

United States – Vietnam Relations, 1945–1967: A Study Prepared by the Department of Defense/I. B. The Character and Power of the Viet Minh

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I. B.

THE CHARACTER AND POWER OF THE VIET MINH

SUMMARY

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

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

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

Vietnamese nationalism developed three types of political parties or movements:

Reform parties. Narrowly based among the small educated Vietnamese elite, these parties made little pretense at representing the masses of the peasantry—except in the ancient mandarin sense of paternal leadership. In general, they advocated reform of the relationship between France and Vietnam to establish an independent and united nation, but would neither sever beneficial bonds with the metropole, nor alter drastically the Vietnamese social structure. Members included many men of impeccable repute and undoubted nationalist convictions—among them Ngo Dinh Diem—but also a number of known opportunist and corrupt Vietnamese. The reformist parties were further discredited by collaboration with the Japanese during World War II. These parties formed the basis for the "Bao Dai solution" to which France and the U.S. gravitated in the late 1960's.

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

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

the VNQDD figured in peasant uprisings in 1930–1931, and 1940–1941. Each played a role in the Vietnamese resistance against the Vichy French and the Japanese during World War II: the ICP as the nucleus of the Viet Minh, and the VNQDD as the principal component of the Chinese Nationalist-sponsored Dong Minh Hoi.

The Viet Minh—Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi, League for the Independence of Vietnam—came into being in May, 1951, at the 8th Plenum of the Indochinese Communist Party, held in South China. It was formed as a "united front" organization with Ho Chi Minh at its head, and was initially composed of the ICP, Revolutionary Youth League, the New Vietnam Party, and factions of the Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNQDD). Membership was held open to any other individuals or groups willing to join in struggling for "national liberation." The announced program of the Viet Minh called for a wide range of social and political reforms designed mainly to appeal to Viet patriotism. Emphasis was placed on an anti-Japanese crusade and preparation for "an insurrection by the organization of the people into self-defense corps," not on communist cant.

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

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

The American O.S.S. during World War II dealt with the Viet Minh as the sole efficient resistance apparatus within Vietnam, depending upon it for reliable intelligence, and for aid in assisting downed allied pilots. However, the Viet Minh itself assigned priority to political tasks ahead of these military missions. The first permanent Viet Minh bases were established in 1942–43 in the mountains north of Hanoi. Only after its political network was well established did it field its first guerrilla forces, in September 1943. The first units of the Viet Minh Liberation Army came into being on December 22, 1944, and there is little evidence of large scale, concerted guerrilla operations until after March 1945.

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

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

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

thrust conflict upon the Vietnamese of Cochinchina. The question before the communists was how to respond; the ICP leadership determined that violence was the sole recourse, and that to maintain leadership of the nationalist movement in South Vietnam they had to make the Viet Minh the most unbending foe of compromise with the French.

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

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

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

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

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

But even this ascendancy proved transitory. Ho Chi Minh, though he tried hard, was unable to negotiate any durable modus vivendi with the French in the summer and fall of 1946. In the meantime, the DRV and the Viet Minh were drawn more and more under the control of the "Marxists" of the former ICP. For example, during the session of the DRV National Assembly in November, nominal opposition members were whittled down to 20 out of more than 300 seats, and a few "Marxists" dominated the proceedings. Nonetheless, the DRV government maintained at least a facade of coalition. A chart (pp. 51–55) of its leadership during 1945–1949 illustrates that through 1949, ICP members remained in the minority, and nominally oppositionist VNQDD and Dong Minh Hoi politicians were consistently included.

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

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

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

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

I. B. 1.

THE CHARACTER AND POWER OF THE VIET MINH

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

1. Origins of the Viet Minh

a. Pre-World War II Vietnamese Political Movements

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

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

"Pauperization was the lot of most peasants and of all tenants, not only in overpopulated Tongking and Annam, but also in Cochinchina, which was much richer than the other four Indochinese states that it contributed 40 per cent to the general budget. The economic burdens of French rule, according to a contemporary English writer, 'were shouldered

principally by the rural population, and the fiscal demands, together with the increasing birthrate, led to a progressive pauperization of the countryside, a process illustrated by the fact that rural indebtedness in Cochinchina alone increased from 31 million piasters in 1900 to 134 million piasters on 1930.'

"There is, however, no more devastating verdict on the failure of the French to combat rural poverty than the dry statement of another French authority on living conditions in Vietnam. 'It is only in periods of intense agricultural labor,' wrote E. Lerich in a study published in 1942, 'which means during one-third of the year and particularly during the harvest, that the people have enough to eat.'

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

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

Principal Vietnamese Political Movements, 1920– 1940

(with Dates of Activation)³

Parties Advocating Reform of the French System

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

Theocratic Movements

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

Parties Advocating Revolution and National Independence

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

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

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

The revolutionary parties were, by contrast, concentrated chiefly in the North, their more radical and conspiratorial complexion reflecting both necessity — given the repressive policies of the French and the mandarins through whom they ruled — and foreign intellectual influences, especially those emanating from China, and from the universities in Hanoi and Hue. All the revolutionary parties were active among Vietnamese living abroad. The Vietnam Restoration League was chiefly based in Japan (and eventually became the Japanese backed vehicle for Vietnamese entry into the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere). The remainder were principally Chinese based, and strongly influenced by Sun Yat Sen's philosophy, Chiang

Kai Shek's Kuomintang, and Mao Tse Tung's Chinese Communist Party. Of the group, only the Indochinese Communist Party and the Vietnamese Nationalist Party achieved real political power, but not even these were successful in dislodging French control; a brief recounting of their failures, however, reveals much concerning the political antecedents of modern Vietnam.

