

Ho Chi Minh: America's Most Capable Foe

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Assessing who was the most capable opponent the United States faced in the post-World War II era is indeed a difficult task. Nonetheless Ho Chi Minh emerges as arguably the most skilled insurgent that the United States faced in this time frame. He thwarted US regional objectives in Indochina, advanced Soviet Communism, divided the US home-front, strained US public will and national treasure, and left a deep scar on US public thinking regarding military intervention (the so-called Vietnam Syndrome)—objectives he clearly articulated in his military doctrine. As importantly, insurgents from Iraq to Latin America and elsewhere model his strategic tactics as effective means to overthrow governments and obstruct US policy.

This setback in US national security occurred in large part because Ho Chi Minh possessed strategic leadership capabilities. These leadership qualities directly, indirectly, and cumulatively contributed to favorable outcomes for the Communist Vietnamese. His leadership included extraordinary personality qualities, international support building, organizational skills, and military deception (MILDEC), all working synergistically to create strategic effects that became “America’s most difficult war.” Fighting such a skilled asymmetrical opponent requires a US leadership that should identify such threats earlier, act more decisively, and strategize more comprehensively than what occurred during much of the 20th century.

In the beginning of the 1930s, after the Hong Kong police had arrested and had imprisoned Ho Chi Minh for his subversive affiliations, he languished in his cell and yearned for his

personal liberties. The humbled revolutionary bemoaned his fate as deep pains pulsing from the human spirit within decried the unnatural state of the deprivation of freedom, and he spoke as if in a language of humanity articulated more sincerely through these bruised emotions than in his normal discourses. He cried out: “Of all the woes on earth, the loss of freedom hurts the most. They watch your every word and deed. They drive you like a horse or cow.”ⁱ

But ironically, shortly after his release from prison he redoubled his efforts to impose Communist totalitarianism in Vietnam. In essence, Ho created a Communist prison there, not only forgetting his experience while in confinement but also perpetuating the very suffering he knew so intimately. Thereafter he worked tirelessly to strip that beautiful land of any hopes of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”—the very ideals that Americans considered essential for humane government.

In 1930 Ho Chi Minh had created the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) that aimed at establishing Marxism-Leninism in that region and particularly in Vietnam.ⁱⁱ Ho Chi Minh’s Indochinese Communist Party succeeded remarkably because he excelled at strategic planning, leadership, propaganda, and the art of political murder. His strategies in these early years, and the character of his revolutionary activities, remained intact throughout the decades of war that followed and are therefore seminal aspects of the development of Vietnamese Communism, and thus important points for study. His success, moreover, became a model for Communist revolutions and other insurgencies.

But the peoples of Southeast Asia remember the revolutionary period not for its brilliant and adaptive strategies but rather for the unparalleled level of killing and terror at the hands of these Communist “nationalists.” Ho Chi Minh succeeded by relying to a large degree upon terrorism coupled with manipulation of the changing political conditions of the era.ⁱⁱⁱ While Ho

courted various and temporary alliances with the French, Chinese (Nationalists), Americans, and others, he concurrently ordered the killing of civilians, the murder of Communist cadre (“purges”), and cultivation of class hatred, considering these aspects to be central features of his revolution.

In sheer numbers of people killed, violence upon the innocent, breadth and scope of persecutions, durability of pogroms and executions, and misery created, Ho Chi Minh’s rebellion had no equal among political movements in Vietnam. The “national liberation” of Vietnam” under Ho Chi Minh was therefore a bloody and Stalinist-like revolution and rule that relied on terror and deception rather than a redress of legitimate grievances and an implementation of genuine reforms.

Ho Chi Minh’s revolution advanced through four major periods: formation of the Indochinese Communist Party and the inter-war period (1920s to World War II), World War II (1939-1945), the Franco-Vietminh War and Geneva Accords Period (1945-1956), and the “Americanization of the War” (1956-1975). During these distinct periods the Vietnamese Communist chief used deception and terror not only systematically but also carefully, adjusting to immovable political obstacles for the moment while ruthlessly removing others that were not strong enough to stand in the way of growing Communist power.^{iv}

“Youth and Precious Assistance”

After Ho Chi Minh had left Moscow’s “cradle” in 1924 he began his early Communist activities in Southeast Asia by walking these first steps of the revolutionary path with a precocious confidence buttressed by both his personal successes within the Communist movement and the successes of his comrades worldwide. His strategic priority therefore

remained centered on operating his organizational work within the political framework and power sources of the Communist International (COMINTERN)—the people, plans, and products that continued to attract the young revolutionary who often witnessed their ability to overthrow capitalist authorities and thus challenge the future on Marxist terms. Far from conceiving the dead V.I. Lenin's missives as merely a general political ideology or just a beginning point for his revolution, the Vietnamese agitator relied continually upon these revolutionary thoughts and, as importantly, "precious assistance": the advice, diplomatic skills, crisis relief, finances, propaganda techniques, supplies, arms, and experiences of his comrades near and afar.^v

Although his organizational work proceeded steadily in Indochina, "step by step" in their own words, every effort was made to integrate the youthful revolution into Moscow's international movement in order to gain maximum support and strength. During these early years a foundational doctrine stipulated that "[t]he national revolution must be integrated into the world revolution, the Vietnamese people must act in concert with the world proletariat, hence the necessity of conforming to the policy of the Third International."^{vi}

In the same year Ho Chi Minh "hit the ground running" when he ex-filtrated to Canton, where his extraordinary leadership and organizational skills became immediately apparent and prepared the way for the formation of the ICP over half a decade later. The bustling port city had served as a center for Sun Yat-Sen's revolutionary forces, which established the Republic of China in 1911, and remained a meeting ground since then for nationalist and revolutionary forces throughout the region.^{vii}

Ho's official position as representative of the Comintern to China provided the necessary legitimacy for open activities and a cover for planting a Communist cell group in Canton's fertile political soil tilled through the sweat of the nationalists.^{viii} More importantly, he needed only a

short time to prove that he possessed the rare political skills of survival and stealth, in addition to determination and discipline—skills particularly evident in the personal relationships developed with his followers. The totality of these leadership skills propelled his movement forward and created a force and durability that marched over nearby borders as well as obstacles intrinsic to developing political movements.^{ix}

In 1925 he formed the Revolutionary Youth League, which he used to train and forge young Vietnamese whom he sent back to his native land to build the foundations of resistance that later became apparent in the wars against France and the United States. Ho's extraordinary personality and leadership capacity drew this target group of youthful revolutionaries from afar to his side where they learned the shrewd military-political arts necessary for survival and success. A North Vietnamese account noted:

In Canton, with the Tam Tam Xa as nucleus, Nguyen Ai Quoc [alias for Ho Chi Minh] set up the Thanh Nien Cach Mang Dong Chi Hoi (Young Revolutionaries' Association), Thanh Nien for short. From the homeland or from Siam, where lived a Vietnamese colony, youths came to China to attend a revolutionary training course organized by Nguyen Ai Quoc, and were sent back to the country to set up revolutionary bases.^x

Even in these early years of the revolution and before, Ho Chi Minh's alluring personality captured the hearts of many young Vietnamese. Truong Nhu Tang, one early follower who was typical of many who fell under the dictator's spell, described a first encounter with Ho during a meeting in Paris:

I had never thought of myself as a person especially sensitive to physical appearances, but Ho exuded a combination of inner strength and personal

generosity that struck me with something like a physical blow. He looked directly at me, and at the others, with a magnetic expression of intensity and warmth.

Almost reflexively I found myself think of my grandfather. There was that same effortless communication of wisdom and caring with which my grandfather had personified for us the values of Confucian life.^{xi}

During World War II, another follower described similar emotional connections when meeting the “magnetic” Ho—yet again a moment in time when the Communist master’s ability to grab the attention and loyalties of the young produced the deep personal ties that bind insurgencies to the future:

We came into the room. Uncle was sitting on a bed, waiting for us. Although the light was dim, we could see him clearly enough. We were struck by his broad forehead, his sparkling eyes and his features which bespoke great kindness. So it was ‘he’! Our joy was indescribable and for a moment we remained speechless, just looking at him with deep emotion.^{xii}

Still others who described their encounters with Ho proved that their leader not only could grab their attention but also keep it. Such memories of lowly peasants resurrected to the life of exalted revolutionaries, baptized in the presence of their messianic leader, reveal vivid images of a time when they were “literally hypnotized” and “captivated by his stories of Asia and Europe.”^{xiii} This fanatical language among the faithful could be easily dismissed as mere propaganda if the devotion of these early followers had not proved that “the walk matched the talk.”

But if the feigned appearances of a Communist subversive could win over many Vietnamese so could his feigned message. Contrary to the mainstream histories of Vietnamese Communism, Ho Chi Minh did not merely use nationalist and popular messages to attract supporters—“independence,” “an eight-hour work day,” “literacy,” and “land to the tiller.” The master propagandist repeatedly claimed to support political rights and social freedoms that he not only failed to implement but also intentionally destroyed through his totalitarian conquests.^{xiv}

Ho Chi Minh had so blatantly misrepresented and had falsified his political agenda in these early years and throughout his life that at times his platform appeared indistinguishable from that of an American politician or any other democratic statesman. These false promises by Ho were a major aspect of his propaganda, and he ordered the Indochinese Communist Party in the middle of the 1930s to emphasize these themes more: “It [the ICP] 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,” he asserted.^{xv} The so-called “popular support” of Ho Chi Minh therefore rested on lies, confusion, and deception rather than political advocacy for the legitimate needs of the people of Vietnam.

Ho mixed these potent leadership, personality, and propaganda qualities with his remarkable discipline, ensuring the prosperity of his organizational work through the early years. His strength of mind and character exercised persistence and patience evident in the completion of the mundane and every-day tasks of building a revolution, leaving few details unattended.^{xvi} Covert activities, propaganda development, organization of cells, subversion of authority, and basic training of cadre--none of which were decisive alone or original to Communism--

nevertheless carried the unique logo of Ho Chi Minh, identifying its quality and guaranteeing its performance.

