

THE COLD WAR IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: VIETNAM CONFLICT

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Abstract

Subsequent to the recapturing of Indochina by the French next to the end of World War-2, the locale having gone down to the Japanese the Việt Minh got underway a mutiny beside the French influence controlling and leading the colonies of French Indochina. The earliest few years of the war occupied a near to the ground level rural revolt not in favor of French weight. Nonetheless, following the Chinese communists arrive at the Northern edge of Vietnam in 1949, the divergence twisted into a conservative war between two armies outfitted with up to date armaments supplied by both of the external powers i-e USA and the USSR.

Introduction

When was the Vietnam War

The most generally made use of dates pro the conflict are 1959-1975. This epoch initiates by way of North Vietnam's primary guerilla smacks next to the South and meets with ends by the collapse of Saigon. American ground armed forces were in a straight line involved in the war stuck between 1965 and 1973.

Fundamentals

The Vietnam confrontation originally started in 1959, five years following the categorization of the country as a result of the Geneva Accords. Vietnam had been divided into two, in the midst of a communist administration in the North under Ho Chi Minh and an egalitarian government in the South under Ngo Dinh Diem. Ho opened a guerilla fight in South Vietnam, piloted by Viet Cong divisions, with the target to bring together the country under communist decree. The United States, seeking to contain the swell of communism, trained and coached the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and made available military consultants to facilitate combat the guerillas.

American involvement

In August 1964, a United State warship was hit by North Vietnamese torpedo vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin. Subsequent to attack, Congress voted for the Southeast Asia Resolution which permitted President Lyndon Johnson to carry out armed forces operations in the area devoid of a declaration of battle. On March 2, 1965, United State jumbo jets started bombing targeted goals in Vietnam and the opening troops reached their destination. Commanded by General William Westmoreland US troops triumphed victories over Viet Cong and North Vietnamese armed forces around Chu Lai as well as in the Ia Drang vale that summer.

The Tet distasteful and hateful

Consequent to these crushes, the North Vietnamese stayed away to fight conservative skirmishes and paid jam-packed attention to engage US troops in petite division actions in the scorching and sizzling forests of South Vietnam. In January 1968, the North Vietnamese along with the Viet Cong began a gigantic Tet odious. Inaugurating in the company of a physical attack on United State's Marines at Khe Sanh, the offensive included assaults by the Viet Cong on cities all the way through South Vietnam. Despite the fact that the North Vietnamese were compressed back with grave casualties and fatalities, Tet wobbled the self-confidence of the American inhabitants plus media who had considered the combat was going according to their wishes well.

Vietnamization

Seeing that a result of Tet, President Lyndon Johnson decided not to run for reelection and was been successful by Richard Nixon. Nixon's preparation to end US taking part was to expand the ARVN in order that they could wrestle the war themselves. Because this procedure of "Vietnamization" initiated, United State troops started to come back to their residing point. The distrust of the management that had started after Tet went downhill with the release of news bulletin regarding US soldiers slaughtering civilians at My Lai (1969), the incursion of Cambodia in 1970, and the pouring out of the Pentagon Papers in 1971.

End of the confrontation and the fall of Saigon

The pulling out of US troops was in flux and more liability was voted for the ARVN, which sustained and continued to provide evidence fruitless in conflict, over and over again relying on American backing to fend off crush. On January 27, 1974, a tranquility concord was signed in Paris to end the clash.

By March of that year, American battle troops had left the land. Following a brief era of calm and stillness, North Vietnam recommenced violent behaviors in overdue 1974. Pushing from end to end ARVN forces with no difficulty, they took into custody the Saigon on April 30, 1975, forcing South Vietnam's lay down her arms and bringing back the country together.

Sufferers and victims

United States got 58,119 exterminated, 153,303 wounded, and 1,948 misplaced in stroke

South Vietnam had 230,000 slaughtered in addition to 1,169,763 injured (projected)

North Vietnam had 1,100,000 eradicated in battle (expected) and a mysterious figure of injured

Fundamental Personnel

- ❖ Ho Chi Minh – Communist chief of North Vietnam till his of death in 1969.
- ❖ Vo Nguyen Giap – North Vietnamese general who thought-out the Tet and Easter Offensives.
- ❖ General William Westmoreland and General Creighton Abrams – Commanders-in-chief of United State's forces in Vietnam, from 1964-1968 and 1968-1973, respectively.

Historical Panorama

Events during World War II had profound effects on the development of the Vietnamese Revolution. In June 1940, Germany defeated France and in the unoccupied sector of the country an extremely conservative government based in the town of Vichy assumed power. The Vichy regime collaborated with the Nazi Germans and their allies, the Japanese, when the latter became interested in occupying Indochina to exploit its agricultural and mineral resources and to use it as a staging area for troop deployments elsewhere. The Vichy government allowed Japan to occupy Indochina in September 1940. But the Japanese left the French colonial administration, armed forces, and French-controlled Vietnamese colonial militia intact. Thus the French were able to maintain a repressive stance toward Vietnamese rebels, smashing a Communist-organized uprising in Cochin China in late 1940.[1] The Japanese presence did, however, gradually weaken French control. And on March 9, 1945, for specific political and military reasons, the Japanese attacked French colonial forces and most French units surrendered within twenty-four hours. The ability of the Japanese, an Asian people, to dictate to the previously all-powerful French and cast them aside at will had a significant effect on many Vietnamese. Just as the French conquest had destroyed the concept of a heavenly mandated, immutable Confucian system, the Japanese victory annihilated the myth of European racial superiority. Many more Vietnamese were thereafter encouraged to resist the French actively.

During the period of joint Japanese-French occupation, the two imperialist powers competed for Vietnamese loyalty and each actually tried to arouse and rally Vietnamese nationalism to its side. The Japanese claimed they were assisting in the liberation of a fellow Asian people from European imperialism and trained and armed several Vietnamese youth militias (soon infiltrated and won over by the Viet Minh) and also armed the political-religious sects, the Cao Dai and the Hao Hao. The Japanese policy appears to have been part of a plan to make use of armed Vietnamese allies in the event of an Allied invasion of Indochina. The French, for their part, expanded the Vietnamese educational system (supposedly to provide more technicians, professionals, and administrators to make Vietnam increasingly self-sufficient in these personnel categories) and organized the Sports and Youth program, which recruited and organized tens of thousands in the spirit of Vietnamese nationalism. This policy backfired: Many of the young people whose nationalism and facility with group activities were increased through the Sports and Youth program soon joined the Viet Minh, recognizing it as the only valid and competent vehicle through which to express their patriotic fervor.[2]

While some Vietnamese supported the Japanese, and others, mostly among the 10 percent Catholic minority and the wealthy landowners, continued to support the French, the Viet Minh opposed both imperialist intruders. Under the military leadership of former history teacher Vo Nguyen Giap, the Viet Minh began to educate peasants politically and organize them in the northern highlands of Vietnam. Giap and other Viet Minh leaders, who had been exposed to Chinese Communist concepts of "people's war" and who, in their own history, had repeatedly witnessed the defeat of urban or lowland insurrections against the French, realized that a key element in gaining independence would be the establishment of secure base camps in the northern mountains, where tanks and heavy weapons would be of little use to the enemy. Giap's plan for a people's war called for obtaining the support of the people in base area regions and developing intensely motivated revolutionary soldiers before fighting began. According to this approach, revolutionary combatants, highly committed to the goal of establishing a more just moral, social, economic, and political order, would constitute the fighting arm of a mobilized supportive population. Such a combination could conceivably overcome the imperialist's advantage in weaponry.[3]