(2) The Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNQDD)

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

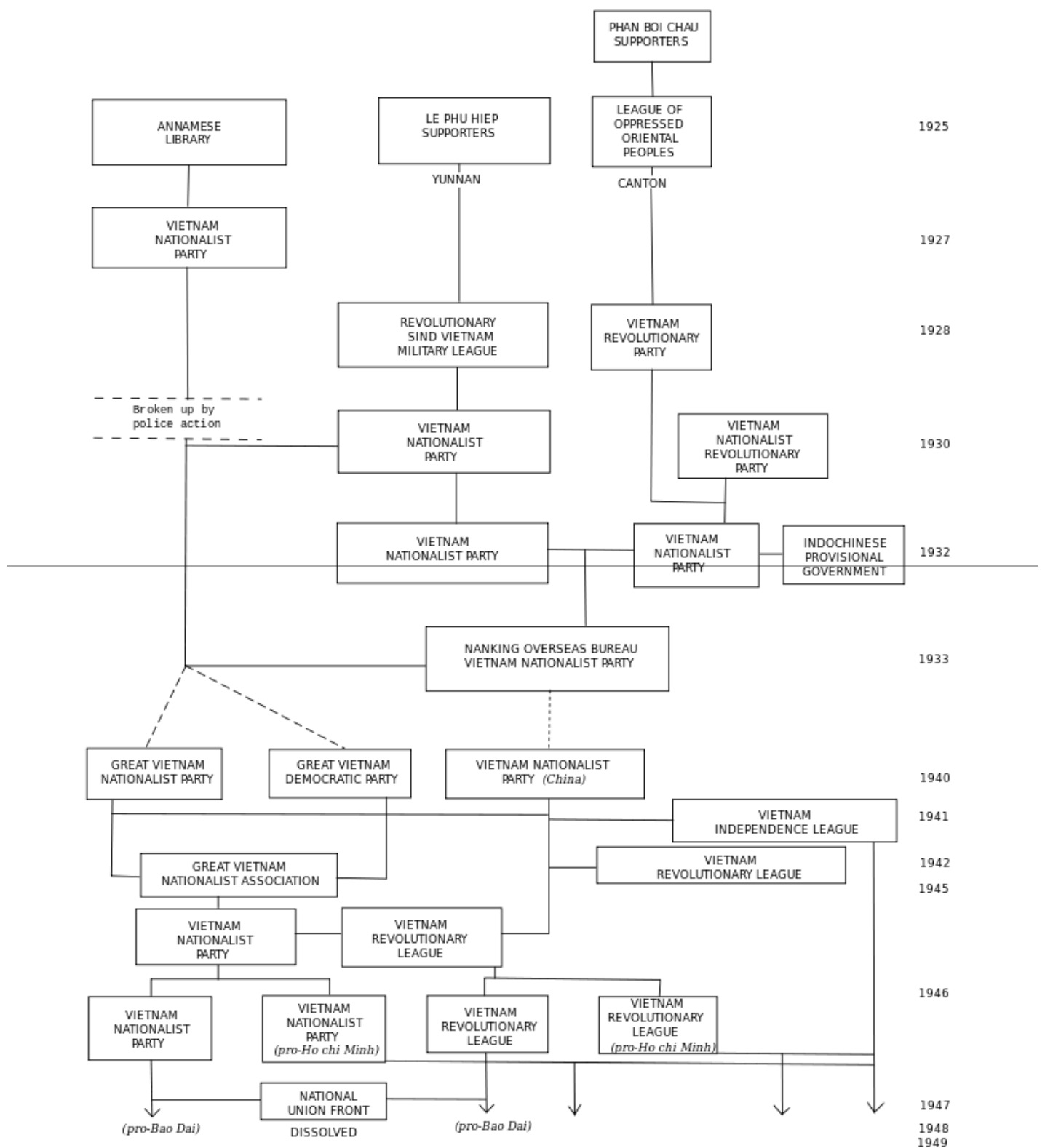


Figure 1

Yen Bay, and spread throughout Tonkin. The French reaction was quick, efficient and severe. Nguyen Thai Hoc was captured and executed, along with hundreds of lesser Nationalists; others fled to China. By 1932, Nationalist Party remnants within Vietnam had been hounded into activity, and the Party thereafter centered on the exile community in China. By 1940, in a series of factional struggles, three main branches

evolved: a pro-Japanese faction called the Great Vietnam Democratic Party (Dai Viet Dan Chinh); a faction re-established in Vietnam called the Great Vietnam Nationalist Party (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang); and a Kunming faction under Vu Khong Khanh bearing the original VNQDD name. The latter group survived the war, and became important in its aftermath.