Ho's "ordinary and simple deeds, concrete and practical ways of doing modest and firm first steps; small and simple forces at the start" placed his revolution on a slow but certain footing where growth and strength marched together balancing one another like the firm gait of his Vietminh soldiers who later evolved from this structure.^{xvii} North Vietnamese General Chu Van Tan remarked about these foundational years:

He was a disciplined man, and followed a fixed schedule of eating, sleeping and working, doing everything in its own time, and he deviated from this schedule only if the situation became tense. If he said he would do something, he set about doing it right away. If he reminded one of us to do something, he immediately proceeded to show him how to go about doing it.^{xviii}

As young revolutionaries poured into his organization, often fleeing the persecution of the French colonial crackdown on subversive activities, Ho managed the rising popularity of his movement by mixing ruthless discipline with steadfastness, not allowing the Revolutionary Youth League to lose either ideological purity or revolutionary fervor as so many other similar organizations had.^{xix} For those who became slack with their duties, "Nguyen the Patriot" (as he was often called) forwarded their names to the enemy--the colonial authorities who sought their capture-- whereupon punishments were meted out severely and lethally. Ho quietly took the cash bounty for his services and used these funds as he saw fit.^{xx}

Another major characteristic of Ho's early leadership was his ability to train dedicated leaders to support his role. Ho successfully replicated his character in those who followed him, carrying these revolutionary qualities into the building of the Communist "utopia" that later

haunted Vietnam and whose specter remains to this day. If Ho can be described as the Leninist cornerstone crafted in Moscow then his early followers were certainly the foundation, which was made of the same substance and rested upon that cornerstone, creating a durable edifice aligned precisely with that rock-like personality. During this early period men like Vo Nguyen Giap, Le Duan, Le Duc Tho, and Pham Van Dong joined the struggle—revolutionaries whose devotion was unquestionable, and if not so ruthless, certainly admirable.^{xxi}

North Vietnamese General Le Quang Ba's matter-of-fact history of the period, typical of those written by Ho's early followers, seems almost irrelevant had it not testified of the adroit secrecy and extraordinary zeal that characterized Vietnamese Communist leaders and their activities spreading through Vietnam. General Le noted such activities in his own province and stated dryly: "Toward 1926-1927, at a time when we were seeking to improve our condition, Hoang Dinh Rong, the first man in our province to become a communist, began his activities in our region under the guise of a private teacher. He first set about wining my friend Quoc Van over to the revolutionary cause."^{xxii}

General Chu noted similarly about successful organizational activities and the growth that he witnessed in 1934:

Comrade Hoang Quoc Viet soon opened a training course where he expounded elementary principles of Communism, and principles of clandestine work, propaganda and organization of peasants. I was deeply interested and immediately joined in revolutionary action. The light of the Party gradually penetrated into the remotest corners of Vu Nhai, Bac Son and Thai Nguyen, and my heart was a flame. . . . [W]e began working feverishly, distributing leaflets, posting bills, collecting subscriptions to the newspapers *Tin Tuc* and *Doi Nay*,

sending petitions in favour of political prisoners, demonstrating against a return to the 1884 treaty. . . . Under the leadership of the Party, political struggle was taking shape.^{xxiii}

Nevertheless, these crafty members of the ICP suffered much under French “counter-revolutionary activities” but managed to survive by using this zeal and stealth: hiding the identity of local leaders, reserve forces in nearby villages, and operational activities under a cloak of legitimate jobs commonly employed by Vietnamese peasants.^{xxiv} Moreover, Ho and his Party, ever the masters of subterfuge, carefully hid their affiliations with Russian and Chinese Communist leaders^{xxv}—a deception carried through with such effectiveness that many modern pundits fail to uncover the international connection and thus fall victim to the propaganda of the late revolutionary.

Even in this early stage of development Ho Chi Minh could have rested on the labor and successes of his subordinates and abandoned his own grass-roots organizational work, retreating to the safety of rear-area leadership. But he did not. In 1928 while Ho’s supporters worked zealously in Vietnam to spread the Communist cause, their leader burned “Red hot” in his Communist zeal and turned his fiery energies to Thailand where he again seized the nationalist and humanitarian banners to rally many in the Vietnamese community to his cause.

Just like his Party’s propaganda work in Vietnam, there was little hint of Communist ideals amid the popular messages fed to these Vietnamese abroad. The humbled appearances of Ho dressed as a Buddhist priest, stooped low and working side by side with poor Vietnamese in Thailand, masked neatly the development of a political movement and an indigenous core of cadre that served his purposes. N. Khac Huyen described the remarkable facade: “To set an

example, the slender man of Buddha himself carried bricks in waived baskets, mixed mortar, actively and enthusiastically participated in construction work.”^{xxvi}

Historians who find a deep affinity with the notion that Ho Chi Minh was “first a nationalist and then a Communist second” should take careful note of the implication of his organizational work in Thailand, which proved the very opposite. This historical event becomes a “double hurdle” for the mental races run by many scholars, who first have to justify on the grounds of nationalism his Communist activities outside of Vietnam (again), and secondly justify the fact that Ho chose a country that was neither dominated by the French nor attempting to liberate itself from imperial oppression. For Thailand was never a part of French or British colonial possessions in Southeast Asia (or a possession of any other Western power).

“Siam,” as Thailand was commonly called during the era, had cherished a long history of independence and retained its self-government through the colonial period and later rapidly developed in the post-WWII era. The fact that Ho Chi Minh risked inciting the wrath of Thai officials while stretching his resources beyond French Indochina to Communize this country over the course of four decades reveals the depth and ideological fervor of the Communist zeal that propelled his activities-- and his aim of destroying all non-Communist governments in his reach.^{xxvii}

Ho Chi Minh’s zeal for agitation and organization mixed and matched with his ability to execute operations well. Indeed, the fox-like aggressor could “rob the chicken coup” because he had an uncanny ability to sense the presence of problems and gauge the pace of progress, and then adapt his pursuits to the realities of these circumstances. Unlike Vietnam’s many non-Communist political groups, which likewise sought to organize revolutionary power to expel France from Vietnam, Moscow’s professional agent guided the pace of his movement’s

operations with a remarkable sensitivity to both opportunities and obstacles and thereby immediately distinguished it qualitatively from other indigenous groups, which could not equal this feat.^{xxviii}

Equally significant during this critical building period, Ho developed “command and control” over local Party work, activities that soon demonstrated the coveted characteristics of intrinsic flexibility and spontaneity within the proscribed political guidelines--as well as a high degree of operational coordination with upper levels of command (i.e., the Central Committee).^{xxix} This matchless unity and symmetry of the movement, coupled with Ho’s dynamic leadership, became so evident that his nationalist rivals paid him the grudging honor of imitating his organizational tactics over the course of the following decades even though they remained ideological enemies of his cause.^{xxx}

Party cadre at the grass-roots level of the ICP remained sensitive to either moving too fast or too slow in regard to revolutionary work lest they commit “rightist errors” or “leftist errors”—terms used within the movement for guiding political and operational orientations. This cadre commonly discriminated between seizing opportunities and refraining from “leaping” into the appearances of such, choosing often to forgo risky agitation for the alternative of additional building, training, and consolidating Party structures. While Party leaders shunned the notion of “leaping” at opportunities as a poor substitute for “stepping”—the patient process of daily building the Communist cause--these same leaders held a confident hope that the changing balance of power between the capitalist world and the proletarian revolution would indeed bring big opportunities for “leaps and bounds” in progress.^{xxxi}

Yet these early successes were not without significant challenges that required strategic shifts, operational adjustments, and corrective actions--situations that developed not just from

local conditions but from changes in the international balance of power. Ho proved quite adroit at mastering these convulsive forces in world history and concurrently maintaining his support locally and internationally. For instance, during the global depression that swept the world after the stock market crash in the United States in 1929, Ho soon found that Vietnam was plunged into economic chaos and social disorder: strikes, food shortages, political unrest, and revolution—a development that created obstacles as well as opportunities for his insurgency.

While using his Party in 1930 and 1931 to direct these “revolutionary discontents,” Ho experienced one of his more significant setbacks. A revolt that erupted in Central Vietnam ended abruptly in defeat at the hands of the French colonial leaders, who brutally repressed insurrectionist hopes and left the young ICP wounded and crawling to the safety of Vietnam’s underground. The defeat occurred partly because of a lack of popular support and partly because of French military power. Shortly thereafter Ho attempted to gain more popular support by adjusting his propaganda message, further hiding Communist themes, and stressing more nationalist themes such as independence, unity, and racial dignity of the Vietnamese people.^{xxxii}

However, not all of the challenges that Ho Chi Minh faced involved national matters but others that reached to the very pinnacle of leadership within the Comintern. During the 1930s Ho Chi Minh faced a serious challenge from his Communist masters. As Fascist Italy, Germany, and Japan (the Axis Powers) formed the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936, an alliance aimed at the destruction of the Soviet Union and its international supporters, Moscow pressured Ho to subordinate his regional revolution to the priorities of the Kremlin and make “peace” with France rather than fighting it. The “United Front” strategy, which advocated a temporary alliance between Communist groups and democratic countries in order to offset Axis power, did not sit well with Ho.^{xxxiii}

Like other Communists who had backed Stalin and yet had found his wishes contrary to personal tastes, Ho struggled to accept orders from Moscow with the accustomed servility demanded by that system. Ho grudgingly accepted this dictate but did so while further building his revolutionary forces.^{xxxiv} Nevertheless, his ability to adjust to even the most repugnant aspects of Moscow's leadership, problems that often alienated Marxist leaders within the Comintern, should be understood within the context of his remarkable ability to manipulate power and survive among the aggressive forces within the Communist movement.

But Ho Chi Minh did not simply capitulate to the French colonial authorities. He intensified the "legal activities" of lobbying for political rights and freedoms while simultaneously he drove his revolutionary activities underground. This two-tiered strategy--typically used by Communist parties--was very effective. Pham Van Dong noted again:

In the 1936-1939 period, through many letters and newspaper articles sent to the Central Committee, Ho Chi Minh described ways to use of temporarily favourable conditions, organized open and legal activities, gathered and led the masses to struggle in various ways, and gradually brought all the people to the revolutionary front. At the same time, he remarked many times that the Party had to have a section working underground, in secrecy, concealing its forces and carefully preparing for dealing with an enemy which would resort to terrorism in order to push back the revolution.^{xxxv}

Indeed, Ho Chi Minh's revolutionary tactics during this period were not merely reactive but also proactive and aggressive. According to his thinking, opportunities must be created and not just awaited--lest the "error of passivity" be committed.^{xxxvi} Subsequently, he ordered the mass killing of the rural landlord class in Communist controlled areas. As early as 1931, Ho

oversaw the “neutralizing” of hundreds of landlords in Nge Tinh, as he “gradually” created rural soviets.^{xxxvii} During the period, Ho ordered his followers to observe the following:

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.^{xxxviii}

Ho’s used political murder to create opportunities for establishing his revolutionary government and to step into the political vacuum that his insurgents created. Although treated lightly by many historians (if at all), the use of political murder was a major activity of early Vietnamese Communist activities, events given cursory but frequent attention in Party literature and often justified under the guise of eliminating “traitors” and “the liquidation of the exploiting classes”^{xxxix} Throughout the duration of this period and his entire life, he systematically removed or destroyed, through well-calculated acts of political murder, rival political parties, village leadership, landlords, and colonial supporters. Achieving power through sheer violence against vulnerable political and social groups was indeed a central mission of Ho Chi Minh’s revolution, used routinely for gaining power rapidly and increasing the momentum of his movement.