ICP activists won the support of many of the Tay and Nung tribal peoples, who lived in a mountainous region extending from northern Vietnam to southern China. Leaders of these groups were hostile toward the French, who had intervened in their affairs, and many were favorably inclined to the ICP's program because relatives in China, having already been in contact with Chinese Communist activists, had told them of the perceived benefits for most peasants of Communist-led revolution. Support from the Tay and Nung, several of whom became prominent generals in the Viet Minh army, and from other minority groups in the northern Tonkin highlands was a key factor in constructing secure base areas within which the Viet Minh could organize and train a revolutionary armed force.[4]

As World War II continued, the Viet Minh network expanded throughout most of Vietnam. Even groups tolerated or encouraged by the Japanese or the French, such as the Advanced Guard Youth militia in Cochin china (transformed by the Japanese from the French-sponsored Sports and Youth movement into a paramilitary group and the University of Hanoi Student Association in Tonkin, affiliated with the Viet Minh. The success of the Viet Minh and the wide popular support it enjoyed were soon obvious to the nations fighting against Japan. GMD military leaders in southern China recognized the Viet Minh as the only effective countrywide anti-Japanese intelligence and resistance network in Vietnam and worked with the Viet Minh despite its Communist leadership. U.S. military forces came to a similar conclusion and air dropped weapons, along with Office of Strategic Services (OSS, predecessor of the CIA) advisers, to Giap's forces.[5] The presence of U.S. advisers indicated to some Vietnamese that the United States actually supported the Viet Minh's goal of attaining national power, further improving the movement's appeal to Western-educated Vietnamese.

Civil waywardness

The conditions for revolutionary insurrection improved dramatically in March 1945 when Japanese forces, anticipating a possible Allied invasion, imprisoned the French colonial administration and captured or routed French military forces. The advantage for the Viet Minh was that the repressive French colonial apparatus in the countryside was destroyed without its being replaced by Japanese forces. For the next five months, "the most important period in the history of the ICP"[6], the Viet Minh were relatively unimpeded in their organizational and mobilization efforts. During this period, Viet Minh military forces expanded rapidly. In the northern provinces of Tonkin, local authorities who had previously served the colonial administration threw their support to the Viet Minh or fled to areas under Japanese control or, in some cases, were assassinated as collaborators of foreign imperialists. By August 1945, the Viet Minh had secured control of six Northern provinces in Tonkin and had as many as 5,000 men and women under arms (to increase to 75,000 within a year and more than 350,000 by the early 1950s). The movement also had a countrywide network of 200,000 Viet Minh activists, led by the ICP, which had 5,000 members (it was also rapidly expanding). The Viet Minh's membership was many times greater than the 5,000 to 10,000 estimated to be associated with the largely elite urban, foreign-sponsored, alternate "nationalist" groups of the period.[7]

Acts of terrorism, such as assassinations, were characteristic of several political groups in Vietnam, not just the Viet Minh. The previously discussed VNQDD (both the original and later versions) and a number of other organizations used terror against Viet Minh activists and sympathizers. The French, for their part, had used terror in various forms, including mass executions and aerial and artillery bombardments of civilians, to control the Vietnamese for decades. The Viet Minh violence tended to be selective. Targets were usually individuals who were clearly identifiable as agents of the colonial regime or colonial military or police personnel. The acts were terrifying to the small category of Vietnamese who shared the collaborationist characteristics of the victims. But the violence was intended to win popular support from the majority of the population who had suffered hardships and the loss of friends and family members due to French, as well as Japanese, imperial policies and who longed to strike back and win a truly independent Vietnam.[8]

At about the same time as the Japanese overthrow of the French administration, a terrible famine reached its height in parts of Tonkin and northern Annam. At least several hundred thousand and possibly over 1 million of Tonkin's 1945 population of 8 million perished. The food shortage was in part due to unusually heavy rainfall, which caused flooding of many cultivated areas, and to Allied bombing, which reduced the rice shipments sent from the Mekong Delta to relieve the starving north. But the famine was blamed primarily on the French and the Japanese. The Japanese had presented the French with a quota of the rice production to feed troops; the French authorities then demanded the rice from the northern peasants (who barely produced enough for their own needs). The Japanese also directed the French to require the planting of industrial use crops, such as peanuts, other oilseed crops, and cotton, in place of some food crops.[9]

The Viet Minh organized peasants and attacked landlord and Japanese grain storage buildings, rationing out what they found. The famine greatly intensified hostility in the countryside toward both the French and the Japanese and increased respect and support for the Viet Minh. By summer 1945, the Viet Minh were immensely more powerful and had more popular support than any of the other Vietnamese groups who labeled themselves nationalists despite their foreign sponsorship. Besides the flaws listed previously, the anti-Viet Minh groups generally lacked charismatic or heroic leadership and put forth ideologies and programs that were very narrow in scope and unappealing in content. They basically offered the Vietnamese people the concept of a partially independent Vietnam run by a foreign-educated urban elite under the sponsorship of China, Japan, or France (depending on the particular clique). Furthermore, their programs contained virtually no proposals for improving the social and economic conditions of the majority of Vietnamese (largely because to do so would endanger the economic interests of the small but relatively wealthy classes they represented or the interests of the foreign countries that sponsored them or both). The Viet Minh, in contrast, offered not only genuine nationalism (an independent Vietnam controlled by Vietnamese) but also a plan for redistribution of wealth in favor of the nation's majority. Since their program embodied the aspirations of most of the rural population and much of the urban working class, the Viet Minh fostered the participation of peasants and workers in local government as well as in local chapters of the mass organizations.

Maximally favorable conditions for a revolutionary uprising developed suddenly on August 15, 1945, when Japan surrendered shortly after two of its cities were destroyed by atomic bombs. At this point, with French troops still incarcerated and the Japanese demoralized and unlikely to resist the efforts of another Asian people to seize their independence before the return of European imperialists, the insurrection was ready. By mid-August (before the Japanese surrender) many villages surrounding Hanoi were under Viet Minh control and the stage was set for the "August revolution." In the major cities, leaflets urging reparations for insurrection were circulated, movies and plays were interrupted so that announcements could be made concerning the Rational liberation struggle, and the flag of the Viet Minh with its gold star and red background suddenly appeared flying from prominent buildings throughout the country.[10] On August 18 the insurrection began. For the next ten days, uprisings swept the Viet Minh and allied groups into power in sixty-four major cities in Vietnam, including Hanoi on August 19, Hue on August 23, and Saigon on August 25. In essence, the Japanese turned Vietnam over to the Viet Minh without violent resistance.[11]

In the Tonkin and Annam regions, the Viet Minh met little in the way of organized opposition from other Vietnamese political groups. The situation was more complicated in Saigon and the rest of Cochin China. The Viet Minh won over the support of the Japanese armed youth militias. But there also existed the armed political-religious sects, which had organization and popular support in certain areas of the Mekong Delta, and the Trotskyite Communists, who had no network of mass organizations but enjoyed some popular support.[12] Consequently, the insurrection in Saigon involved an alliance of several groups, in which the Viet Minh was most prominent. But the coalition proved unstable, and participants soon began to feud among themselves. Cochin China, which had been under French rule the longest of the three regions, also had a well-organized pro-French party, the Constitutionalists. This group desired to maintain close ties with France.[13] In the weeks that followed the "August revolution," scores of Vietnamese were assassinated, usually by fanatical members of rival groups. Those groups with limited membership and little mass organization or popular support could not survive the loss of a few prominent figures. But the Viet Minh could endure terrorist acts directed against it precisely because it had thousands of members, a resilient organizational structure, and widespread popular support.