(3) The Primacy of the Indochinese Communist Party

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

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

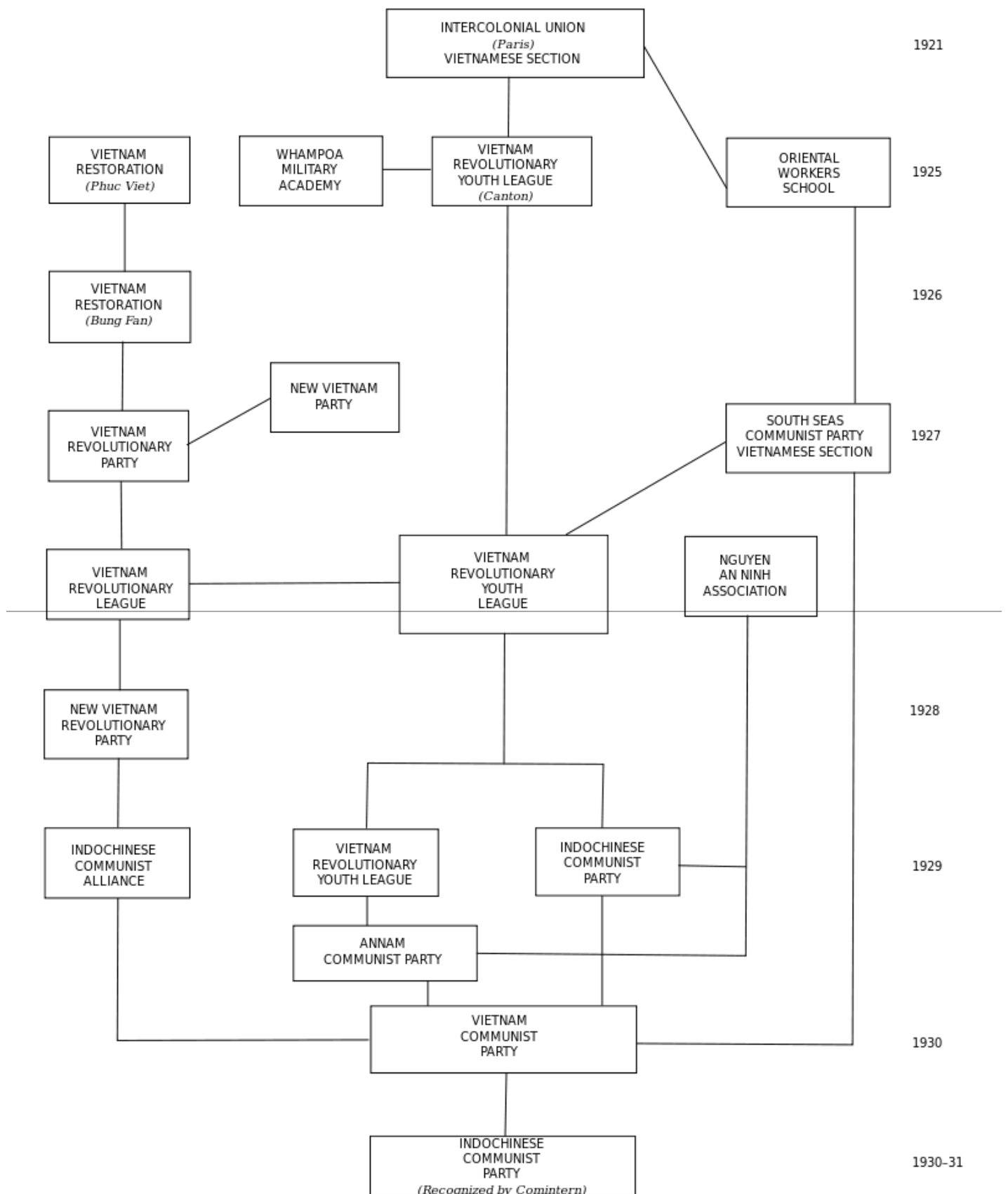


Figure 2

on their request, Ho Chi Minh was arrested by the British in Hong Kong. Attempts at party reorganization in 1932 were met by renewed police repression, and not until 1933 were communists again permitted political activity of an sort. The party, however, did revive, establishing a new foothold in more permissive Cochinchina, under Tran Van Giau (Figure 3).⁸ Tran there formed the League Against Imperialism, a front organization specifically non-violent in its program designed to attract support from the political center and right. In 1935, following the Comintern Seventh World Congress, the ICP centered itself on Saigon, and launched an Indochinese Congress

"Democratic Front," paralleling the communists' Popular Front movement in metropolitan France. Almost immediately, however, Trotskyite elements, advocating "permanent revolution," split with the ICP leadership, and began to press an independent, more revolutionary line.