But political violence wheeled by Ho Chi Minh and his followers targeted more than just non-Communist groups. Like other Communist leaders Ho frequently purged his own party and terrorized, tortured, and killed its members for real and imaginary reasons. Fearing the infiltration of French or rival groups, or non-Communist ideological influences, Ho purged the Party throughout the 1930s and 1940s—and thereafter. One such example of the period involved a “comrade” who allegedly seduced a female member of the ICP. After execution the body was

burned.^{xi} The extent of Ho Chi Minh's victimization therefore reached well into his own organizations and among his adherents.^{xli}

“The Double Yoke”

The outbreak of World War II afforded additional opportunities for Ho Chi Minh to manipulate public sentiment and advance his revolution. As hordes of Japanese invaders ravished Vietnam and collaborated with Vichy France and its colonial supporters in Vietnam, Ho exploited the spontaneous outburst of popular antipathy against the invaders as well as an equally intense hatred of the French, who refused to provide sufficient protection of the Vietnamese people. Ho depicted his revolution as a nationalist movement fighting the “double yoke” of French colonialism and Japanese Fascism and called on all Vietnamese to unite and fight against the common enemy. He declared:

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.^{xlii}

The seasoned revolutionary further used the memory of Vietnam's glorious past resistance to invaders as a powerful means to create unity for his Communist cause. He declared further: “The sacred call of the fatherland is resounding in your ears; the blood of our heroic predecessors 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!”^{xliii} Young Vietnamese responding to these patriotic themes picked up the crude weapons of sticks and stones, and joining others

who were well-armed, filled the ranks of the Communist movement causing it to swell into another phase of expansion-- pregnant from the rapid growth in military and political organization. Thus the “Vietminh” (the name given by the Communist Vietnamese to their newer “nationalist” cause) was born in 1941 as yet another illegitimate child of international Communism while Ho again stood as the midwife.^{xliv}

A particularly potent aspect of Ho Chi Minh’s early revolutionary work included the successful exploitation of the entire region of Indochina. As the name indicated, the “Indochinese Communist Party” conceived by Ho encompassed the whole of Indochina and not just Vietnam. Ho drew strength and gained advantages from the peoples, geography, and resources of mainland Southeast Asia, limited only by the authorities who opposed him and the resources at his disposal.

In addition to Thailand mentioned previously, he targeted Cambodia and Laos and cleverly used the region’s extensive terrain, border areas, safe-havens, patchy authority structures (limited reaches of each governing authority and administrative region) to the advantage of his Reds. It should be noted in this regard that both the Revolutionary Youth League and the ICP were founded in China, where he exploited the higher degree of support and safety, as well as the absence of French authority. Ho also demanded that his cadre utilize the support throughout the region and develop “close solidarity between the peoples of Viet-Nam, Cambodia, and Laos. . . .”^{xlv} Pham Van Dong remarked on this matter:

As for fraternal countries and revolutionary movements, especially for Laos and Cambodia, Ho Chi Minh instilled in the Vietnamese people in general and his cadres in particular the thinking that ‘helping friends is also helping ourselves.’ Vietnam resistance wars supported by the whole of mankind were a modest

contribution to the world revolutionary cause and Ho Chi Minh's proletarian internationalism through practical revolutionary work.^{xlvi}

Yet students of history who search their historical atlases to understand these issues better and to find the borders of Southeast Asian nations of the period can easily deceive themselves if they follow the neat lines that smoothly delineate one country from another--a visual representation which implies that these lines mark where one power began and another ended. For these *dejure* national boundaries belie the *defacto* political realities that occurred during the time and fail to indicate the political authority held by the Communists in these border regions. Ho Chi Minh's followers trampled national boundaries and exploited these areas, finding many advantages for building their insurgency. These Vietnamese Communists particularly benefitted from the degree of control held by Mao Zedong's supporters along China's borders with mainland Southeast Asia.

For instance, the ICP effectively exploited the border areas between China and Vietnam, using these areas for bases, safe-havens, training, and access farther into China.^{xlvii} General Le noted during World War II:

Near our place, on the other side of the frontier, there was a strong Chinese guerrilla base. We decided to have a close look. So I crossed the frontier. The Chinese comrades and we decided to give each other assistance and to establish a guerrilla base in our region. So we could rely on support from both sides of the frontier. . . . From Luc Khu, the influence of our action spread to neighboring regions especially to Pac Bo. Our bases formed a corridor along the frontier, solidly leaning on the revolutionary base comprising the three southernmost provinces in China. On both sides of the frontier we had active supporters.^{xlviii}

Similarly, Ho and his followers recognized the strategic importance of Laos and Cambodia, where additional “agit-prop” work weakened French colonial authority, spread its military forces throughout the region, and supplied the Communist Vietnamese with more space for evading and exhausting the larger and more heavily-equipped French army. The additional supporters in the region would also minimize the strain on Vietnamese Communist manpower and supplies.^{xlix} At first Ho’s work in these areas concentrated on recruitment and organization of cell groups; later, however, these areas became major grounds for military activity as the ICP’s revolutionary forces grew in complexity and operability.¹

But Ho did not have to create such a movement *ex nihilo* (“out of nothing”). Popular grievances against French colonialism in Southeast Asia coupled with Ho’s preponderance of power over other revolutionary causes (made possible by Communist bloc support) made him a seductive choice difficult to resist. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Ho’s early work in Indochina—incubating, planting, training, uniting, and strategically posturing/deploying forces—began to change the potency of the Communist revolutions in Laos and Cambodia by an order of magnitude. These historical events which still disturb the memories of nationalists throughout Indochina, patriotic men and women who contemplate the agony and suffering of decades of Communist tyranny, remain nearly absent in print and discourse among too many Americans, who should be analyzing these histories to better understand life in Southeast Asia.^{li}

The realization of a burgeoning Indochinese Communist revolution challenged French authorities and later grew into the “wider war” that deeply disturbed American policymakers. These Communist activities reflected not only the growth of Ho Chi Minh’s revolution but also his ability to recognize its maturity and further cultivate it. By the mid-1940s, he proved in

Vietnam that he could unite diverse causes, consolidate effectively his revolutionary work, militarize increasingly his movement, and expand steadily his organizational activities.^{lii}

While young Americans wearing khaki pants or pleated skirts, creased by winds of victory in Europe and Japan as much as by leaps of joy in hometown parades, filled streets dotted by Woolworth Department stores and local barber shops, where fluttering banners of the Stars and Stripes seemed to dance in step with returning G.I.s, a sinister development far away indicated that war was not over in 1945. Enthralled at media images of a fire-gutted Berlin and of nuclear mushroom clouds that blotted out the brilliance of the land of the rising sun, most Americans (as well as other Westerners) were caught in the rapture of the moment but unaware that the seeds of “America’s most difficult war” had sprouted roots deeply into Indochina’s rich dark soil.^{liii}

“A Declaration of Independence”

As World War II ended in 1945 and the Japanese departed Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh again seized the moment by openly revolting against the invaders and asserting the independence of Vietnam from French colonial rule.^{liv} On September 2, 1945 he mounted a large platform in Hanoi and appealed to the Vietnamese people and the world to recognize his movement and its leadership of an independent Vietnam. During the speech, Ho’s gangly frame jutted out sharply under his khaki Asian-styled suit as he declared his indictment against French colonialism and his vain promises of supporting the Vietnamese people. Ho’s rail-like body running awkwardly parallel with the tall metal microphone before him seemed to mimic crudely its shiny but lifeless rigid positioning and purpose on the platform—the two serving as products of humans but not necessarily humanity. Southeast Asia’s newest leader, basking in the limelight of victory and an

audience with foreign dignitaries, looked like a minor actor on a world stage elevated above his thespian skills.

But the awkward-looking revolutionary wearing white rubber sandals was no amateur actor. Using lofty Western ideals of “self determination,” “fraternity,” and “independence,” which streamed from his lips during his public address, Ho moved his audience and demonstrated that his sophisticated political language matched a cunning instinct for public affairs and a sharp understanding of international relations. Perhaps he reached his political crescendo when he cited the American Declaration of Independence.

Nevertheless, Ho Chi Minh failed to move the American officials who watched from near and afar. Washington’s assessments in the post-WWII era demanded concrete actions and practices that upheld not the forms but the substance of the words used quite freely by the radical Left and codified in the treaties at the end of the war. American policymakers determined soon enough that the man who trampled the very ideas propounded in his speech, and who sought to maneuver his Communist revolution to victory, was no freedom fighter but rather “the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina.”^{lv}

Ho Chi Minh immediately proved the validity of this assessment by taking advantage of the political vacuum that existed in his country after World War II ended.^{lvi} Rather than advocating for and helping the middle class, nationalists, and other Vietnamese as he had promised, the self-anointed President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) lashed out at these peoples and groups and instituted some of the most horrific political killings of his revolutionary life. The bloody executions and power-grabbing that followed seemed more like a scene out of the movie *The Godfather* rather than behavior commonly associated with civilized politics.

Ho Chi Minh's Party, using revolutionary ideology like gasoline thrown on a fire, cultivated violence and incited raw and unbridled hatred among the Vietnamese people in order to destroy the opposition. After a kidnapping and assassination campaign created by local initiative and allowed by Ho's supporters killed thousands and took many more than that hostage in August and September of 1945, the ICP declared publically that it regretted that it did not kill more of its enemies.^{lvii} The Vietnamese Communists boasted that it is better to kill ten innocent people than to allow one guilty to go free. Like Mao, Ho Chi Minh and his supporters did not want to limit the violent rages of the Vietnamese people because these passions succeeded in weakening the opposition even though it caused many innocent deaths.^{lviii}

Moreover, nationalist groups, local Mandarins, "reactionaries," landlords, and rival Communist groups ("Trotskyites") suffered much under the brutal rage of Ho Chi Minh and his nascent national government.^{lix} Ironically, Ho used the French authorities during this period to assist with the elimination of these political organizations.^{lx} Mrs. Le Thi Anh, a young nationalist during the time, recalled the horrible massacre:

I stayed in the underground until 1952, a couple of years before Mr. Diem came home. I left because I saw too many frightening things. The Communists were grabbing all the power by killing off the nationalists.

The Communists had organized in the resistance with us. We fought together and regarded them as comrades in arms. But sometimes in the middle of the night they would tell us, 'Hold the area.' And they would leave to indicate to the French where our nationalist positions were. The Communists betrayed us all the time. Ho Chi Minh's people began to kill off all of the strong non-Communist leaders

and Trotskyite Communists in the resistance. One of my uncles, Le Trong, and friends like Dr. Suong, after collaborating with the Communists were killed by them. Huynh Phu So, the leader of the Hoa Hao Buddhist sect, whom I knew personally, was also killed by Ho's people.”