On August 30, after representatives of the pro-Viet Minh Students Association of the University of Hanoi petitioned the figurehead emperor, Bao Dai, to support the revolution, the latter abdicated in favor of the Viet Minh provisional government. Two days later, on September 2, Ho Chi Minh addressed several hundred thousand people at a Hanoi rally to proclaim Vietnam's Declaration of Independence and announce the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. No other nation at that point recognized Vietnam's independence. The victorious Allied powers instead decided to occupy Vietnam. British and Indian troops (under British control) entered the southern half of Vietnam, while approximately 125,000 anti-Communist Chinese GMD troops were sent into the northern half of the country. In late September 1945, the British commander in Saigon rearmed the 1,400 French soldiers the Japanese had arrested there in March. In a surprise move the French troops quickly seized the city's government buildings and with British assistance drove the Viet Minh from Saigon. In October an additional 25,000 French troops arrived and reoccupied all the major cities in Cochin China.

In the northern part of Vietnam, the Viet Minh resorted to bribing Chinese commanders (with gold from rings and other jewelry donated by thousands of Vietnamese) to prevent repression of their new government. And in December 1945, elections were held for national assembly in Tonkin and Annam; the Viet Minh appeared to receive about 90 percent of the vote. French military authorities refused to allow elections in Cochin China, where almost 25 percent of Vietnam's 1945 population of 22 million resided. The national assembly elected Ho Chi Minh president. Ho, asserting his intention to create a government of national unity, included Socialists and Catholic politicians as well as Communists among his cabinet ministers.[14] To Ho the Chinese presence in the north represented a greater danger than the French reoccupation in the south. China had long threatened Vietnam with its immensity and power. It appeared that Ho, lacking any significant international support for immediate independence, would have to take the risk of making a deal with the French, the more distant imperialist power, to get the Chinese out.

As Ho put it, "Better to sniff a bit of French shit briefly than eat Chinese shit for the rest of our lives".[15] In a move evidently intended to gain greater acceptance of their movement by the GMD Chinese and the French, the members of the ICP publicly dissolved their organization in October 1945 (although the Party continued to function covertly through its extensive and still intact social network). The party was formally reestablished in 1951 as the Vietnamese Communist party (officially labeled the Vietnam Labor party). Early in 1946 the Chinese decided to withdraw and allow the French to reenter northern Vietnam, provided that the French relinquish their colonial claims to territory within China. The Viet Minh government agreed to allow the French to reintroduce military forces into northern Vietnam on the condition that these units are withdrawn in five years. The French were to grant Vietnam independence within the framework of the so-called French Union, which would keep Vietnam economically associated with France.[16] The future status of the southernmost part of Vietnam, Cochin china, was a major point of contention.

Neither the French nor the wealthy Vietnamese residents of this region wanted unification with the other parts of Vietnam, whereas the Viet Minh demanded that Cochin China be joined to the middle section of Vietnam (Annam) and the northernmost section (Tonkin) in one independent Vietnamese state. The compromise was an agreement to hold a referendum in which the people of Cochin China would vote either to unify with the other parts or to remain separate. The Viet Minh were certain the majority would vote for unification. But the Cochin China colonial administration, ignoring the pledge of French government, refused to hold the referendum. Tensions continued to rise. The government of France, despite its leftist slant, was staunchly nationalistic and interested in restoring French pride through reclaiming imperial territory. The French, subjugated so recently by the Germans, were now attempting to reestablish their national machismo by reasserting domination over the colonies. On November 23, 1946, a dispute over who controlled customs collections in the Port of Haiphong precipitated skirmishes between Viet Minh and French units. French naval forces opened an artillery bombardment of the city, resulting in hundreds, perhaps thousands, of deaths.

The French Indochina War: 1946-1954

The French proceeded to seize major cities and towns and to build a colonial Vietnamese militia of more than 300,000 to help fight the Viet Minh. But the local allies of the French were largely composed of the most Europeanized Vietnamese, some anti-Vietnamese members of minority groups, the political-religious sects in the south, and the Binh Xuyen criminal "mafia," which controlled much of the Saigon-area drug business and organized prostitution. France's military leaders, however, anticipated that their professional army and much superior firepower would bring them victory in only a few weeks. But the Viet Minh chose to fight largely on terrain that reduced the effectiveness of the French advantage in weaponry. Throughout the war with the French (and later in the war with the United States) the Vietnamese revolutionary forces, in addition to the small-unit harassment tactics characteristic of guerrilla warfare, often employed the technique of attacking many widely dispersed targets simultaneously, forcing the enemy to scatter his forces. Then, when possible, revolutionary forces would use large units to attack individual positions that had been drained of manpower to meet attacks elsewhere. The Viet Minh usually enjoyed popular support in the areas of military operation and were more highly motivated than the typical Vietnamese who fought alongside the French, often as a mercenary. At the beginning of the war the Viet Minh emphasized the goal of winning independence in an attempt to unite as many people as possible from all social classes in support of the Communist-led forces confronting the French. Rather than alienate potentially patriotic landlords and rich peasants by giving some of their land to poor peasants, the Viet Minh delayed land redistribution in the areas they controlled throughout most of the war.

The Viet Minh rural economic policy until 1953 was to leave landownership patterns relatively intact while easing the economic burdens of the poor by reducing the rent that landlords could charge for land parcels cultivated by tenant farmers. But the Viet Minh promised the poor that the anti-imperialist struggle against the French would also be antifeudalist and eventually result in both a transfer of much of the land owned by landlords to the landless and nearly landless peasants and the destruction of landlord political dominance in the countryside. And in the later stage of the war the demands of the poor for landownership and the need for their increased involvement in the revolutionary effort as combatants and in transporting by foot large quantities of ammunition and other equipment prompted the Viet Minh in 1953 to begin significant land redistribution in much of the countryside.[17] Realizing they were badly in need of a legitimate nationalist image for their Vietnamese supporters, the French invited back the ever opportunistic Bao Dai to resume the role of emperor in a partially "independent" French-sponsored Vietnamese state in which Frenchmen continued to control, among other things, the country's economy and arm. The men willing to serve the French in Bao Dai's cabinet were characterized by a U.S. diplomat in Hanoi in 1952 as "opportunists, nonentities, extreme reactionaries, assassins, hirelings, and, finally, men of faded mental powers".[18]

As Communist-led rebellions began to develop in Laos and Cambodia with Viet Minh assistance, the French allowed non-Communist governments in these countries to declare independence from France in 1953. By the 1950s the French were experiencing extreme difficulties in Indochina. After the 1949 culmination of the Chinese Revolution, China began to provide the Viet Minh with valuable assistance, such as training services and shipments of weapons, including artillery. The French economy could not support the war effort, and consequently, the United States, determined to help the French succeed in defeating the Communist-led Viet Minh, was paying 78 percent of the cost of the war at its conclusion, including Bao Dai's \$4 million per year "stipend".[19] The French military was eventually losing more officers in combat than were being graduated from the nation's main military academy. And army morale was deteriorating, not only because of battlefield losses, but also because much of the French public turned against the war. In 1953 both the French and the Viet Minh were considering negotiations to end the fighting. But each side sought a final battlefield triumph that would give it the stronger bargaining position. General Giap, commander of the Viet Minh forces, had sent three divisions toward Laos, taking the village of Dienbienphu on the Vietnamese Laotian border.