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

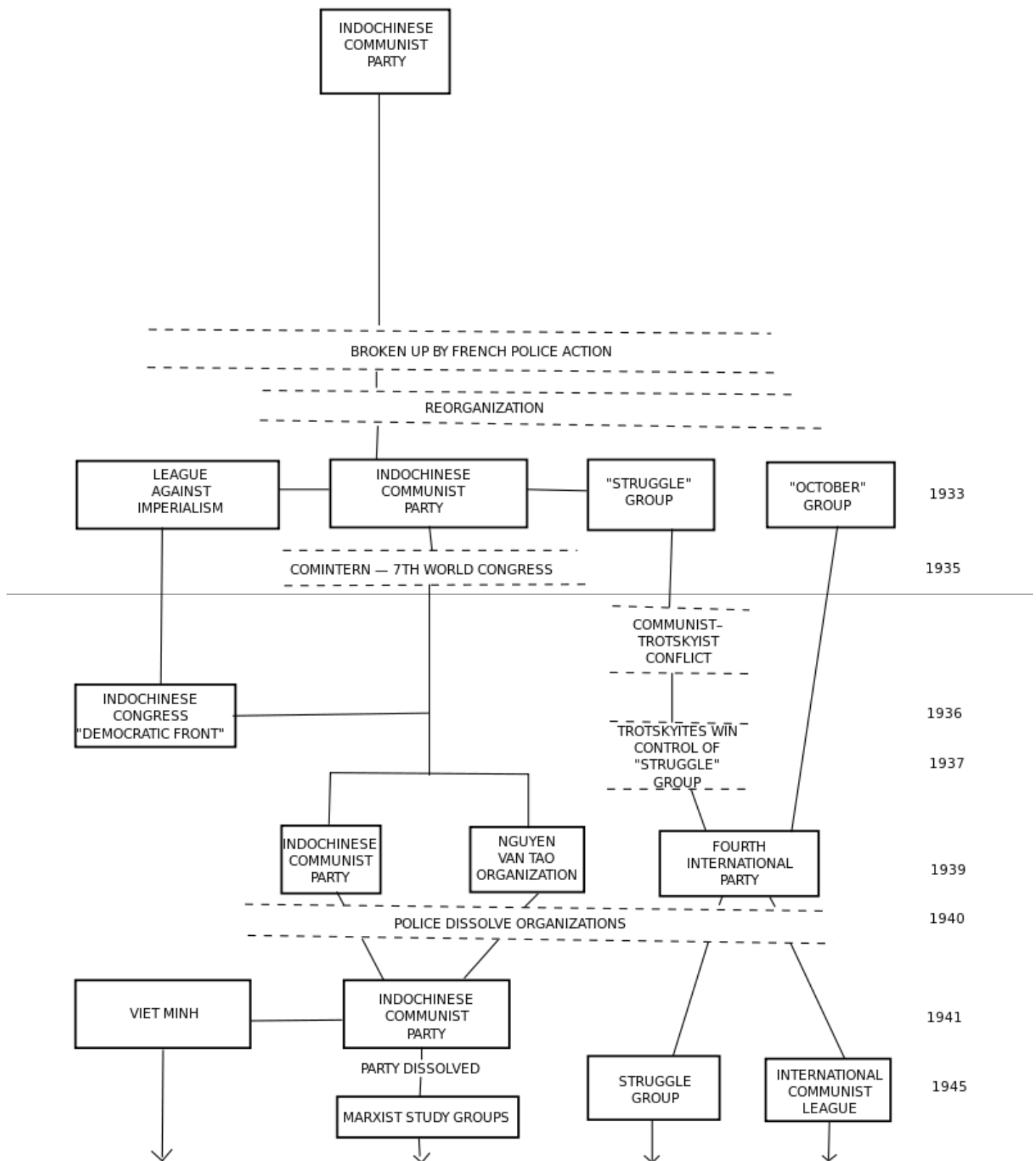
The divisions within the communist movement of Vietnam during the 1930's, as well as the ICP willingness to subordinate its doctrinal abhorrence of both the French and the bourgeoisie for short term goals, are evident in the following report on "The Party's Line in the Period of the Democratic Front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

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

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

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

Figure 3



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

b. World War II and the Viet Minh

(1) Formation of the Independence League, 1941

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

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

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

The Japanese entry into Indochina kindled, in 1940 and 1941, Vietnamese insurrections against the French, who now appeared more reprehensible and vulnerable than ever. Too, some Vietnamese nationalists had long looked to the Japanese to liberate their nation. The communists were apparently undecided whether to risk another premature insurrection. While it appears that the Central Committee of the ICP may have actually ordered subordinate echelons to refrain from violence, communists, first in Cochinchina, and then in Tonkin, led armed uprisings. The results were disastrous for the rebels. The Japanese, who probably encouraged the revolts to the extent they could, stood aside while the French reacted swiftly and savagely to crush the Vietnamese.¹² Numerous ICP and other nationalist leaders died in the fighting, or in the harsh ministrations of French colonial justice which

followed. The outcome of the rebellions of 1940 and 1941 was thus yet another French purge, exile of Vietnamese nationalist movements. While small scale covert operations continued in Vietnam, party headquarters were forced to move abroad, mostly to Nationalist China. In 1946, the Vietnamese government published a tract which acknowledged its debt to China:

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

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

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

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

"Elders!

"Prominent personalities!

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

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

"Dear compatriots!

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

"Revolutionary fighters!

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

"Victory to Viet-Nam's Revolution!