I survived because at first I was too young to be considered a potential rival. I never dared to question what the Communists did. I didn't know what Communism was. The rhetoric looked good. But they killed off a lot patriots more intelligent and mature than I.”^{lxi}

Ho Chi Minh's massacre of the opposition proved to be not just ferocious in its methods and thoroughness--the numbers of lives taken--but also in the ability to decapitate the leadership of these political rivals of the Vietminh. Two South Vietnamese generals who lived through this period remarked:

In their jockeying for power the Viet Minh did not hesitate to liquidate any adversaries they deemed dangerous. Bui Quang Chieu, founder of the Constitutional Party, Vo Van Nga, leader of the Party for Independence, and Nguyen Van Sam, the Imperial Delegate to Cochin-china, were all assassinated. In Hue, the Viet Minh killed the scholar Pham Quynh and Ngo Dinh Koi, Ngo Dinh Diem's eldest brother, both from the former Bao Dai government and dignitaries with prestige in their times. The Viet Minh did not even spare their own comrades who happened to have divergent views; they killed Ta Thu Thau, for example, who was leader of the Trotskyist Struggle Group. This reign of terror eventually brought the collapse of the nationalist movement in the South

and gave the Viet Minh the indisputable leadership position in the resistance movement.^{lxii}

The destruction of the Nationalist Party of Vietnam in the summer of 1945 emerged as a particularly tragic episode in the horrific legacy of Ho Chi Minh and the ICP. Established in 1927, the Nationalist Party rejected Communism but sought independence from the French. The Nationalists, also called the Viet Nam Quoa Dan Dang (VNQDD), were a viable alternative to Ho Chi Minh's Communists and therefore had to be "liquidated" by the ICP, according to its thinking.^{lxiii} Ho admitted as much and declared that because they did not cooperate with the "revolutionary government" they had to be "annihilated."^{lxiv} The "annihilation" of the VNQDD at Ho's behest was a shocking act of barbarity that American military adviser Rufus Phillips described as follows:

The French were famous for intrigue. In 1945-1946, the French and Ho's Communists worked together to eliminate the non-Communist nationalist Vietnamese organizations. In this deal, the French turned over their files on the VNQDD and Dai Viets to Ho Chi Minh. This perpetrated a massacre of nationalist leaders all over Vietnam. In one particular case, I met a VNQDD guy who had escaped. He was still fairly young at the time. He told me that nationalists were simply hit on the head, sewn up in sacks, and dumped into the rivers—literally hundreds and hundreds.^{lxv}

One of the more egregious distortions of the history of the Vietnam War occurs because many historians have failed to include or to address squarely this essential piece of Ho Chi Minh's history. Because the elimination of nationalists proved that Ho Chi Minh detested

nationalism and freedom, and was neither the humanitarian nor the patriot that many modern histories of the Vietnam War have created, this telling event regarding the VNQDD has been omitted or distorted. The fact remains: nationalism was alive and growing in Vietnam until Ho Chi Minh destroyed it as an organized political movement simply because it rivaled Communist power.

Historical myth has replaced this truth about Ho Chi Minh and his revolution. An example of this myth making about the war occurs commonly in modern college textbooks today. For example, George Donelson Moss, *Vietnam: An American Ordeal* (1994), a popular college textbooks on the Vietnam War, depicted the destruction of the Nationalists as the result of the French colonial authorities alone. Subsequently, Moss' portrayed the Communists under Ho in terms that indicated not only their innocence in the matter but also in terms that falsely show that they were patriots. Moss asserted:

The failed uprising meant the end of the VNQDD as a major nationalistic movement. Afterward, French authorities destroyed the VNQDD organization; some of its leaders were able to escape to exile in China.

Following the destruction of the VNQDD, Marxist organizations took over the revolutionary nationalist cause in Vietnam. In 1930, the Indochinese Communist Party was organized by a professional revolutionary and Vietnamese patriot calling himself Nguyen Ai Quoc ("Nguyen the Patriot"). The world would later know him as Ho Chi Minh.^{lxvi}

In 1945, following the example of other Communist revolutions, Ho Chi Minh augmented his organizational power in order to further perpetuate terrorist acts. He instituted

totalitarian controls in areas that he held while forming a powerful “state security” organization in Saigon, which facilitated his brutal policies. Around the same time, his Vietminh formed the Assault Assassination Committee, an organization comprised of local criminals and thugs, who roamed the streets and brutalized the alleged enemies of Vietnam. *The Black Book on Communism* noted:

The Viet Minh formed the Assault Assassination Committee, which marched through the streets. Most of its members were recruited from the local underworld, and it was at the head of the anti-French pogrom of 25 September that left dozens of mutilated corpses in its wake. Vietnamese women who had married Frenchmen were also systematically slaughtered, although these actions were blamed on people who were not really members of the Viet Minh.^{lxvii}

Furthermore, the ICP created a prison system that routinely tortured and killed many of its captives. Despite Ho’s public statements that called for leniency and humane treatment of prisoners of the Communist revolution,^{lxviii} his prison system tortured to death thousands of French prisoners. Although the Vietnamese Communists held 20,000 French Expeditionary Forces, by the time of the Geneva Accords in 1954 only 9,000 were still alive.^{lxix} The torture of these French prisoners was a portent of the terrible suffering that awaited American prisoners of war in the 1960s.

The Party’s acts of terrorism and murder cut deeply into the grassroots of Vietnamese society and transcended mere moments or incidents in the post-WWII era, for “proletarian revolution” was far more calculated, far more sweeping and systematic. Suffering and fear became an intimate part of Vietnamese life through the 1940s and into the 1950s, causing many to understand that Ho Chi Minh’s “independence” was much more inhumane than “enslavement”

under French colonialism. Hoang Van Chi recalled the widespread terror experienced under the newly formed Democratic Republic of Vietnam and its Land Reform in 1951:

Cadre were ordered by the Party; ‘Better to kill ten innocents than let one reactionary escape.’ Quota were set in every village; at least one must be publicly executed. But if a village was quite big, they increased the number. Others are sent to jail. But the number of people who died by violent execution is much smaller than those who died because of isolation. When the family is branded ‘landlord’ nobody in the town is allowed to communicate with them. The family must live inside the house with nothing to eat. As a consequence, many people died of starvation, children and old people first.^{lxx}

But at the same time Ho Chi Minh was “liquidating” his political opponents after World War II had ended, he and his Vietnamese Communists faced a major challenge from the Allied victors, a challenge that sheer violence could not meet. In order to restore stability in Vietnam and facilitate the exodus of the Japanese, the United States assisted the return of the French, along with further Allied assistance from Nationalist China and Great Britain.^{lxxi} Consequently, Ho Chi Minh became surrounded by an overwhelming force that significantly minimized his ability to operate and even survive. The deceptive Ho, however, did not vacillate.

Applying Lenin’s policy of collaboration with “the enemy” in order to gain time to mobilize and rebuild, Ho feigned support of the Allied forces while courting all Allied parties involved.^{lxxii} One by one, he played off the various occupying groups, hastening the exodus of the Chinese and the British, until France was isolated. Pham Van Dong stated succinctly about this tactic:

After September 2, 1945 and throughout 1946, the Vietnamese revolution went through a stormy period. The destiny of the homeland was at stake. In those hard months and years, Ho Chi Minh showed himself to be courageous, clever and creative, reacting sensitively and in a timely way to various situations, using many techniques to divide enemies, now working with the Chinese Kuomintang troops to deal with the French colonialists, then compromising with the latter to rapidly drive Chiang Kaishek troops home. Under his guidance, our people foiled all the manoeuvres [sic] of both internal and external enemies, held on firmly to revolutionary power, and raced against them to prepare [sic] the nationwide resistance war against the French aggression. Thinking back to that time I cannot help asking what would have happened without Ho Chi Minh.^{lxxiii}

Having minimized Allied power in the region, and left to deal with the attempts of France to reassert colonial rule over Vietnam, Ho stalled for time in order to further develop his revolutionary forces. Even though Ho then faced far less resistance since the removal of Allied forces from the region, his forces were still ill prepared to fight the French, who were returning in large numbers and renewed strength since the end World War II had freed additional military forces from the field.

Ho consequently undertook diplomatic initiatives with the French, using false promises of peace, promises to cooperate with the French Union, and an alleged affinity of political ideals with France. In 1946 he beckoned: “French people! We have affection for you and sincerely want to cooperate with you within the framework of the French Union because we have a common ideal which is freedom, equality, and independence.”^{lxxiv} But the whole negotiation process with France was nothing but a deception to buy more time. Ho Chi Minh noted:

Mention should be made of the Preliminary Agreement of March 6, 1946, and the *modus vivendi* of September 14, 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 this 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.

We needed peace to build our country, and therefore we made concessions to maintain peace. Although the French colonialist broke their word and unleashed war, nearly one year of temporary peace gave us time to build up our basic forces. When the French deliberately provoked war, we could no longer put up with them, and the nation-wide war broke out.^{lxxv}

During this “rebuilding” period when Ho Chi Minh admitted that he intentionally deceived Allied nations in order to gain time and support, one of the more controversial events of the history of the Vietnam conflict occurred. In 1945, Ho had not only cited the American *Declaration of Independence* when declaring independence for Vietnam, but he also petitioned the United States directly for support of his revolution and “appeared” to be favorable toward democratic reform.^{lxxvi}

The fact that United States authorities rejected these petitions has been used by critics of the war as “proof” that Ho Chi Minh was a pragmatist and that American policy, misguided in its overreaction to Communism, missed an opportunity to embrace a potential ally or at least avert

the terrible troubles that lied ahead. This argument has been used as commonly as any other criticism against American involvement in the war and American policy in general.^{lxxvii}

In addition to the fact that Communist authorities, including Ho Chi Minh, openly stated that they used these opportunities as a deception, another factor is salient. What did Ho's petitions to the United States contain? The documents containing Ho Chi Minh's requests have been made available through the *Pentagon Papers*. These papers indicate clearly that the very request was duplicitous. Ho requested that the United States, United Nations, Soviet Union, and China assist Vietnam in its independence under the Vietnamese Communists. He supported his claim by asserting that Vietnam under the Communists had achieved "popular elections, abolition of undesirable taxes, expansion of education and resumption as far as possible of normal economic activities."^{lxxviii}

But did he? Did Ho establish "free elections" or did he perpetuate the execution of thousands within the electorate while denying free speech to those allowed to live? Did a multiparty system function in this electoral process? Did he restore economic activity or begin the destruction of the propertied class of that former economic system? The answers were obvious to American policymakers who indeed refused to acknowledge these disingenuous requests.^{lxxix}

Yet, while Ho Chi Minh sought legitimacy from Western powers like the United States, Great Britain, and France, he continued his mass executions of the people of Vietnam for the next decade, and another decade beyond that during "the American War." Following Mao's policies slavishly, Ho oversaw not only the extermination of significant portions of the population during the post-WWII period but also the base policies characteristic of Communist rule.^{lxxx} An eyewitness account of the use of terrorism and execution in the show-trials that

commonly occurred during the time testified of the arbitrary viciousness in the emerging government of Ho Chi Minh:

Next they began Land Reform in the villages. The elimination of landowner was meant to begin the process of Communist collectivity of all land and labor. You weren't a landlord because of the acreage you possessed or your way of life; anyone who wasn't Communist was targeted. There were public trials and torture sessions that the Party forced the whole villages to attend. It turned into very vicious, what we would call kangaroo courts.

Peasants were forced into playing out retaliation against neighbors. For instance, if a father has been classified as a "landlord," the cadre call in the children. If the eldest is a girl with younger brothers and sisters, she is told, 'If you do not denounce your father, you will be classified as a landlord, too. But if you publicly denounce your father and say the he raped you, you can stay home to take care of your brothers and sisters.' To save the rest of the family, she was obliged to go along. It was like a stage drama, orchestrated by the Party. Peasants and landowners had to play roles like in the theater.

I witnessed some of these rallies in villages in the resistance zone. The rallies were held at night because during the day we feared the French airplanes.

Hundreds of people would be marched into an area the size of a football field, usually hidden by a hill. Surrounded by a circle of bamboo torches, the flames and clouds of smoke resembled temple paintings of Buddhist hell. The tribune

had two wooden stages, one for the accused and a presidium for seven judges, all poor peasants. Among them was a police chief, usually a woman.

