the French desire for a continuation of their former policy of economic monopoly. He was willing to give the French priority in such matters as advisers, concessions, and purchases of machinery and equipment, but if the French were not in a position to meet his country's needs he would insist on the right to approach other friendly countries. He hinted that the policy might apply to military and naval matters as well and mentioned the naval base at Cam Ranh bay.

As I left, Ho Chi-minh stated that he hoped that through his contacts with the Embassy the American public would be informed of the true situation in Indochina.