"Victory to the World's Revolution!"¹⁴

(2) Component Parties and Program

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

- The New Vietnam Party (Tan Viet Dang)
- The Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League (Viet Nam Thanh Nien Cach Menh Dong Chi Hoi)
- Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNQDD) (Only certain factions of this party elected to join the Viet Minh)
- The several "National Liberation Associations"
- The Indochinese Communist Party (ICP)

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

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

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

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

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

"In the international sphere the program stands for the revision of unequal treaties and an alliance with all democratic nations for the maintenance of peace. More important for the anti-Japanese war, however, is the immediate program of action which is: (1) Organization of the masses — workers, peasants, women, and youth — for the anti-fascist struggle. This has already attained promising successes. (2) Preparation of an insurrection by the organization of the people into self-defense corps. (3) The formation of guerrilla bands and bases 'which will assume greater importance as we gradually approach the time of country-wide military action.'"¹⁷

(3) Competitive Parties

(a) Dong Minh Hoi

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

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

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

The Dong Minh Hoi acquired only modest political and military power in Vietnam, and became a significant political factor there only after Chinese Nationalist forces occupied Tonkin in late 1945. On March 28, 1944, a "Provisional Republican Government of Vietnam" was proclaimed in Luichow, China, with Viet Minh officials occupying only a minority of positions in the government.¹⁸ But in Vietnam, the Viet Minh formed the only effective and extensive resistance movement.

(b) Collaborator Parties

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

Great Vietnam Party (Dai Viet)

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

Restoration League (Phuc Quoc)

- (1) The Annam National Party, consisting of a volunteer corps, a civilian section, and a military section. The volunteer corps, which is the principal element, counts 1,500 in the north, 3,000 in the center, and 5,000 in the south and has influence amongst business men, officials, and intellectuals.
- (2) The Vietnam Patriots' Party (Viet Nam Ai Quoc Dang), made up of doctors, lawyers and intellectuals in the liberal professions and having latent power among young intellectuals.
- (3) The National Socialist Party (Dai Viet Quoc Xa), having about 2000 members and its chief sphere of influence in the light industry towns Haiphong and Hanoi. This party was directed by Tran Trong Kim, late premier of the Bao Dai government, and is said to have been inspired by the Japanese Military Police and Intelligence Organization (Kempei Tai) to recruit Vietnamese for the puppet military forces.¹⁹

In Cochinchina, the Restoration League was preeminent:

Restoration League

- (1) The Vietnam National Independence Party (Viet Nam Quoc Gia Doe Lap Dang), founded by Tran Van An, Nguyen Van Sam, Ho Van Nga, and Ngo Tan Nhon. Some of the elements of the dissolved Vietnam Revolutionary Party (Viet Nam Cach Minh Dang), which had been founded in 1939, joined the new organization. The Party was markedly pro-Japanese in orientation. It favored collaboration with the Japanese Army and the adherence of Vietnam to the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.
- (2) The Vietnam Patriots' Party (Viet Nam Ai Quoc Dang), a group of intellectuals and students.

(3) The Great Vietnam Nationalist Party (Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang), an outgrowth of the Cochinchina Vietnam Nationalist Party, consisting of pro-Japanese elements.

(4) The Vietnam National Party (Viet Nam Quoc Gia Dang), a minor political group.

(5) The Youth Justice Association (Thanh Nien Nghia Dong Doan), a minor youth group.

(6) The Youth Patriots (Thanh Nien Ai Quoc), the southern branch of a terrorist youth group. Elements of this southern group created an organization known as the Vietnam Democratic Party (Viet Nam Dan Chu Ngia Dang).

(7) The Hoa Hao Buddhist Sect (Phat Giao Hoa Hao), also known as the Vietnam Independence Restoration Party (Viet Nam Doc Lap Van Dai) a militant Buddhist sect led by Huynh Phu So

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

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

(c) Trotskyists

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

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

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

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

(4) Viet Minh Operations in Vietnam

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

"1. Develop new organizations among the people, and consolidate those which exist within the Viet Minh.

2. Expand organizations into the cities.

3. Organize the minority peoples within the Viet Minh.

4. Form small guerrilla groups."²³

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

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

On 9 March, 1945, the Japanese overturned the Vichy regime in Indochina, and set up the Emperor of Annam, Bao Dai, as the head of a state declared independent of France, but participating in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. This unification of Vietnam by the faltering Japanese under the ineffectual Annamese Emperor opened new political opportunity for the Viet Minh. On April 6, 1945, the ICP Central Committee directed the forming of a shadow government throughout Vietnam, to extend to every echelon of the society, prepared to mobilize the whole people for war. In May, 1945, a Viet Minh "liberated zone" was established near the Chinese border.

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

(5) The Liberation of North Vietnam

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

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

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

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

"On August 16, the National Congress opened at Tan Trao, a locality in Thai Nguyen province, in the liberated zones. Sixty representatives from all parts of the country came to learn additional details on the order for the General Revolution. The home and foreign policies of the Revolutionary Government were mapped out and the Viet Nam people's Liberation Committee, which became later the Provisional Government of the Viet Nam Democratic Republic, was created.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You could understand even better if you were able to see what is happening here, if you were able to sense this desire for independence which has been smoldering in the bottom of all hearts, and which no human force can any longer hold

back. Even if you were to arrive to re-establish a French administration here, it would no longer be obeyed; each village would be a nest of resistance, every former friend an enemy, and your officials and colonists themselves would ask to depart from this unbreathable atmosphere.