The tribune was lit by bicycle-powered generators. The people pumping the bicycles were behind the tribune's rear screen. Also behind the screen were Land Reform cadre, who directed and coached the judges in a low voice. Very often they were accompanied by Chinese advisors dressed in Vietnamese clothing, who helped to structure this program according to Mao's model. Each tribunal would last two or three nights. . . . On top of the tribunal stood three portraits: Ho Chi Minh in the middle flanked by the Soviet Malenkov and Mao. Placards were posted with slogans like: 'Down with traitorous reactionary landlords.' And, 'Let us give the masses a free hand in their struggle.'

At first the accused is only denounced with minor crimes of exploitation. If the victim denies this, the next night he is accused of bigger crimes by neighbors or relatives—rape or murder. If he does not confess, on the third night his is accused of serving French intelligence. That is treason to the country, which means death.^{lxxxii}

“The Franco-Vietminh War and Forward”

Even the outbreak of the Franco-Vietminh War in 1946 did not deter the continued efforts of the Vietnamese Communists to purge society. Ho Chi Minh called this “building while fighting,”^{lxxxiii} a tactic that allowed the Communists to recreate the social structure of occupied areas so that the populace would be favorable toward the Vietnamese Communists and their

agenda. The fact that they pursued this policy even under the difficult circumstances of fighting against the French, using precious resources and manpower, indicated clearly that these Marxist revolutionaries could not have succeeded if left to popular support alone.

But Ho Chi Minh did not have to fabricate problems during the post-World War II era in order to succeed. He needed only to manipulate them again as he had in the past, and thereby achieve his strategic goals through the war with France. The return of French colonial authorities after World War II had inflamed rapidly popular hatred of the old colonial system, raising cries for independence throughout Indochina. Racial antipathies among the Vietnamese boiled over as more recent abuses by the French stirred up past memories, creating the revolutionary passions that aided Ho Chi Minh's movement.^{lxxxiii}

The short period of peace between the France and the new revolutionary government died a quick death, struck down by the French colonial regime which reasserted its authority and its aggression in relationship to that growing retrenchment of power. Ho, who awaited such an opportune moment for action, described this time as follows:

However, the French colonialists still dreamed of the possibility of reestablishing their oppressive regime in our country. They regarded our peaceful attitude as a weakness. Encouraged by the British-American reactionary forces and in collusion with the Chiang Kai-shek clique, on September 23, 1945, they attacked the Vietnamese people in Saigon, then sought to penetrate the North. Afterwards, trampling on what they had pledged in the Preliminary Agreement of March 6, 1946, and the modus vivendi of September 14, 1946, the colonialists perpetrated a massacre in Haiphong, occupied Lang Son, and staged repeated provocations until

December 19, when the Resistance War of our entire people against the invaders began.^{lxxxiv}

The French, weary from fighting in World War II, exhausted financially and emotionally from that conflict, foundered before the determination and elusiveness of Ho's Vietminh. Its "protracted war" strategy gained valuable time for developing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's military power, for recruitment and "education" of the Vietnamese people, and, by the beginning of the 1950s, even for the achievement of superiority in forces.^{lxxxv} Though Ho's troops were not many, and had suffered many hardships and heavy losses in human wave assaults against fortified French positions, these revolutionaries were persistent--adroitly fighting a guerrilla war that offset French advantages in firepower.

In *Some Aspects of Guerrilla Warfare in Vietnam*, Vietnamese Communist author Hoang Van Thai described the clever use of guerrilla tactics that typified this war whereby "the weak can defeat the strong." In one episode from this source, the ingenuity of the Vietminh involved a clever diversion using a most unlikely subject--a frog. French soldiers frantically firing their weapons into the night later found the following:

What actually had occurred? The people's militia of Haiduong had devised a stratagem to harass the enemy. They had introduced a small ball of tobacco into the mouth of a toad whose jaws they bound together. The animal was then hung at the barbed wire fences at a late hour. With an irritated throat, it coughed just like a man.

The experience was afterwards popularized among the guerrillas of other districts so much so that raising [frogs] became a special trade occupation in several villages.^{lxxxvi}

Thus undeterred by the crude appearances and the lack of sophisticated arms of their comrades, many within the ranks of the Vietminh still believed in the Party's proverb regarding the certainty of victory and a better future: "True, it is today a grasshopper kicking an elephant, but tomorrow the elephant will have its bowels plucked out."^{lxxxvii}

Indeed the patience of "the grasshopper" was not without merit. In 1949, Mao Zedong's Communist forces in China deposed the Nationalist Chinese and poured aid and advisers into Vietnam, tipping the balance of power in favor of the Vietminh over the French. The amount of aid and logistical support given by Mao's China "linked Vietnam to the Communist world" and produced a qualitative change and not just a quantitative one for the Vietminh. Later, the end of the Korean War in 1953 allowed the People's Republic of China to redirect its energies from that conflict and supply even more help to Ho's army. The Vietnamese Communist recognized this strategic advantage, exploited it, and considered it pivotal to their success.^{lxxxviii} The prophesied time for "leaping" had come to the Vietminh.

Subsequently, the Communist forces under Ho accelerated their offensive operations and penetrated further into Laos and Cambodia. Indochina was inflamed in war and Communist revolutionary work.^{lxxxix} By that time Indochina's strident revolutionary had gained much experience and organizational success. The task at hand therefore called for building on past successes in new circumstances, and drawing upon popular passions and the power of an ubiquitous insurgent apparatus.

By the 1950s Ho had accomplished that very feat and had developed his revolutionary work throughout Indochina, moving his forces with relative ease in Laos and Cambodia. Both the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Rouge, the Communist revolutionary groups respectively of these two Southeast Asian neighbors of Vietnam, grew in potency as well as numbers and therefore increasingly assisted the insurgency in Vietnam. The minimally important trails that linked Vietnam with Laos and Cambodia grew in number and complexity as Ho's cadre remembered their mentor's words nearly a decade earlier: "Do you understand that communications are a life-and-death matter?"^{xc}

Throughout his life, Ho Chi Minh urged the further development of the region for operational, logistic, and offensive purposes.^{xc} Lt. Gen. Sak Sutsakhan described these ominous events in his country of Cambodia during the Franco-Vietminh War:

The Viet Minh troops in Cambodia continued to expand gradually as the political and military situation of the regime in power deteriorated. Under the pretext of bringing military assistance for independence in Cambodia, these Viet Minh forces established themselves more and more deeply in Cambodia. Their method was to move into certain frontier regions to facilitate taking over particular areas in the interior of Cambodia just before the signing of the Geneva agreements in 1954. These areas of Viet Minh control were then expanded according to the 'oil spot' or 'leopard spot' concept.^{xcii}

In addition to the vital logistic systems created in these parts, the Vietnamese Communists operated in coordination with these other Communist organizations and benefitted much from their support. During the Franco-Vietminh War Ho achieved operational unity with

Laotian and Cambodian Communist forces, a unity that was cemented in formal agreements between parties.^{xciii}

Subsequently in 1953 Air Force Colonel Edward Lansdale remarked that the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese operated together during a military offensive against the French that he observed first hand. Although Lansdale took careful note of this coordination of Communist forces, he was struck by another fact: the Communists were using the drug trade to fund their military operations. The daring Colonel recalled:

Some memories of my Indochina visit have stuck with me. There was the hasty trip to a foreign legion outpost on the Plaine des Jarres in Laos to observe a sudden Vietminh invasion of the area—only to discover that the Communist invasion had been called off when the French preclusively bought up the opium crop in the region and thus denied it to the enemy. Ever since, I have noted wryly how Communist military forces of the North Vietnamese or Pathet Lao become most active in that region every year at opium harvest time. The opium now pays for many of their battalions and divisions.^{xciv}

Ho Chi Minh's strategy in Indochina during the Franco-Vietminh War involved more than just Communist internationalism (augmented by China), communications (logistics), and military operations (joint operations with other Communist military forces). The Indochina strategy included the creation of international political leverage as well, the very beginning of strategies that later became staples of the Vietnamese Communist diet of political-military warfare against the United States.

Throughout the conflicts with France and later the United States, Ho and his Communist supporters gained international support by repeatedly asserting the false notion that the “imperialists” were “expanding” the war in Southeast Asia. As French forces, and later United States military forces, fought against the coordinated attacks of Communist insurgents in the region, whether in Laos or Cambodia, Ho and his followers announced to the world that the aggression was “escalating” because the enemy had violated the neutrality or rights of Cambodia and Laos.^{xcv}

Ho and his followers often used this notion of “escalation” and “expansion” of the war in Indochina, along with false notions of “neutrality,” as pretexts to weaken popular support in France and the United States for war and to safeguard the strategic advantage of the Communist forces, which Ho depicted as “liberators.”^{xcvi} In 1970 this Party propaganda reached deeply into the psyche of young Americans who reacted emotionally and sometimes violently to President Richard Nixon’s decision to eliminate North Vietnam’s sanctuaries and supplies in Cambodia.

But Ho Chi Minh’s strategic considerations also included a wide exploitation of the international politics of the time and not just a linkage between international politics and regional politics in Laos and Cambodia. His ability to ride the success of the victory of the People’s Republic of China was only the beginning of a strategy that exploited the changing “balance of power” and the ascension of new power sources. As he walked through the revolutionary stages of development and the decades that followed, Ho increasingly courted Communist support from around the globe and beyond his earliest backers--Soviet Russia, Communist China, and the French Communist Party--taking advantage of the creeping power of Moscow’s and Peking’s internationalism and the birth of new Communist states.

Ho later received delegations from the Communist parties in Cuba, Angola, India, Yugoslavia, Mongolia and other parts of the Marxist world, finding propaganda and material benefits in these relationships.^{xcvii} Ho Chi Minh praised them for their support and, in turn, pledged his country's support for international Communism and their particular "struggle."^{xcviii}

Ho, ever mindful that a good Communist must show gratitude to the father and not just his children, assured Moscow that the socialist revolution worldwide owed its highest regards to its leader, the Soviet Union. He declared: "The Democratic republic of Viet-Nam is a member of the big socialist family headed by the great Soviet Union. It is our duty to defend the advance post of socialism in Southeast Asia, to endeavor to contribute to the strengthening of the forces of the socialist camp, and to safeguard peace in Southeast Asia and the world"^{xcix} The reception of Bloc aid therefore cemented Ho's movement to international Communism, making him a debtor as well as a creditor in revolutionary assets.

Ho not only courted these various Communist parties around the globe but also threatened to use their soldiers as well. Yet another potent political weapons that he held was the implicit and explicit threat of escalating the war and turning it into a global war that directly involved the Soviet Union, Communist China, and other Communist countries. Ho's repeated rhetoric supporting notions of an eventual global triumph of Marxism over capitalism, coupled with his alliance with China whose threats against Southeast Asian states were vehement, fell not open deaf ears in the West.^c

Although Ho's rattling of the "Hammer and Sickle" was quieter at first, and later far more vehement in tone as he voiced his militancy with words such as "the Cuban people are ready to give even their blood [for our cause]," these threats deeply disturbed Western security assessments.^{ci} Such a geo-political scenario was troubling to Paris, but far more for Washington

in 1949 as Moscow acquired nuclear weapons and thus crashed the nuclear club as an unwanted guest determined to defy the gentlemen's rules of conduct.