French commanders, eager to protect the pro-French Laotian government from the Viet Minh, decided to recapture the town and then use it as a fortress from which to attack Viet Minh base camps. Despite its remote location, the French were confident aircraft, if necessary could supply it. The first of 12,000 French paratroopers entered Dienbienphu in November 1953. Simultaneously, 50,000 Viet Minh, including artillery, anti-aircraft, and engineering units, moved to encircle them. In March 1954, Viet Minh forces attacked and quickly destroyed French artillery bases and the airfield. The Viet Minh then closed in by digging tunnels and trenches ever closer to French positions. In desperation, the French appealed unsuccessfully to the United States for heavy bomber attacks to break the siege. On May 7, 1954, the day the Geneva negotiations to settle the fighting in Indochina convened, the Viet Minh's red and gold banner was raised over the French command center at Dienbienphu.

The 1954 Geneva Concordats On Indochina

As the Geneva Conference opened, the Viet Minh were in control of most of the countryside in the northern two-thirds of Vietnam, with base camps, sizable "liberated" areas, and large forces active in the remaining southern third of the country.[20] The Viet Minh concluded they had won the war and expected essentially to negotiate terms for the French departure. But they did not anticipate the compromise stance that would be taken by the two Communist giants. The USSR leadership was attempting to establish better relations with the West after the death of Stalin in 1953 and avoided pushing for a settlement favorable to the Viet Minh. And the Chinese had taken 1 million casualties in fighting against U.S. forces in Korea and were determined not to risk another violent confrontation. Both the USSR and China pressured the Viet Minh to settle for a partial victory.[21] The key provisions of the Geneva settlement included a *temporary* division of Vietnam at latitude 17 degrees north—the 17th parallel (which explicitly was not to be viewed as a national boundary). French military units were to be withdrawn south of this line and Viet Minh forces to the north. No foreign military forces were to be introduced into Vietnam. And in a provision by which the post-French Saigon regime refused to be bound, the settlement stipulated that elections were to be held throughout Vietnam in 1956 *to unify* the entire country under one government.[22] The fulfillment of the terms of the Geneva Accords was to be supervised by a commission composed of observers from Canada, India, and Poland.

During a 300-day "regroupment period," about 900,000 Vietnamese moved south of the 17th parallel (about two-thirds were Catholics fearing Communist persecution and encouraged by CIA-supplied leaflets stating, "Christ has gone to the South," while the rest were largely businessmen and employees of the French); approximately 87,000 Viet Minh combatants and 47,000 civilians headed north.[23]

U.S. Involvement in Vietnam: 1954-1975

The U.S. decision to provide aid to the French in Indochina was based, in part, on the conception of a monolithic Communist movement expanding outward from its "origin" in European Russia. In this formulation, Communist China represented the success of "Communist aggression" against China, and Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh represented a new Communist aggression against Vietnam (supposedly directed from China). Ignoring the nationalistic character of the Viet Minh movement and the fact that Vietnam's unique history and political and economic characteristics had brought about an essentially non exportable revolution (except, in a sense, to the two smaller countries that had also been components of French Indochina), the Eisenhower administration resolved to stop the "spread of communism."

President Diem: An Anti-Communist Leader

An important aspect of the plan to prevent the southern part of Vietnam from reuniting with the north was the selection of a leader for the south who was both an anti-Communist and recognized as a nationalist. The anti-Communist leader chosen for South Vietnam was Ngo Dinh Diem. Diem was born to a wealthy Catholic family at Hue in 1901 and attended the French School of Administration in Hanoi, where he finished first in his class. He rose rapidly through governmental ranks and in 1933 was appointed minister of the interior to Emperor Bao Dai. He subsequently resigned because of French interference in his official duties. This action earned him the reputation of being a Vietnamese patriot within Vietnam's elite circle of middle- and upper class anti-Communist nationalists. Diem, who at one time considered becoming a priest, was a religious ascetic throughout his life. His conception of holding and exercising political authority was akin to the absolute power exercised by Vietnam's ancient emperors and "concepts of compromise, power-sharing and popular participation" were alien to him. The Viet Minh captured Diem in 1945 and sent him to a remote village for six months. In 1946 Ho Chi Minh offered him a governmental position, but he refused to work with Communists and he blamed the deaths of a brother and a nephew on the Viet Minh. In 1950, after residing for four years in seclusion at Hue, he left Vietnam and eventually settled at the Mary knoll Seminary in Lakewood, New Jersey. Diem came to the attention of the influential Catholic leader Cardinal Spellman and was later accepted by the Eisenhower administration as a possible anti-Communist leader for the southern part of Vietnam.

In July 1954 Diem was appointed prime minister of South Vietnam by emperor Bao Dai and quickly returned to Saigon. By 1955, the Eisenhower administration was pouring economic assistance and military aid into South Vietnam and reorganizing and training the men who had served in the French colonial armed forces into what was eventually called the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). The weapons and military advisers the United States sent to Vietnam were in direct violation of the Geneva Accords. During the same year, Diem consolidated his power by intimidating and bribing the leaders of the political-religious sects and through military action against the French-supported Binh Xuyen organized-crime group. He also turned on Bao Dai, eliminating the position of emperor through a rigged referendum in October 1955.[24] Diem decided not to hold the reunification elections scheduled for because he, like virtually everyone else, realized that Ho Chi Min and the Viet Minh would almost certainly win.[25] Diem's police even helped burn the Geneva commission's office in Saigon.

He proceeded to launch the fierce Denunciation of Communists Campaign, in which thousands of Viet Minh supporters, relatively unprotected since most of the revolutionary soldiers had gone north as called for by the Geneva Accords, were arrested and imprisoned. Many were tortured to obtain information about their compatriots and some were killed. Morale among Viet Minh sympathizers in the south deteriorated because the government in the north would not immediately give consent for armed resistance to Diem's repression. Without effective means of defense against persecution, membership in the southern branch of the Vietnamese Communist party declined to about 5,000 in 1959. Ho Chi Minh and the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north were hesitant to consent to a renewal of armed revolutionary conflict in the south. Among their reasons was the hope that international pressure would eventually force the Diem regime to hold the reunification elections. The leaders in the north clung to this increasingly remote possibility because they anticipated the devastation a war with the United States would bring. They also were unsure of what assistance the USSR and China would be willing to provide in the event of large-scale U.S. intervention.

This apprehension was in part prompted by the Soviet Union's startling 1957 proposal that both North and South Vietnam be admitted to the United Nations, in effect granting recognition to the south as a separate nation. Ironically, the United States helped kill this measure at the time because it objected to the implied recognition of the government of North Vietnam.[26] The North Vietnamese government also became preoccupied in the mid-1950s with the mishandled land-reform program, which had been designed largely by urban Party leaders and had created chaos in parts of the north. The planners selected mainly poor, semiliterate rural youth to implement the reform at the village level. These young zealots, often recruited from the revolutionary army, had thrown the countryside into an uproar by organizing other poor peasants to denounce landlords for past crimes, such as collaborating with the French and exploiting the poor. Seized lands were distributed to 75 percent of the region's peasants. But 5,000-15,000 landlords and "collaborators" were killed by peasants who blamed them for the deaths of loved ones and other past hardships.[27]