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

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

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

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

(6) The Liberation of South Vietnam

The overturning of Japanese power in Cochinchina followed a separate course. Bao Dai's government had waited until August 13, 1945 to proclaim the incorporation of Cochinchina into a united Vietnam, but this move came much too late to have any impact. The first effective steps toward consolidating the disunited Vietnamese political groups in the South was undertaken by the Trotskyist "Struggle" faction and formerly collaborationist parties, who merged on August 14, 1945, to form a "United National Front" (Mat Tran Quoc Thong Nhut). Participants included the Cao Dai League, the Hoa Hao Sect, and the Buddhist League. The United National Front adopted the Trotskyist platform, and directed its energies principally against Bao Dai's representatives in Saigon. The Viet Minh seems to have delayed until 23 August to launch its program in Cochinchina, apparently moving at that time in response to the seizure of power by the Viet Minh in Annam and Tonkin. In the meantime, the ICP, led by Tran Van Giau, quietly seized power. On 25 August 1945, the Viet Minh sponsored a meeting at which a government entitled "Provisional Executive Committee of the Southern Vietnam Republic" was formed. The Committee of the South, though dominated by Tran Van Giau and other members of the ICP, purported to represent both the Viet Minh and the United National Front, and to be the southern arm of Ho Chi Minh's Hanoi government. The United National Front was represented at the 25 August meeting, but formal negotiations for an alliance between the Viet Minh and the Front did not commence until 30 August. The following is purported to be a transcript of the proceedings of this meeting, following a report by Tran Van Giau as Chairman of the Executive Committee of the South:

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

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

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

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

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

meet together and selected Phan Van Hum, as its representative, to negotiate with the Viet Minh in order to fuse the two fronts into one.

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

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

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

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

I. B. 2.

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2. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam

a. Establishment of the Republic

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

On 2 September 1946 — the day Japan signed the surrender instrument — Ho proclaimed the foundation of a new state, issuing the following "Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Việt-Nam":

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

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

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

"Those are undeniable truths.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Thus, from that date, our people were subjected to the double yoke of the French and the Japanese. Their sufferings and miseries increased. The result was that, from the end of last year to the beginning of this year, from Quang Tri Province to the North of Viet-Nam, more than two million of our fellow citizens died from starvation. On March 9 [1945], the French troops were disarmed by the Japanese. The French colonialists either fled or surrendered, showing that not only were they incapable of "protecting" us, but that, in the span of five years, they had twice sold our country to the Japanese.

"On several occasions before March 9, the Viet Minh League urged the French to ally themselves with it against the Japanese. Instead of agreeing to this proposal, the French colonialists so intensified their terrorist activities against the Viet Minh members that before fleeing they massacred a great number of our political prisoners detained at Yen Bay and Cao Bang.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"For these reasons, we, members of the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam, solemnly declare to the world that Viet-Nam has the right to be a free and independent country — and in fact it is so already. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property in order to safeguard their independence and liberty."³⁴

b. Short-lived Independence in Cochinchina

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

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

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

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

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

On 17 September 1945, the Committee of the South called a general strike to protest the Allied lack of cooperation, and arrested some sixteen French. The French then importuned Gracey to permit them to step in to restore order. On 19 September, the French "Commissioner" for Cochinchina, Cedile, announced that there would be no negotiations with

Vietnamese nationalists until civil order was restored. On 20 September, General Gracey suspended all Vietnamese newspapers, and took over the Vietnamese police force. On 21 September, martial law was declared, outlawing all demonstrations, and the bearing by Vietnamese of any weapon whatsoever, including bamboo rods. On 22 September, the British freed some 1400 French parachutists that had been incarcerated outside Saigon by the Japanese, and these promptly descended on the city to beat Vietnamese wherever they could lay their hands on them. On the morning of 23 September, French troops occupied the police stations, the post office, and other public buildings, and began to arrest Vietnamese politicians and public officials, although members of the Committee account noted that:

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

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

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

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

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

"...advised the Annamite [Vietnamese] Communists to be sure, before they acted too rashly, that their struggle 'meets the requirements of Soviet policy.' It warned that any 'premature adventures' in Annamite independence might 'not be in line with Soviet perspectives.' These perspectives might well include France as a firm ally of the USSR in Europe, in which case the Annamite independence movement would be an embarrassment. Therefore, it urged upon the Annamite comrades a policy of 'patience.' It advised them in particular to wait upon the results of the French elections, coming up the following month, in October, when additional Communist strength might assure the Annamites a better settlement. In the meantime, it baldly proposed that an emissary be sent not only to contact the French Communist Party but also the Russians 'in order to acquaint yourselves with the perspectives of coming event.'"³⁹

Whether the circumstances were propitious or not, conflict had been thrust upon the Vietnamese of Cochinchina. The question before the communists there was how to respond, and apparently the Party leadership determined that violence was the sole recourse, and that to regain leadership of the nationalist movement they had to make the Viet Minh the foremost proponent of war, the most unbending foe of compromise with the French General Gracey, on the urgings of Admiral Lord Mountbatten's Allied Command, made a determined effort to effect a compromise with the Viet Minh, and succeeded in obtaining a truce on 2 October. But this broke down quickly in the face of truculence on both sides. French reinforcements under General Leclerc began pouring into Saigon, bolstering French resolve. A representative from Ho's Hanoi government arrived to buttress the Viet NUnh's position with tales of Viet Minh ascendancy in Amam and Tonkin. The French sought to negotiate on the premise that they would rule, and allow some Viet participation; the Viet Minh demanded return to the status quo prior to 22 September, and eventual French evacuation. On October 9, 1945, France and the U.K. concluded an agreement in London in which the British formally recognized the French civil administration in Indochina as the sole legitimate authority south of the sixteenth parallel. Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin described to the House of Commons of Vietnamese disorder and looting, and of the difficulties presented by clashes between French troops under Gracey's command and Vietnamese forces. Britain, he announced, would assist in transporting to Vietnam enough French troops to permit them to take over from Gracey, and that in the interim British policy would support "close and friendly cooperation between the British and French commanders."⁴⁰ On 11 October, the truce broke down, and fighting resumed.