All the presidents who led the American war effort in Vietnam, from President Harry Truman to President Richard Nixon, therefore strove to limit the war there and to keep that conflict from tying down too many American troops.^{cii} Playing to these strategic concerns, and hoping to paralyze American military efforts, Ho later asserted against the United States:

The United States has a big economic and military potential. To defeat such an enemy, we first of all rely on our own strength, and at the same time strive to win the most effective international assistance. The assistance support given us by the brotherly socialist countries are particularly valuable. Hundreds of thousands of volunteers from the socialist countries and other countries have declared their readiness to fight the U.S. imperialists by our side. We warmly thank them for their militant solidarity with us. When necessary, we will appeal to them.^{ciii}

While remaining firmly committed to his "comrades" he simultaneously courted sympathizers from all regions of the world and all ranks of life. In fact, Ho rarely missed a public opportunity for calling attention to his sympathizers, "progressive peoples" around the world, praising them and acknowledging their importance in the struggle against "imperialist aggression." Both Ho and Pham Van Dong considered this element to be essential to their victory and a major aspect over their revolutionary strategy.^{civ}

And logically so, Ho Chi Minh and his followers gained much comfort and recognition from the support of non-Communists around the world--including many Americans who later praised his revolution. In 1954 Ho remarked about this early support: "This internationalism is

invaluable. It encouraged us through the trying days of our Resistance. It will help us to build a lasting peace. The ever-growing movement of peace and democracy in the world was conducive to our victory.”^{cv}

This encouragement from abroad during the Franco-Vietminh War period foreshadowed the American anti-war movement of the 1960s and early 1970s. Ho masterfully targeted the French and American masses, media, malcontents, and militaries, stirring the doubts, debates, and debacles that reached well into the corridors of Paris and Washington, where leaders echoed propaganda conceived in minds that despised Western security and freedom. The scraggily-bearded hippie wearing peace signs, the strait-laced appearing professor delivering campus speeches opposing the “immoral” war against Vietnam’s “peasant nationalists,” and the agitated mother inadvertently berating the leadership of freedom against Communist tyranny--all figures who became historical background to memories of an era past--served the calculated interests of a mind whose wits conceived of a revolution that carried weapons far beyond the hefty crates of newly minted Chinese and Soviet AK-47s later dropped in mass on the musty docks of North Vietnam.

Moreover, if Ho Chi Minh could not gain the open support of some groups or countries for the war against France, and later the war against the United States, at the very least he “won assurance that they would keep a neutral attitude towards that struggle.”^{cvi} Consequently, during the 1950s Ho Chi Minh traveled to India and Burma and sought political advantages there. He similarly received official visits from these states as well as Indonesia, represented by President Sukarno.

But the DRV’s international relations were surely not a “one man show” resting on Ho’s efforts alone. Ever ready to shake an extended hand, on May 29, 1955 Pham Van Dong attended

the Bandung Conference in Indonesia, which was not only a major international conference but also the beginning of a major international movement that hosted participants of the Non-Aligned Movement and articulated concepts of neutrality and “peace” that were favorable to Communist ambitions.^{cvi} Pham’s courting of “neutral” countries not only attained Ho’s earlier objective of keeping political powers from supporting the West’s containment policy, but also his diplomatic efforts fostered the political inertia that allowed the DRV to cultivate regional Communism--or to paraphrase the words of President John F. Kennedy, “to allow the tiger to fill its belly with those who attempted to ride its back.”^{cviii}

The end of the Franco-Vietminh War came in 1954 at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. General Henri Navarre, who assumed command of the French expeditionary forces in April 1953, gambled that the Vietminh could be drawn into the open at Dien Bien Phu--a strategic point of supplies and westward deployment for the DRV’s military--and massacred by his superiority in firepower. Navarre, determined to win a decisive battle and reestablish the cause both in Vietnam and at home, underestimated the logistical abilities of the Vietminh as well as their determination to deploy artillery on the surrounding heights of the French position there.^{cix}

The Vietminh’s logistical accomplishments achieved in deployment of artillery and troops through the difficult terrain and the potency of rival weaponry remain a centerpiece of the history of this battle--and a proud record in Hanoi’s military annals. These artillery weapons battered “the enemy” and in March destroyed the airfields connecting their supplies and reinforcements.^{cx} General Vo Nguyen Giap, who commanded the Vietminh, summed up the ferocity of the DRV’s assaults when he asserted pointedly: “We decided to take the enemy by the throat at Dien Bien Phu.”^{cxii}

The defeat of France at Dien Bien Phu on May 7th had a devastating effect on the will of the government and people of that crumbling colonial empire. Even though the Vietminh had suffered terrible casualties, the victory for Ho Chi Minh at Dien Bien Phu had been an unquestioned triumph of international Communism—and yet one exaggerated well out of proportion to its reality. But France lacked the will, the popular support at home, and the finances to continue the struggle alone and to achieve victory.^{cxii}

French colonialism had been defeated in Vietnam, and not many Americans shed a tear for the defeat of that system.^{cxiii} But the victory was not one of nationalism over colonialism. Ho Chi Minh had clearly shown by his actions as well as his words that his revolution would continue to serve the interests of international Communism. The battle shifted next to the negotiation table at Geneva, Switzerland where the fate of Vietnam awaited the decisions of the United States, China, the Soviet Union, and to a lesser degree France and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

With 20,000 to 30,000 Chinese Communist military advisers in Vietnam, Soviet aid and supplies pouring into Ho's occupied territory along with advisers from that sponsor, and his demonstrated and passionate resolve to export "peoples' wars" throughout the region, the preponderance of power was indeed in the hands of those who believed that "power began at the end of the barrel of a gun."^{cxiv} Moreover, the Vietminh had invaded Laos and Cambodia and remained there against the wishes of these countries. At this point in time, the United States found that it could no longer just debate the methods and measures of intervention,^{cxv} or rely simply on aiding its allies with military advice and supplies, but had to contain Communism and also uproot it by supporting directly the Vietnamese and Indochinese nationalists who sought freedom for their lands.

There was no turning back at this point. Washington was determined to fight a survival war against a contagion that resisted the conventional curatives of reason and diplomacy. Thus the stakes were far greater than local conflicts or “civil wars” in Vietnam or Southeast Asia. With mass killings, political intrigue, enslavement of entire populations, and the degradation of human life, all expanding against the determination of developing states, the bamboo curtain drawn from strings reaching as far as Moscow and Peking threatened to close upon Indochinese lands that had fought to see the daylight of independence and freedom magnified through leaders far closer to heart and home.

ⁱHo Chi Minh, *Prison Dairy* in Marr, David G. ed., *Reflections From Captivity*. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978), 81.

ⁱⁱPham Van Dong noted also that Ho wanted to bring Communism to all of East Asia. Pham Van Dong, *Ho Chi Minh: A Man, A Nation, An Age, and A Cause*, 4th edition (Hanoi: Gioi Publishers, 1999), 21-22, 47. Luu Van Loi, *50 Years of Vietnamese Diplomacy: 1945-1995* (Hanoi: Gioi Publishers, 2000), 137.

ⁱⁱⁱPham Van Dong, Van. *Ho Chi Minh*, 51. Pham Van Dong noted: “Throughout his life, Ho Chi Minh followed one road and one goal. Nevertheless, he directed strategy and tactics in a dynamic and versatile way, without sticking to rigid principles and dogmas. . . . With a special political sensitivity, Ho Chi Minh correctly appraised the turning point, making very clearsighted [sic] and clever decisions, now compromising to preserve and consolidate his forces, now resolutely turning to the attack with well-prepared forces in decisive battles.”

^{iv}Ho Chi Minh died in 1969 and did not live to see the victory of his Vietnamese Communists in 1975.

^v*An Outline History of the Viet Nam Worker’s Party, 1930-1970* (Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1970), 22. Ho Chi Minh, *Against U.S. Aggression For National Salvation* (Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1967), 16. During these primary building years, or the “survival stage” of protracted war, the Vietnamese Communists concentrated on organization, propaganda, and guerrilla warfare, leaving conventional warfare for the later stages of development. Therefore, military supplies imported from abroad were less important compared to later years. Nevertheless, the Chinese Communists provided much aid and shelter for Ho’s revolution—a point discussed later in the chapter. Moreover, reliance on local supplies—stealing, taxing, and requisitioning—was a practice used to create self sufficiency, a coveted Communist characteristic for organization building in the initial stages.

^{vi}Nguyen Khac Vien, ed., *A Century of National Struggle*, 81.

^{vii}Tran Van Dinh, in Le Duan, *This Nation and Socialism Are One: Selected Writings of Le Duan First Secretary, Central Committee Vietnam Workers’ Party*. ed. Tran Van Dinh (Chicago: Vanguard Books, 1976), xv.

^{viii}Ibid.

^{ix}Nguyen Khac Vien, ed., *A Century of National Struggle*, 78. Viet Nam Workers’ Party, *Our President Ho Chi Minh* (Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1970), 74-76. Hoang Van Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism: A Case History of North Vietnam* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1964), 43.

^xNguyen Khac Vien, ed., *A Century of National Struggle*, 80-81. Hoang Van Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism*, 43.

^{xi}Quoted in Michael Lee Lanning and Dan Cragg, *Inside the VC and The NVA: The Real Story of North Vietnam’s Armed Forces* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1992), 34-35.

^{xii}General Le Quang Ba, “Reminiscences of Underground Revolutionary Work,” in *Mountain Regions and National Minorities* (Hanoi: Xunhasaba, n.d.), 45-46.

^{xiii}General Chu Van Tan, “With Uncle Ho,” in *Mountain Regions and National Minorities* (Hanoi: Xunhasaba, n.d.), 62-66.

^{xiv}Ho Chi Minh, “Founding of the Communist Party of Indochina (February 1930)” in Marvin Gettleman, ed., *Vietnam: History, Documents, and Opinions on a Major World Crisis* (New York: Fawcett Publications, 1965), 35. Ho Chi Minh, “An Open Letter to M. Leon Archimbaud” in *Le Paria* January 15, 1923 in *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution: Selected Writings, 1920-1966*. ed. Bernard Fall (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 19.

^{xv}Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 130.

^{xvi}General Le Quang Ba, “Reminiscences of Underground Revolutionary Work,” in Nguyen Khac Vien, ed., *Mountain Regions and National Minorities*, 46. Viet Nam Workers’ Party, *Our President Ho Chi Minh*, 100-101.

^{xvii}Pham Van Dong, *Ho Chi Minh*, 50. General Le Quang Ba, “Reminiscences of Underground Revolutionary Work,” in Nguyen Khac Vien, ed., *Mountain Regions and National Minorities*, 46. Viet Nam Workers’ Party, *Our President Ho Chi Minh*, 100-101.

^{xviii}General Chu Van Tan, *Reminiscences on the Army for National Salvation: Memoir of General Chu Van Tan*. trans. Mai Elliott (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1974), 51.

^{xix}Hoang Van Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism*, 43.

^{xx}N. Khac Huyen, *Vision Accomplished? The Enigma of Ho Chi Minh* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), 27. During this time Ho betrayed the famous Vietnamese nationalist Phan Boi Chau for 150,000 Indochinese piasters. Maj. Gen. Nguyen Duy Hinh and Brig. Gen. Tran Dinh Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 10.