Distressed by disruptions, protests, and injustices resulting from the poorly executed land-reform program, the North Vietnamese government initiated a period of self-criticism and reassessment. Eventually many of North Vietnam's peasants were organized into lower-stage, or "semi socialist," cooperatives, in which the participants retained individual ownership of their pooled land, livestock, and equipment. The cooperative paid them "rent" in proportion to their contributed assets as well as a share of the profits in proportion to their labor.[28] During the 1960s most cooperatives became higher-stage, or "fully socialist," in that land and productive agricultural property were owned collectively by all members of the cooperative, with an individual paid only in proportion to the amount of work he or she performed. In the south the Saigon regime's efforts to repress Viet Minh activists and suspected Communist party members by imprisonment or execution seriously damaged the revolutionary social network. Surviving Communist party members began to demand that the government to the north of the 17th parallel consent to their right to engage in all-out armed resistance against Saigon military and police forces, perhaps as much out of a desire to fight for self-preservation as anything else.[29]

The call for violent opposition to the South Vietnamese government was well received by large numbers of peasants who since 1954 had been outraged and alienated -by many of Saigon's policies. Among the measures provoking widespread discontent, particularly significant was the Saigon regime's effective reversal of the land reform that the Viet Minh had carried out in much of the countryside toward the end of the war with the French. Saigon forced poor peasants to return ownership of the land to their former landlords and then pay rent for its use. In some instances those given land by the Viet Minh were forced to pay for it. The urban-based Saigon government, in attempting to assert its control over the countryside, allied itself with the rural landlord class, which had fled to the relative safety of cities during the war. The Saigon regime returned the landlords to the villages, some in the role of village council administrators, protected by armed guards, and therefore largely reinstated the economic and political domination of the traditional rural elite.[30] Saigon authorities further antagonized many among the poor majority by coercing them to work on government projects, by persecuting many non-Communists who supported the Viet Minh reforms, and by often engaging in corruption and abusive behavior.

Configuration of the National Liberation Front

On December 20, 1960, resistance forces proclaimed the formation of the National Liberation Front (NLF) of South Vietnam, an organization of southern nationalists united under the leadership of the southern branch of Vietnam's Communist party for the purpose of bringing about a reunification of Vietnam.[31] The Diem government quickly branded the NLF the "Viet Cong" (Viet Communists). The leaders of the Communist party evidently hoped that the actions of the NLF, together with expected mass uprisings against Diem, would precipitate the formation of a coalition government in the south that would include representatives of the NLF. The new government would then hold negotiations with the north to reunify Vietnam. The decision to mobilize the southern nationalists for armed resistance to the Diem regime under the banner of the NLF resulted in a rapid revitalization of both the revolutionary effort and Communist party membership in the south, which reached 70,000 by 1963.[32] NLF armed forces grew at a dramatic pace and attacks on Saigon forces multiplied. As the NLF expanded, the Diem regime, with U.S. support, launched the so-called strategic hamlet program, which involved in some cases the relocation of peasants from their homes to fortified sites and in others the fortification of existing hamlets.[33] According to Saigon authorities, the peasants in their new or modified living environments would be safe from Viet Cong terrorism. They would also be inhibited from supporting or joining the NLF, if they were so inclined. The policy, in effect, was a counterinsurgency technique intended to deprive the revolutionary forces of their popular support by physically removing its source—the peasants—from the open countryside (an attempt to starve the guerrilla "fish" by drying up the popular "sea" that nourished them).

However, many peasants resented, being displaced from their ancestral villages and compelled to build hamlets and fortifications so that they could reside under the surveillance of the Saigon regime and be subjected to its coercive measures. The strategic hamlet program was apparently so unpopular with most peasants that it influenced many to join the NLF. In fact, the ARVN army colonel in charge of implementing the program for the Saigon regime was, throughout the war, secretly a member of the National Liberation Front [34], and it is very likely he was willing to carry out the policy precisely because of its positive impact on NLF recruitment. Diem favored the Catholic minority, of which he was a member. This orientation prompted opposition from some Buddhists, to which Diem responded characteristically with violent repression. After several Buddhist monks set fire to themselves in further protests in June 1963, Diem's Special Forces, under the command of his brother, donned regular army uniforms and raided several Buddhist pagodas. The counterproductive nature of these actions outraged many ARVN officers, most of whom were at least nominally Buddhists like 80 percent of their country's patriots. Saigon's top military leaders most inherited from the French colonial army, also resented Diem's interference in the handling of the war against the NLF.

Fearing the possibility of a military plot against his government, Diem regularly rotated officers around the country so that they could not stay long enough in any one place to organize a conspiracy. But consequently, they also often lacked the time to gain the experience necessary to adapt to one command situation before they were shifted to another. Incompetency in the military ranks was also heightened by Diem's tendency to promote those he deemed most loyal to him rather than those most able.[35] Most important, Diem's regime was clearly losing the war with the NLF. Both Washington and the Saigon general staff decided that Diem had to go. On November 1, 1963, most of Diem's generals, assured of support or at least noninterference by U.S. officials, rebelled against him.[36] Diem and his brother were executed the next day. President John F. Kennedy, although anticipating that Diem would be forced out, was reportedly shocked at the news of his killing. But on November 22, 1963, Kennedy was himself assassinated in Dallas.

By the end of 1963, some 15,000 U.S. military advisers were in South Vietnam. Several thousand former Viet Minh had moved south to help organize and strengthen the growing NLF ranks, but these were almost all individuals born in the south who had gone north as Viet Minh soldiers in line with the 1954 peace accords.[37] In Saigon, a council of generals replaced Diem, but this was followed by seven changes in leadership during 1964 as Saigon military figures struggled for power. According to Turley [38], Saigon's military leaders were "mostly products of French education and bourgeois families, holdovers of the colonial system who made up the South's anti-Communist elite" and were usually unconcerned with the economic and social hardships of the majority of the population. After Diem, corruption in the military appeared to increase. And the NLF continued to expand its areas of control. U.S. advisers concluded that only large-scale U.S. military action could save the Saigon regime.[39]

Gigantic U.S. Armed forces Intrusion

On August 2, 1964, North Vietnamese patrol boats attacked an American destroyer, the Maddox, engaged in close surveillance in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam. ARVN units had earlier raided several positions in the area. The patrol boat incident, which inflicted no damage on the U.S. vessel, and a second alleged but unconfirmed incident involving another destroyer two days later, were represented to Congress and the U.S. public as "unprovoked Communist aggression." On August 7, 1964, the U.S. Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (unanimously in the House of Representatives and with only two dissenting votes in the Senate), giving President Lyndon Johnson the power to take whatever military action necessary to defend U.S. forces. This vote constituted the essential congressional authorization for the war in Southeast Asia, and Congress would continue until 1973 to vote appropriations for various aspects of the conflict.[40]

In February 1965, the United States initiated continuous bombing raids over North Vietnam and by December U.S. troop strength had reached 200,000. Regular North Vietnamese army (People's Army of Vietnam) units were also entering the south along the "Ho Chi Minh Trail" (a network of mountain and jungle paths extending through Laos into Vietnam's central highlands as well as into its southern regions) to assist several hundred thousand National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) fighters organized into village militia, regional defense units, or main combat units. U.S. force levels continued to rise, eventually approaching 500,000 by the end of 1967. The Soviet Union provided the north with weapons, including anti-aircraft missiles, and China contributed weapons and rice. In a highly constrained 1967 South Vietnamese "election" without NLF participation-but in which there were eleven slates of candidates-General Thieu, a former major in the French army who had married into a wealthy Catholic family and converted from Buddhism to Catholicism, and his running mate, General Ky, won with 34.5 percent of the vote.[41]