On 25 October, the French under General Leclerc thrust southward from Saigon to My Tho, the temporary capital of the Committee of the South, and, victorious there, to the northwest into Ty Ninh, where they subdued the Cao Dai. The Viet Minh opened a guerrilla campaign which greatly slowed the French, and demonstrated almost at once that neither French air power nor armor would suffice for pacification against that determined foe. The eminent French journalist, Philippe Devillers, who accompanied Leclerc's initial forays, wrote that:

"From this time on the work of pacifying the country revealed an aspect it would never lose again: to be forever put in question. The Viet Minh would suddenly start shooting at night at a village protected by one of our posts...to pull defenders to one side while on the other set fire to the houses and killed all suspicious persons. If we departed, believing a region pacified, they would arrive on our heels and the terror would start again. There was only one possible defense: to multiply the posts, to fortify them, to arm the villagers, and to train them for a coordinated and enlightened self-defense through a thorough job of information and policing.

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

c. Nationalist Government in North Vietnam, 1945–1946

(1) The Government of 2 September 1945

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

The numbers of Chinese who entered North Vietnam is not known precisely, the totals having been obscured not only by inadequate reports, but by the Nationalists' use of Tonkin for passage of troops from Yunnan and Kwangsi en route to other parts of China. French estimates ran as high as 180,000, but the Chinese occupation forces per se probably numbered about 50,000.⁴² Even fewer foreign troops would have gravely overburdened North Vietnam, where because of a bad crop year, and war-disturbed commerce, famine was rampant. Most of the Chinese troops were ill-disciplined and poorly-equipped, living, perforce, off the land. Their exactions of the peasantry stirred the traditional animosities of the Vietnamese for the Chinese — resentments untempered by gratitude to the Chinese as liberators, since the Vietnamese believed they had already been liberated by the Viet Minh. And the transgressions of the Chinese troops were matched by the Chinese high command; the warlords promptly began to plunder North Vietnam. The Chinese dollar was made legal tender at an exorbitant rate of exchange with the Vietnamese piastre, which exacerbated an already serious inflation, and opened new vistas for the black market. Chinese profiteers began large scale buying of French and Vietnamese enterprises and real estate.⁴³

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

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

A non-free image has been removed from this page.

This page included a map of North Vietnam with shaded areas indicating zones held by the Viet-Minh, Phuc-Quôc, Dong-Minh-Hoi, V.N.Q.D.D., and the local neutral administration. Stars indicated Chinese Nationalist garrisons. The removed content can be viewed in the original document [here](#) (PDF).

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

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

FIGURE 4

The realities of the Chinese presence alone required Ho Chi Minh to use circumspection in dealing with rival nationalist groups. Why the Chinese did not follow through, and simply oust Ho's government in favor of a VNQDD/Dong Minh Hoi coalition is not known. It appears that venality played a part – Chiang Fa Kuei and other warlords were direct beneficiaries of an official DRV "gold week" in September, 1945, in which the state appealed to

the citizenry for scraps of gold as "a contribution to the finance of national defense."⁴⁴ Allegedly this campaign produced some 500 pounds of gold and 20 million piastres, and for it the DRV received from the warloards, besides toleration, weapons the Japanese had in their possession — a reported 40,000 arms, including mortars, artillery pieces, and 18 tanks.⁴⁵

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CENTRAL COMMITTEE INDOCHINA COMMUNIST PARTY

November 11, 1945"⁴⁷

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"General Gallagher was asked whether the Annamese were realistic regarding their ability to stand up against French military force. While they are too enthusiastic and too naive, he said, they probably know that they will be licked. They are strong on parades and reiterate their willingness 'to fight to the last man,' but they would be slaughtered and they have been told that and probably know it. The Annamese would be no match for forces with modern arms even if they themselves have some, which they may have since the Chinese found no Japanese rolling artillery and numerous Japanese anti-aircraft guns seem to have completely disappeared. United States Army representatives never did learn the extent of arms controlled by the Viet Minh. Certainly the Chinese are not turning Japanese arms over to them. Before V-J Day the Japanese undoubtedly had armed and trained many Annamese. A Japanese general claimed they had taken over on March 9 simply because the French could no longer control the Annamese, but this statement General Gallagher characterized as a lie. He had heard that under the pretext of arming Annamese gendarmes for police duty in Hanoi, the Japanese had actually armed three distinct contingents, dismissing each group when armed and bringing in a new one to be armed and trained. Furthermore, the Annamese had acquired Japanese arms from arsenals which had been opened. General Gallagher did not know whether or not Tai Li (Deputy Director, Bureau of Investigation and Statistics, Chinese National Commission of Military Affairs) was sending arms to the Viet Minh.

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

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

with the Atlantic Charter and other ideological pronouncements. In our neutral role we were thus a disappointment to both sides....

"At the present time the Hanoi radio is controlled by the Chinese so that there is communication between Hanoi and Saigon. A British military and civilian liaison team was sent to Hanoi and a Chinese counterpart to Saigon. The British in Hanoi at first made little progress with the Chinese but General Gallagher understands they have since made more headway.