^{xxi}Hoang Van Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism*, 43. *An Outline History of the Viet Nam Worker’s Party*, 22.

^{xxii}General Le Quang Ba, “Reminiscences of Underground Revolutionary Work,” in Nguyen Khac Vien, ed., *Mountain Regions and National Minorities*, 29.

^{xxiii}General Chu Van Tan, “With Uncle Ho,” in Nguyen Khac Vien, ed., *Mountain Regions and National Minorities*, 61. See also General Vo Nguyen Giap, *The Military Art of People’s War: Selected Writings of General Vo Nguyen Giap*. ed. Russell Stetler (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 41. Giap noted that from 1926-1927 the student movement in Hue had become associated with international Communism: “Following the quit-school movement staged by the student in Hue in 1927, I was dismissed from school and had to go to my native village. At that time, the student movement in Hue also maintained contacts with the revolutionary organizations abroad.”

^{xxiv}Viet Nam Workers’ Party, *Our President Ho Chi Minh*, 100-101.

^{xxv}Ho Chi Minh, like Mao Zedong, used this tactic during the early revolutionary stages. The secrecy concealed not only the international connection but also the Communist nature of the movement. National Intelligence Estimates (NIE), “Prospects for Soviet Control of Communist China” (April 15, 1949), <http://www.foia.cia.gov/search.asp> (accessed 12 August 2007).

^{xxvi}N. Khac Huyen, *Vision Accomplished?* 29-30. See also Nguyen Khac Vien, ed., *A Century of National Struggle*, 82. Viet Nam Workers’ Party, *Our President Ho Chi Minh*, 91.

^{xxvii}See Barbara Leitch LePoer, ed., *Thailand: A Country Study* (Washington: Federal Research Division, 1987). This source is available online, [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+th0000\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+th0000)) (accessed May 21, 2007).

^{xxviii}Pham Van Dong, Van. *Ho Chi Minh*, 51. General Le Quang Ba, “Reminiscences of Underground Revolutionary Work,” in Nguyen Khac Vien, ed., *Mountain Regions and National Minorities*, 32-38. Dan Van Song, “A Historical View of the Vietnamese Nationalist Cause,” in Francois Sully, ed., *We the Vietnamese: Voices From Vietnam*, 139. The author, who was a South Vietnamese Senator during the war, discussed the Communist Vietnamese ability to seize causes such as the nationalist revolt during World War II. Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1966).

^{xxix}Viet Nam Workers’ Party, *Our President Ho Chi Minh*, 92, 100-101.

^{xxx}Dan Van Song, “A Historical View of the Vietnamese Nationalist Cause,” in Francois Sully, ed., *We the Vietnamese*, 139.

^{xxxi}*An Outline History of the Viet Nam Worker’s Party*, 27-28. General Le Quang Ba, “Reminiscences of Underground Revolutionary Work,” in *Mountain Regions and National Minorities*, 36. General Vo Nguyen Giap, *The Military Art of People’s War*, 50-68. Giap noted the fact that Ho was very careful in his organizational work during World War II, a master at pacing his activities.

^{xxxii}Clive J. Christie, ed., *Southeast Asia in the Twentieth Century: A Reader* (New York and London: I.B. Tauris and Company, Ltd., 1998), 77.

^{xxxiii}Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 130.

^{xxxiv}Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 126. Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 208.

^{xxxv}Pham Van Dong, Van. *Ho Chi Minh*, 30. Nguyen Khac Vien, ed., *A Century of National Struggle*, 109. *An Outline History of the Viet Nam Worker's Party*, 21-22.

^{xxxvi}For example, Le Duan, *This Nation and Socialism Are One*, 163. Basic Communist ideology upheld the notion that revolutionaries must not await the fall of capitalism but strive to realize that outcome.

^{xxxvii}Stephane Courtois, Nicholas Werth, et. al., *The Black Book on Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*. trans. Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 566.

^{xxxviii}Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 130.

^{xxxix}*An Outline History of the Viet Nam Worker's Party*, 20, 44,47. Le Duan, *Some Questions Concerning The International Tasks of Our Party: Speech at the Ninth Plenum of the Third Central Committee of the Viet Nam Workers' Party* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1964), 161. General Vo Nguyen Giap, *The Military Art of People's War*, 65. Bui Tin, *From Enemy to Friend: A North Vietnamese Perspective on the War*. trans. Nguyen Ngoc Bich (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2002), 7-8. General Chu Van Tan, *Reminiscences on the Army for National Salvation*, 77. *Heroes and Heroines of Liberation Armed Forces of South Vietnam* (South Vietnam: Liberation Editions, 1965), 8. Tran Van Dinh in Le Duan, *This Nation and Socialism Are One*, 100. The last author noted: "The greatest achievement of the North's socialist revolution has been the elimination of oppression and exploitation, the liquidation of the exploiting classes as such, and the replacement of small-scale and scattered production by co-operation."

^{xl}Stephane Courtois, Nicholas Werth, et. al., *The Black Book on Communism*, 566.

^{xli}Hoang Van Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism*, 112-113. Hoang Van Chi, "Land Reform" in Al Santoli, ed., *To Bear Any Burden: The Vietnam War and Its Aftermath In the Words of Americans and Southeast Asians* (New York: E. P. Dutton, Inc., 1985), 46.

^{xlii}Marvin Gettleman, ed. *Vietnam: History, Documents, and Opinions on a Major World Crisis*, 56. Nguyen Khac Vien, ed., *A Century of National Struggle*, 123. Democratic Republic of Vietnam, *Vietnam: Fundamental Problems* (Hanoi: Xunhasaba, 1966), 41-42.

^{xliii}Marvin Gettleman, ed. *Vietnam: History, Documents, and Opinions on a Major World Crisis*, 57.

^{xliv}Ho Chi Minh returned to Vietnam to oversee directly the Vietminh. *An Outline History of the Viet Nam Worker's Party*, 32-34. Mai Thi Tu, "A Century of Anti-Colonial Struggle (1859-1954)" in Nguyen Khac Vien, ed., *South Viet Nam: From the NFL to the Provisional Revolutionary Government*, 224-234. General Vo Nguyen Giap, *The Military Art of People's War*, 39-68. The term *Vietminh* is a contraction of "Vietnam Doc Lap Dong Minh" (League for Vietnamese Independence).

^{xlv}Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 200. Ho Chi Minh, *Against U.S. Aggression For National Salvation*, 19.

^{xlvi}Pham Van Dong, Van. *Ho Chi Minh*, 26.

^{xlvii}General Chu Van Tan, *Reminiscences on the Army for National Salvation*, 49. General Vo Nguyen Giap, *The Military Art of People's War*, 41.

^{xlviii}General Le Quang Ba, "Reminiscences of Underground Revolutionary Work," in Nguyen Khac Vien, ed., *Mountain Regions and National Minorities*, 38-40. General Chu Van Tan, *Reminiscences on the Army for National Salvation*, 46-47.

^{xlix}Examples of guerrilla warfare accounts by the Communist Vietnamese include Lieutenant General Hoang Van Thai, *Some Aspects of Guerrilla Warfare in Vietnam* (Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1965). "Cuu Long on New Developments in the Guerrilla War in South Vietnam" (Published in Quan Doi Nhan Dan [Hanoi], November 29, 1966, and broadcast by Liberation Radio to South Vietnam, 0100 GMT, November 13, 1966) in *Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace. Visions of Victory: Selected Vietnamese Communist Military Writings, 1964-1968* (Hoover Institution

Publications, 1969), 101-112. General Vo Nguyen Giap, *The Military Art of People's War*.

ⁱPenn Nouth, "Invitation to a Sideshow," in Al Santoli, ed., *To Bear Any Burden*, 66-69.

Brig. Gen. Soutchay Vongsavanh, *RLG Military Operations and Activities in the Laotian Panhandle* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1981), 9. Paul F. Langer and Joseph J. Zasloff, *North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao: Partners in the Struggle for Laos* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970).

ⁱⁱFor example, Brig. Gen. Soutchay Vongsavanh, *RLG Military Operations and Activities in the Laotian Panhandle*, 16-19, 196. Maj. Gen. Nguyen Duy Hinh and Brig. Gen. Tran Dinh Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society*. Lt. Gen. Sak Sutsakhan, *The Khmer Republic at War and the Final Collapse* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 1-17. General Cao Van Vien and Lt. Gen. Dong Van Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 136-163. Penn Nouth, "Invitation to a Sideshow," in Al Santoli, ed., *To Bear Any Burden*, 66-69.

ⁱⁱⁱGeneral Vo Nguyen Giap, *The Military Art of People's War*, 57-58. Viet Nam Workers' Party, *Our President Ho Chi Minh*, 93-94. *An Outline History of the Viet Nam Worker's Party*, 14-15, 46.

ⁱⁱⁱⁱGeneral Cao Van Vien and Lt. Gen. Dong Van Khuyen *Reflections on the Vietnam War*, 136. These two Generals noted in their book: "Of historical interest, it is also worth noting that the building of a Communist underground infrastructure—the preparatory phase—had begun as early as the 1930s and developed during the 1946-1954 First Indochina War under the Viet Minh movement. This organization continued its underground existence in South Vietnam after the 1954 Geneva Accords, and along with guerrillas, had re-emerged and rapidly developed since 1959."

^{lv}Ho Chi Minh, "Appeal for General Insurrection," (August 16, 1945) *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 141. Also, Ho Chi Minh, "Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam" (September 2, 1945) *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 142-145.

^{lvi}*The Pentagon Papers* (Gravel edition) vol. 1 "Background to the Crisis, 1940-50," (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), chapter 1, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/pent1.html>. John Clark Pratt, ed., *Vietnam Voices: Perspectives on the War Years, 1941-1982*, 5. President Harry Truman, underscoring Dean Acheson's concerns on Southeast Asia and Communism, noted in his memoirs that his administration had been concerned about events in Indochina for a long time. Truman, Harry S. *Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1956), 519.

^{lvii}General Vo Nguyen Giap, *The Military Art of People's War*, 80.

^{lviii}Stephane Courtois, Nicholas Werth, et. al., *The Black Book on Communism*, 567.

^{lix}Hoang Van Chi, "Land Reform" in Al Santoli, ed., *To Bear Any Burden*, 46. Mao Zedong, "Report On An Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan" March 1927, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archives/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv-1_2.htm#s5 (accessed October 19, 2007). Although Mao denied that innocent people were often hurt in the peasant revolts under his leadership, his point was that the most important issue was overthrowing the enemy, not the nature and excessive level of violence of the revolution.

^{lx}Stephane Courtois, Nicholas Werth, et. al., *The Black Book on Communism*, 566. Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 189, 214. *An Outline History of the Viet Nam Worker's Party*, 44, 47. General Vo Nguyen Giap, *The Military Art of People's War*, 83. Maj. Gen. Nguyen Duy Hinh and Brig. Gen. Tran Dinh Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society*, 23-27. These South Vietnamese generals provide excellent examples and commentary on the subject.

^{lxi}Stephane Courtois, Nicholas Werth, et. al., *The Black Book on Communism*, 567.

^{lxii}Mrs. Le Thi Anh, "Revolution" in Al Santoli, ed., *To Bear Any Burden*, 36. Stephane Courtois, Nicholas Werth, et. al., *The Black Book on Communism*, 566.