Toward the end of that year, U.S. military leaders assured President Johnson and the U.S. public that the war was being won and that enemy forces in the south would be hard pressed to mount any significant attacks. This assessment was highly inaccurate. Communist party leaders devised a plan for an offensive that would significantly affect the course of the war. It was set for the Vietnamese New Year, Tet, and January 31, 1968. The planners of the Tet offensive had several potential goals. The basic ones were to disrupt the Saigon regime's efforts to expand control over the countryside by forcing its forces to fall back toward the cities into defensive positions; to destroy the confidence and sense of security of the Saigon government's urban supporters, who had been long removed from the violence of the war; and to disrupt any plans of the U.S. or Saigon government to launch an invasion of the north. The organizers were also hopeful that Tet would disillusion U.S. governmental and military leaders and the U.S. public and demonstrate that the conflict would last indefinitely if U.S. troops were not withdrawn. The most optimistic potential outcome of the Tet offensive, which few of its planners felt was realistic, was to provoke widespread uprisings throughout the south to bring a quick end to the war and reunify the country before the death of Ho Chi Minh (who was ill and would die in 1969).[42]

On January 31 approximately 80,000 National Liberation Front soldiers simultaneously attacked 100 cities and towns (North Vietnamese units took part only in assaults in the northernmost sections of South Vietnam).[43] Four thousand NLF fighters invaded Saigon itself, and one unit seized the U.S. embassy before being annihilated. Hue, the old imperial capital, was captured and held for weeks against a tremendous counterattack organized by U.S. and Saigon forces. In the end, all the major cities and towns captured by the NLF were retaken. The NLF suffered as many as 40,000 casualties, a devastation that would take years of recovery. The offensive, however, did weaken Saigon's control over areas of the countryside previously thought to have been secured from the NLF. But probably the most important consequence of Tet was the powerful demoralizing effect it had on the U.S. public and government. Top military leaders who had previously claimed the war was being won now appeared incompetent or deceitful. The war itself seemed destined to go on without end. While Vietnamese revolutionaries were prepared to keep fighting for decades, if necessary, the U.S. public was willing to endure the sacrifices of warfare only if a limit could be set and victory assured.[44]

Although virtually all the observable military targets in North Vietnam had been repeatedly bombed, some U.S. political figures called for the use of even greater armed might, such as an invasion of North Vietnam by U.S. forces or even tactical nuclear weapons. However, this demand ignored important realities. The publicly asserted purpose for the U.S. presence in Vietnam was to promote democracy, the expression of the people's will. But the massive resistance to U.S. intervention by millions of Vietnamese, hundreds of thousands of whom perished, suggested that the high level of military violence used was necessary precisely because U.S. policy ran counter to the aspirations of the majority of Vietnamese. Since many of the people of other nations not directly involved in the conflict interpreted the situation in exactly this manner, the U.S. government received very little support from its major allies for its actions in Vietnam. Greater levels of military force might have further isolated the United States. Of critical importance moreover, all the presidents and Congresses of the Vietnam era feared the possibility of direct military intervention by the USSR and China. That could have forced the United States to choose between accepting an enormous military catastrophe for its forces in Vietnam or using nuclear weapons in an attempt to protect them, possibly precipitating world war.

In any case, public opinion in the United States turned decisively against the war after the Tet offensive. The reasons for antiwar sentiment varied greatly. Some who voted for peace candidates in the 1968 presidential primary campaign (Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy, who was assassinated after winning the California Democratic Primary) felt the war was an immoral intervention. Others supported antiwar candidates out of a belief that U.S. armed forces were not allowed to use all their potential destructive might to win the war.[45] But clearly, after 1968 the majority of Americans demanded an end to the conflict. Richard Nixon, inaugurated president in January 1969, pledged to end the war "with honor." Thirty thousand Americans had died in Southeast Asia before Nixon took office and more than 26,000 would perish before the final U.S. departure in 1975. Nixon's approach to ending the war involved greatly increasing the size and level of armament of the Saigon armed forces while at the same time gradually withdrawing U.S. units. This process was referred to as Vietnamization. Another aspect of the Nixon plan involved threats and massive bombing attacks if against the North Vietnamese to pressure concessions during negotiations.[46]

1973 Peace Concord

The peace agreement worked out between the Nixon administrations. And the government of North Vietnam permitted North Vietnamese] troops to remain in place in South Vietnam.

The Saigon government of President Thieu (the North Vietnamese and the NLF had dropped the demand that Thieu be ousted as part of a peace agreement) was to enter into negotiations with the National Liberation Front's "Provisional Revolutionary Government" to form a coalition government in South Vietnam. The provisional government would, in turn, negotiate the possibility of reunification with the north. In essence, the peace agreement was very much in line with what the National Liberation Front had hoped to achieve when taking up arms in the early 1960s. Thieu and many in his Saigon government were outraged by the peace accords.[47] Nixon promised Thieu that any Communist offensive in violation of the treaty would be countered with massive U.S. air attacks. Saigon's own air force was, at the time, the fourth largest in the world.[48] Thieu, who ignored the cease-fire in certain areas of South Vietnam, ordered the Saigon army to begin attacking NLF units and seizing territory. His plan was evidently to expand the land area (and population) under his control gradually until that held by the National Liberation Front was insignificant, thereby making the formation of a coalition government appear unnecessary.[49]

The Communist-led forces, however, had expanded the Ho Chi Minh Trail and were pouring equipment and men into the south in preparation for the final campaign to reunify Vietnam. The offensive was launched in earnest in March 1975 with the expectation that a year's fighting might be necessary. Since Nixon had previously been forced to resign in disgrace (in August 1974) over the Watergate Affair, and the U.S. Congress had proceeded to ban any further U.S. military action in Southeast Asia, including air attacks, Saigon's forces were on their own. Initial Communist victories in Vietnam's central highlands precipitated an ARVN retreat, which turned into a rout. As ARVN generals and some other officers fled the country with whatever wealth they had accumulated, enlisted soldiers surrendered or changed into civilian clothes and simply went home.[50] With the exception of a few South Vietnamese army and air units, the startlingly sudden collapse of Saigon's forces in the face of the determined advance of their opponents appeared to testify to the inherent weakness, artificiality, and moral shallowness of the Saigon government. Communist-led forces accepted the surrender of Saigon on April 30, 1975, and renamed it Ho Chi Minh City. The two halves of Vietnam, separated at the 17th parallel since the 1954 Geneva Accords, were then once again joined into a single nation. In retaliation for the Communist offensive, the United States canceled proposed assistance and enforced an economically damaging trade embargo on Vietnam, still in effect in 1991.

After effects and correlated maturities

Following the fall of Saigon and the reunification of Vietnam in April 1975, at least 200,000 former South Vietnamese government officials and army officers were sent to "reeducation camps" for periods generally ranging from a few months to several years. Upon release, many of these men and their families joined the more than 1 million people who had left Vietnam after the end of the war.

After years of destruction, Vietnam was left with staggering problems. The tasks of repairing war damage, clearing unexploded mines and bombs, and coping with the medical and ecological catastrophe caused by the spreading of thousands of tons of herbicides over the countryside (the U.S. military had attempted to defoliate large areas to reveal or inhibit the movement of enemy forces) retarded development of the economy. The country also had to care for hundreds of thousands of injured soldiers and civilians and thousands of war orphans. Inefficiency, over centralization, and corruption created further problems in administrative and economic functions. Population growth of 3 percent per year put additional strains on resources.