^{lxiii}Maj. Gen. Nguyen Duy Hinh and Brig. Gen. Tran Dinh Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society*, 26.

^{lxiii}General Vo Nguyen Giap, *The Military Art of People's War*, 85. Giap noted: "The liquidation of the reactionaries of the Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang was crowned with success, and we were able to liberate all the areas which had fallen into their hands."

^{lxiv}Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 189, 214.

^{lxv}Rufus Phillips, "Pacification" in Al Santoli, ed., *To Bear Any Burden*, 54.

^{lxvi}George Donelson Moss, *Vietnam: An American Ordeal*. second edition. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994), 17.

^{lxvii}Stephane Courtois, Nicholas Werth, et. al., *The Black Book on Communism*, 567.

^{lxviii}Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 189, 149.

^{lxix}Stephane Courtois, Nicholas Werth, et. al., *The Black Book on Communism*, 567-568.

^{lxx}Hoang Van Chi, "Land Reform" in Al Santoli, ed., *To Bear Any Burden*, 46. See also Hoang Van Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism*, 92.

^{lxxi}*The Pentagon Papers* (Gravel edition) vol. 1 "Background to the Crisis, 1940-50," (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), chapter 1, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/pent1.html>.

^{lxxii}Le Duan, *This Nation and Socialism Are One*, 165. *An Outline History of the Viet Nam Worker's Party*, 50.

^{lxxiii}Pham Van Dong, *Ho Chi Minh*, 31.

^{lxxiv}Ho Chi Minh, "Message to the Vietnamese People, the French People, and the Peoples of the Allied Nations" (December 21, 1946) in *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 174.

^{lxxv}Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 214. *An Outline History of the Viet Nam Worker's Party*, 50.

^{lxxvi}*The Pentagon Papers* (Gravel edition) vol. 1 "Background to the Crisis, 1940-50," (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), chapter 1, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/pent1.html>.

^{lxxvii}For example, Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 136.

^{lxxviii}Neil Sheehan, Hedrick Smith, et. al., *The Pentagon Papers* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), 26.

^{lxxix}*The Pentagon Papers* (Gravel edition) vol. 1 "Background to the Crisis, 1940-50," (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), chapter 1, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/pent1.html>. In February 1947, the United States Ambassador in Paris noted to the French Premier Ramadier: "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. . . ."

^{lxxx}Stephane Courtois, Nicholas Werth, et. al., *The Black Book on Communism*, 568. Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 207-208. Ho noted in 1951 regarding Mao's revolution: "Owing to geographical, historical, economic, and cultural conditions, the Chinese Revolution exerted a great influence on the Viet-Nameese revolution, which had to learn and indeed has learned may experiences from it."

^{lxxxii}Hoang Van Chi, "Land Reform" in Al Santoli, ed., *To Bear Any Burden*, 45-46.

^{lxxxiii}Pham Van Dong, Van. *Ho Chi Minh*, 44.

^{lxxxiii}Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years Mandate for Change: 1953-1956* (Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1963), 331-333. Harry S. Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 380. National Intelligence Council, "The Breakup of the Colonial Empires and Its Implications for US Security (3 September 1948) in *Estimative Products on Vietnam, 1948-1975* (Pittsburgh, PA: Government Printing Office, 2005), 7-8. National Intelligence Council, "Memo Critical Developments in French Policy Toward Indochina (10 January 1952) in *Estimative Products on Vietnam*, 38.

^{lxxxiv}Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 291.

^{lxxxv}Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years Mandate for Change*, 333. "Speech by Premier Lanier Before the National Assembly, March 5, 1954," in Gareth Porter, ed., *Vietnam: The Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions*. vol. 1 (Stanfordville, New York: Earl M. Coleman Enterprises, Inc., Publishers, 1979), 495-497. NIC, "Prospects for the Defense of Indochina Against A Chinese

Communist Invasion (7 September 1950)" in *Estimative Products*, 1. "Probable Developments in Indochina Through Mid-1952 (3 March 1952)," in *Estimative Products*, 1-2.

^{lxxxvi}Lieutenant-General Hoang Van Thai, *Some Aspects of Guerrilla Warfare in Vietnam*, 25. See also *Heroes and Heroines of the Liberation Armed Forces of South Vietnam*.

^{lxxxvii}*An Outline History of the Viet Nam Worker's Party*, 61.

^{lxxxviii}*Ibid.*, 60-61. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years Mandate for Change*, 331-333.

General Vo Nguyen Giap, *The Military Art of People's War*, 88. National Intelligence Estimate-91, "Probable Developments in Indochina through 1954," 4 June 1953, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam.htm> (accessed January 14, 2008). Ho Chi Minh, *Against U.S. Aggression For National Salvation*, 20.

^{lxxxix}General Vo Nguyen Giap, *The Military Art of People's War*, 90. National Intelligence Estimate-91, "Probable Developments in Indochina through 1954," 4 June 1953, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam.htm> (accessed January 14, 2008). "Indochina-United States Emergency Aid to Laos and Thailand in the Face of Viet Minh Aggression: Statement by the Secretary of State at a News Conference, May 9, 1953," <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam.htm> (accessed January 14, 2008). Indochina-United States Support of Laos Against the Viet Minh Invasion: Statement by the Department of State, April 17, 1953, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam.htm> (accessed January 14, 2008).

^{xc}General Chu Van Tan, "With Uncle Ho," in *Mountain Regions and National Minorities*, 80. Tran Dinh Tho, *The Cambodian Incursion* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1979), 18.

^{xcii}"Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh: Changsha (Hunan), 16 May 1965," in *Cold War International History Project Virtual Archive* (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars), [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=va2.document&identifier=5034C820-96B6-175C-90CBCFCB37536D19&sort=Collection&item=The%20Vietnam%20\(Indochina\)%20War\(s\)](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=va2.document&identifier=5034C820-96B6-175C-90CBCFCB37536D19&sort=Collection&item=The%20Vietnam%20(Indochina)%20War(s)). Maj. Gen. Nguyen Duy Hinh, *Lam Son 719* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1979), 9.

^{xciii}Lt. Gen. Sak Sutsakhan, *The Khmer Republic at War and the Final Collapse*, 2. Penn Nouth, "Invitation to a Sideshow," in Al Santoli, ed., *To Bear Any Burden*, 66-69.

^{xciiii}Luu Van Loi, *50 Years of Vietnamese Diplomacy*, 100-101. Brig. Gen. Soutchay Vongsavanh, *RLG Military Operations and Activities in the Laotian Panhandle*, 19. *An Outline History of the Viet Nam Worker's Party*, 68.

^{xcv}John Clark Pratt, ed., *Vietnam Voices*, 20.

^{xcvi}Luu Van Loi, *50 Years of Vietnamese Diplomacy*. Luu made asserted this point as a central feature of his diplomatic study of the war. Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 372-373. *Political Programme of the South Viet Nam National Front for Liberation* (Gia Phon Publishing House South Vietnam, 1967), 12.

^{xcvii}Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 372-3. Penn Nouth, "Invitation to a Sideshow," in Al Santoli, ed., *To Bear Any Burden*, 66-69. This advocacy of regional Communist movements was also evident at the Geneva Conference. "Excerpts from the First Plenary Session, the Geneva Conference Indochina Phase, 8 May 1954," <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam.htm> (accessed January 14, 2008).

^{xcviii}Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 345.

^{xcix}*Ibid.*, 207, 345-348, 388-389. Luu Van Loi, *50 Years of Vietnamese Diplomacy*, 139.

^{cx}Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 349, 361, 377.

^{cxi}NIE, "Probable Developments in China (June 16, 1949)," <http://www.foia.cia.gov/search.asp> (accessed 12 August 2007). George Donelson Moss, *Vietnam: An American Ordeal*, 49. National Intelligence Estimate-91, "Probable Developments in Indochina through 1954," 4 June 1953, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam.htm> (accessed January 14, 2008). The last document noted the PRC's military activities in northern Vietnam. US, National Security Council, NSC 5405,

'United States Objectives and Courses of Action With Respect to Southeast Asia,' 16 January 1954, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam.htm> (accessed January 14, 2008). US, National Security Council, Action No. 1074-a, on Possible Intervention in Indochina, 5 April 1954, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam.htm> (accessed January 14, 2008).

^{ci}Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 388. The buildup of Chinese forces along its southern border, in addition to the PRC's continued development of the logistics of this area, created a threat scenario recognized by both French and U.S. authorities. NIC, "French Problems in Indochina (4 September 1951)," in *Estimative Products*, 1.

^{cii}The defense of Europe from Communist aggression was the chief priority among presidential policies regarding the era of containment of international Communism. United States policy regarding Vietnam entailed a careful consideration of limiting the war in extent in order to concentrate a sufficient amount of United States resources on the preservation of Europe. The Europe first strategy was therefore central to the policy of containment. See Chapter One. Also, Memorandum from Arthur Radford, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Defense of Southeast Asia in the Event of Loss of Indochina to the Communists," 21 May 1954, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam.htm> (accessed January 14, 2008).

^{ciii}Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 383.

^{civ}Ibid., 355. Pham Van Dong, *Ho Chi Minh*, 48.

^{cv}Ho Chi Minh, *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, 278.

^{cvi}Luu Van Loi, *50 Years of Vietnamese Diplomacy*, 139.

^{cvii}Ibid.

^{cviii}John F. Kennedy, "Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: 1961* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1962), 1-2.

^{cix}Major Harry D. Bloomer, "An Analysis of the French Defeat At Dien Bien Phu," Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the Navarre Concept for Operations in Indochina, 28 August 1953; Memorandum for the National Security Council on Further US Support for France and the Associated States of Indochina, 5 August 1953; Remarks Made by Major General Thomas J.H. Trapanall, Jr., Former Chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Indochina, 3 May 1954; <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam.htm> (accessed January 14, 2008).

^{cx}Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years Mandate for Change*, 356.

^{cx}General Vo Nguyen Giap, *The Military Art of People's War*, 91-92.

^{cxii}NIC, "Memo Critical Developments in French Policy Toward Indochina, 10 January 1952," *Estimative Products*, 38. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years*, 350. National Intelligence Estimate-91, "Probable Developments in Indochina through 1954, 4 June 1953," <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam.htm> (accessed January 14, 2008). Memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the President's Special Committee on Indochina, "Discussions with General Paul Ely, 29 March 1954, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam.htm> (accessed January 14, 2008).

^{cxiii}However, many Americans felt a deep sorrow for the loss of life among the French soldiers, who fought bravely at Dien Bien Phu and throughout the Franco-Vietminh War. Many American military and political leaders praised the bravery of the French Union forces at Dien Bien Phu. For example, "Indochina-Midway in the Geneva Conference: Address by the Secretary of State, May 7, 1954, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam.htm> (accessed January 14, 2008).

^{cxiv}George Donelson Moss, *Vietnam: An American Ordeal*, 54-55. Lt. Gen. Sak Sutsakhan, *The Khmer Republic at War and the Final Collapse* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 1-2.

^{cxv}US, National Security Council, Action No. 1074-a, “On Possible Intervention in Indochina, 5 April 1954,” <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam.htm> (accessed January 14, 2008).