Vietnam never received the several billion dollars in aid from the United States that was part of the 1973 peace settlement (the U.S. view was that the agreements had been broken, so assistance was no longer merited). And Vietnam was soon further burdened with the cost of its invasion and military operations in Cambodia after December 1978 and of defending against a punitive attack from Cambodia's ally, China, in 1979. After 1988, Vietnam's leaders attempted to improve economic performance by allowing increased private business activity geared to public (market) demand and by permitting peasants to lease substantial amounts of land on a long-term basis (fifteen to thirty years) to farm for personal profit. By 1990, the free-market-oriented reforms had contributed to a very significant improvement in the Vietnamese economy. Inflation rates dramatically declined, as did the number of Vietnamese departing the country for economic reasons [50a]. And Vietnam became the world's third-leading rice-exporting nation, after Thailand and the United States. A possible end to the U.S. trade embargo against Vietnam, originally established in 1975, offered the prospects of further major gains in the economic situation. U.S. treatment of Vietnam after 1975 tended to be relatively punitive. The officially stated U.S. government conditions for considering the establishment of diplomatic and commercial relations with Vietnam were the removal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia (where they had intervened in 1978) and the formulation of a peace settlement there freedom for all remaining political prisoners, permission to leave Vietnam for any

Amerasians offspring of U.S. citizens, and assistance in resolving questions concerning 2,303 U.S. personnel still listed as missing in action (MIA) in 1990. The MIA issue was of considerable emotional significance in the United States, and opinion surveys indicated that a majority of U.S. citizens, especially Vietnam veterans, believed MIAs were still alive in Vietnam. But according to U.S. government officials, no reports of supposed MIA sightings were ever confirmed after investigation, at least up to 1990, and most Vietnamese had long given up hope of finding the remains of their own thousands of loved ones who were also MIA after the war. Most U.S. authorities surmised that the persons some Vietnamese refugees reported as Americans in Vietnam were either Eastern Europeans or Amerasians. In any case, attitude surveys also showed that by 1990 many more U.S. citizens favored than opposed reestablishing relations with Vietnam.

In the same way Laos, to the west of Vietnam, a country of 4 million, had been plagued by civil war among right-wing, neutralist, and leftist factions and had experienced French and U.S. military interventions since World War II. The leftist forces, the Pathet Lao, were originally trained by the Viet Minh and adopted much of the Viet Minh organizational structure in the areas they controlled, mostly the regions bordering the northern part of Vietnam.[51] In 1973, a cease-fire was negotiated and a neutral coalition government assumed power. Later the Pathet Lao movement, enjoying organizational networks and support among many of the country's peasants, inspired local seizures of power by "people's committees," followed by elections, which forced the abdication of the Laotian king and resulted in the establishment on December 2, 1975, of the Communist-led People's Democratic Republic of Laos.[52]

Further On April 17, 1975, two weeks before the end of the Vietnam conflict, the Khmer Rouge (Red Khmer, or Red Cambodians) captured the capital of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. The Cambodian Communist movement had developed with Viet Minh assistance during the French Indochina War. At the Geneva Conference, however, the Cambodian Communists (as well as the Laotian Party) had been left out of the peace accords, a fact some Cambodians blamed on the Viet Minh.[53] Cambodian Communist displeasure with the Vietnamese increased because the Vietnamese Communist forces were reluctant to help arm the Khmer Rouge in its efforts to topple the non-Communist Cambodian government of Prince Sihanouk. Sihanouk, who had helped lead Cambodia to independence from French colonial rule in 1953 through a negotiation process, had tried to keep his nation relatively neutral regarding the conflicts in Vietnam. The prince, however, was critical of U.S. intervention and had permitted the Vietnamese National Liberation Front and North Vietnamese units to use Cambodian territory for base camps and storage of food and war materiel.

Whereas many members of the original Cambodian Communist party had taken refuge in North Vietnam after the Geneva Accords in 1954, another faction, formed mainly by Cambodian students radicalized while studying in France, returned to Cambodia with an ideology that combined ultra nationalism with some extreme-Maoist concepts. The intense nationalist orientation of this group, led by individuals such as Saloth Saar (later called Pol Pot), was reflected in its hostility not only to European and U.S. influences but also to the Vietnamese, who in the late eighteenth century had deprived Cambodia of the Mekong Delta area. Inspired by their interpretation of Mao's concepts, Pol Pot Communists intended to depopulate what they viewed as the "parasitic" and "corrupt" cities and then organize the people into rural farming collectives. The neutralist Prince Sihanouk, however, was also threatened from the Right. His establishment of diplomatic relations with the National Liberation Front's Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam disturbed conservative Cambodian generals, government officials, and businessmen. Many in these groups, along with thousands of other urban Cambodians, advocated allying Cambodia with the United States' and anticipated that such a move would result in a beneficial massive infusion of U.S. assistance. On March 18, 1970, while Prince Sihanouk was out of the country, General Lon Nol seized control of the government and proceeded to establish himself as chief executive [54] The Lon Nol government soon became total dependent on U.S. economic and military aid and air power for survival

On April 29, 1970, President Nixon ordered U.S. military force accompanied by South Vietnamese troops, into Cambodia for sixty days to destroy North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front supplies and bases in order both to provide the Saigon government with more time to build its forces and to shield remaining U.S. units in Vietnam from major attacks before their final departure.[55] Vietnamese Communist forces responded by moving large amount of equipment away from invaded territory and occupied large interior sections of Cambodia, which they soon turned over to the Khmer Rouge The U.S. invasion and simultaneous massive bombing campaign drove tens of thousands of Cambodians into the ranks of the Khmer Rouge and strengthened the ultra nationalist faction in the Cambodian Communist party, which benefited from the intensified hatred of foreign.[56] Because the U.S.

Congress had banned bombing Cambodia in August 1973, U.S. air power was not available to slow the Communists' 1975 "final offensive." General Lon Nol fled to Hawaii on April 1. Phnom Penh fell on April 17. The Khmer Rouge, dominated by Pol Pot, quickly moved hundreds of thousands of urban Cambodians to agricultural settlements; killed thousands accused of supporting Lon Nol and the Americans, and purged and executed thousands of Cambodian Communists thought to be "contaminated" by Vietnamese influence. In addition to those killed in fighting during 1970-1975, many more (estimates range from several hundred thousand to more than over 1 million, out of Cambodia's 8million population) died between 1975 and 1979 from persecution, starvation, or disease.[57] After the fall of Phnom Penh, Khmer Rouge units began attacking Vietnamese communities in border areas to the west of Saigon, possibly hoping to evict the Vietnamese from territories that 200 years earlier had belonged to Cambodia. After repeated assaults and failed negotiations, Vietnamese military forces invaded Cambodia on December 25 1978, accompanied by thousands of Cambodian Communists opposed to the Pol Pot regime. The Vietnamese offered three major reasons for their occupation of Cambodia, including providing protection for Vietnamese civilians from Khmer Rouge border attacks, preventing the possibility of a two-front war with the Khmer Rouge attacking from west of Saigon and the Chinese, Cambodia's ally, attacking from the north, and halting the brutality of the Pol Pot extremists.[58] In retaliation for the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, the Chinese attacked the northern section of Vietnam in February 1979 and after reportedly suffering considerable losses, withdrew.

Despite the opposition of the United States, China, and most members of the United Nations, Vietnamese forces, harassed by Khmer Rouge and some non-Communist Cambodian guerrillas, remained in Cambodia for over a decade. Finally, after negotiations involving several Cambodian factions and representatives of Vietnam and China, a tentative agreement was reached to end the war. The pact centered on the establishment of a coalition government of national unity. Vietnamese leaders announced that all their remaining troops would leave Cambodia by the end of September 1989.[59] Vietnam's intervention in Cambodia, although at least partially achieving the original aims, had cost the Vietnamese 18,000 killed and 37,000 wounded.[60] The Cambodian peace negotiations, however, repeatedly broke down, leading to renewed civil war. The coalition-of three Cambodian organizations (of which the Khmer Rouge was by far the largest and militarily 'most effective'), supported by China and the United States, opposed the Vietnamese-backed Cambodian government in Phnom Penh. But in the face of mounting successes by the Khmer Rouge, the U.S. government, apparently fearing that this movement, already held responsible for over: a million deaths, could again seize power with the aid of its indirect U.S. assistance, dramatically shifted its position in July 1990.

The Bush: administration withdrew its previous diplomatic recognition for the anti- Vietnamese Cambodian rebel alliance and stopped referring to the Cambodian government as a puppet of Vietnam. Instead the United States agreed to negotiate with Vietnam (for the first time since 1975) in an effort to bring about an end both to the Cambodian conflict and to the threat of the establishment of a new brutal regime in that nation. It means the prime unifying motivation for revolution in Vietnam was the goal of throwing off perceived foreign subjugation. The Vietnamese people for hundreds of years manifested a desire for independence in Rebellions and wars against a multitude of enemies, taking on and often defeating Chinese armies, the forces of Kublai Khan, and numerous other foes before the twentieth century. Vietnamese nationalism, although temporarily checked by the modern weaponry of Western nations, experienced a rapid resurgence in the 1920s and, heightened further by colonial repression, contributed greatly to the development the revolution

Frustrated nationalist aspirations, along with widespread economic hardships, were a major source of mass discontent and a basis for popular participation in revolution. Traditional inequalities present in Vietnamese society had occasionally spurred rebellions against the big landlords -and the exploitation and oppression of the mandarin elite. In many ways the French colonization of Vietnam, while elevating a small percentage of the Vietnamese to great wealth and extending the benefits of Western education and technology to a larger minority, brought dislocation, a loss of self-sufficiency, and dependence on the world market to much of the peasantry. Many rural residents were transformed into property less tenant farmers, plantation workers, or mine or factory laborers. Downturns in the world economy meant lower prices for* exports and hardships for those at the bottom of Vietnam's economic pyramid. Occupying powers so disrupted agriculture during World War II that mass starvation occurred in the northern half of Vietnam. This disaster greatly intensified hostility against the French and the Japanese and against those Vietnamese who supported the foreigners. During the twentieth century, a small percentage of Vietnamese obtained access to the French colonial educational system and some even studied in France itself.

After the 1920s, at least three major divisions could be identified among the educated. First, French colonization had generated a small but significant Francophile elite among the Vietnamese, including large landowners, some members of the Catholic minority, officers in the Vietnamese colonial army, which was organized and trained by the French, and some businessmen. These individuals supported close ties with France, if not outright colonial status, and hundreds were granted French as well as Vietnamese citizenship. Most members of this group would transfer allegiance to the United States after the French defeat in the 1946-1954 war.

A second elite element claimed the title "nationalist" (that is, they claimed to be neither front men for a foreign power nor Communists) but was anti-Communists or at least non-Communists. Ngo Dinh Diem, wealthy and French educated, was viewed as a nationalist by virtue of his resignation from Emperor Bao Dai's French puppet administration during the 1930s. But Diem represented the limited appeal of this type of nationalist to most Vietnamese. Self-centered and dictatorial, he and his supporters manifested little interest in the welfare of the majority of the population and appeared even less concerned with paying attention to popular views and national aspirations. Reflecting this approach, the Diem regime not only did little to redistribute wealth toward the masses but even reversed land-distribution programs set in motion by the Viet Minh. The lack of a commitment to social revolution reduced the appeal of non-Communist nationalists to the peasants, and sponsorship by foreign powers undermined their claims to nationalism.

The third elite element to develop in Vietnam during the 1920s and 1930s was composed of Marxist-oriented, largely urban, middle-class, educated individuals who in 1930 unified most of their various groups into the Indochinese Communist party. Ho Chi Minh did more than anyone else to organize the ICP and develop its basic revolutionary program. The ICP fused traditionally fierce and resilient Vietnamese nationalism with Marxist-Leninist concepts. The result was an ideology that called for both the defeat of "imperialism" (meaning the attainment of true independence for Vietnam) and the defeat of "feudalism" (social revolution involving redistribution of wealth and abandonment of the remaining oppressive aspects of Confucian culture). The Party's reform program, including land redistribution to poor and landless peasants, won broad support in the countryside and provided the basis, along with nationalism, for mass membership in organizations tied to and coordinated by the ICP. Eventually the ICP, accepting Ho Chi Minh's position, put primary emphasis on achieving independence from foreign domination.

During the period of revolutionary conflict, the antirevolutionary state apparatus was always flawed in terms of its legitimacy to govern the Vietnamese people because it was either the creation of some foreign power or dependent on foreign support for its existence. From the early 1930s to 1955, the playboy emperor, Bao Dai, occupied the role of puppet for whichever outside power was paying the bills. Diem, dependent on U.S. economic and military aid, which was used to suppress revolutionaries and Buddhist religious leaders alike, also failed to gain the respect, much less the support, of most Vietnamese. The succession of generals who followed Diem, including General Thieu during 1967-1975, had previously served in the French colonial army, and some succeeded in greatly enriching themselves during their periods of military and governmental service.

The coercive and administrative capabilities of the antirevolutionary state in Vietnam fluctuated over time. On paper these were high at the time of the victorious Communist offensive in 1975. Saigon had 1 million men under arms and outnumbered its adversaries in the south by about 3 to 1. But South Vietnam's army was, especially by 1975, riddled with corruption. After the final departure of U.S. combat troops in 1973, the South Vietnamese economy went into a decline, deprived of its U.S. military customers for shop goods, bars, drugs, and prostitutes. Urban unemployment rose to 40 percent and inflation increased. Many Saigon officers embezzled army funds and even charged "tolls" for other military units to cross through areas their garrisons controlled. By 1975 the large majority of South Vietnam's enlisted soldiers were not earning enough to support their families and morale was low.[61] Once deprived of its unconditional US support, the Saigon government and military could hardly withstand the onslaught of highly motivated revolutionary forces.

Conclusion

The developing Vietnamese revolution experienced periodic windows of permissiveness" regarding the larger world context and involvement of other nations in Vietnam's affairs. The 1936-1939 Popular Front government in France precipitated the release of many ICP members from Vietnamese prisons and presented an opportunity for the ICP to organize openly after earlier repression.

The Japanese overthrow of French colonial authority in March 1945 provided the Viet Minh with a five-month period of relative freedom of movement in the countryside, during which base areas and the foundations of the revolutionary armed forces were securely established. The several weeks, between the mid-August surrender of the Japanese and the arrival of Chinese and British (and later French) occupation forces provided the maximum favorable conditions for revolutionary insurrections. These were carried out with virtually no resistance from the demoralized Japanese in more than sixty Vietnamese cities. After that time, the huge coercive power of the French (400,000 Vietnamese killed during 1946- 1954) and the even more massive military strength of the United States (over 1 million Vietnamese dead between 1956 and 1975) were inadequate to reverse a revolution that long before had succeeded in achieving widespread popular support. The steadily declining commitment of the U.S. government to supporting the Saigon regime after 1973 resulted in nonintervention during the spring 1975 Communist offensive and a relatively quick end to the military conflict. Anyway, the war of Vietnam neither side was the winner or master of dark horse. The American and Vietnamese fought together however the lawful one is the most hurt one. That was a well heeled man conflict but an underprivileged and deprived men exchange blows. USA pulled out from the war as soon as both poles signed the Paris Peace Accord. North Vietnam captured South Vietnam and she turned out to be the communist.

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