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

"General Gallagher noted that magnetic mines have not been entirely cleared at least from the northern ports and that the threat provided by these mines has helped and would continue to help keep the French from undertaking large-scale landing operations in that area. He felt that regular rail communications between Saigon and Hanoi might not be opened for another year."^[1]

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

(2) The Government of 2 March 1946

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

The new government faced at the outset a crisis in relations with France. Though General Leclerc's "pacification" operations in South Vietnam had fallen short of expectations, French troops and shipping had arrived in Indochina in sufficient quantity for them to contemplate operations in North Vietnam. Simultaneously, the French undertook negotiations with the Chinese, seeking to have them relinquish their occupation of North Vietnam, and with the DRV, seeking to have it accept the reintroduction of French forces. In the meantime, the British withdrew from Cochinchina; on 4 March 1946, the Allied Southeast Asia Command deactivated Indochina as a territory within its purview. In February, the French deployed an amphibious task force prepared for operations in North Vietnam. On 28 February, they obtained Chinese agreement (from Chungking, not the Chinese satraps in North Vietnam) to turn over the occupation to France by April. Ho Chi Minh, faced with French military power and Chinese withdrawal, and denied succor from the United Nations or the U.S., had no recourse save to negotiate with the French.

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

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

(3) Chinese Withdrawal

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

One of the more remarkable chapters in the tragic history of Vietnamese nationalism then ensued. On the heels of the withdrawing Chinese Vo Nguyen Giap's DRV troops struck into the regions governed by the Dong Minh Hoi, VNQDD, and Phuc Quoc. In a series of skirmishes, they routed the partisan bands, and overturned the civil administrations of the opposition parties. The French not only provided equipment, but in some instances actually maneuvered their own forces with, and furnished artillery support for, the Vietnamese. Some strongholds held out for months — Lao Kay on the Yunnan border remained in VNQDD hands until November, 1946 — but the issue was decided before the end of July⁵²

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

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

"Please pass to General Marshall for information.

"There are three important political parties in Viet Nam.

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

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

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

"Vdet Minh strength seems to be spread throughout northern Indo-China. Dong Minh Hoi and Quoc Dan Dang control territory in Moncay, Langson, Vinh Yen area.

"As yet no Catholic party has appeared nor do Catholics appear to be committed to support of any one party. Viet Minh League has been making tentative moves to capture Catholic support but is said to be too radical to obtain full cooperation from church. In view of fact church claims million members in Tonking and Annam (large percentage believed to be 'rice Christians'), it seems probable that Catholics as group will [not?] remain long absent from politics."^[2]

In July, the same source reported that Vet Minh was steadily eliminating the Dong Minh Hoi and VNQDD as organized opposition.^[3]

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

(4) The Government of 3 November 1946

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

DRV

Political Parties in the DRV National Assembly⁵³

October 28, 1946

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

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

The new constitution, ratified on 8 November 1946 by the National Assembly with a vote of 240 to 2, ordained in phrases reminiscent of Jefferson and Rousseau a state of guaranteed civic freedoms, of delineated duties and rights of citizens, and of a people's parliament supreme in power. Thereafter, the Assembly adjourned until late 1953, and never did get around to transforming itself into constitutionally prescribed form.⁵⁴ The 1946 Constitution declared Vietnam to be a democratic republic in which all power belonged to the people "without distinction of race, class, creed, wealth, or sex." Its territory, "composed of Bac-Bo, or Northern Viet Nam (Tonkin), Trung-Bo or Central Viet Nam (Annam), and Nam-Bo or Southern Viet Nam (Cochinchina) is one and indivisible... The capital of Viet Nam is Hanoi."⁵⁵ However, the Constitution of 1946 never became institutionalized; instead, the exigencies of the war with the French eventuated in a government which was literally an administrative extension of a rigidly disciplined politico-military apparatus headed by Ho Chi Minh, and a cadre of his old comrades from the Indochina Communist Party⁵⁶

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

VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENTS 1945 – 1949

<u>Government</u>	<u>Date Established</u>	<u>Capital</u>	<u>Cabinet Composition</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Incumbent</u>	<u>Party</u>
State of Vietnam	10 March 1945	HUE	Not Available	Prime Minister	Tran Trong Tim	Conservative Nationalist
[Bao Dai, Emperor, abdicated on 26 August 1945 in favor of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam]						
People's Liberation Committee	16 August 1945	Hanoi	12 Viet Minh (6 ICP) 2 VN Democratic Party	Not Available		
[Superseded by Prov Gov't DRV, 2 September 1945]						
Provisional Executive Committee of the Southern Vietnam Republic	25 August 1945	Saigon	6 Viet Minh (4 ICP) 1 VN Democratic Party 2 Non-party 1 National Independence Party	Chairman	Tran Van Giau	ICP

[Overthrown by French Coup d'etat 23 September 1945]

Provincial Gov't of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam	2 Sep 1945	Hanoi	9 Viet Minh (6 ICP)	President	Ho Chi Minh	Communist-Viet Minh
			4 VN Democratic Party	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Ho chi Minh	Communist-Viet Minh
			1 Catholic	Minister of Interior	Vo nguyen Giap	Communist-Viet Minh
			2 Non-Party	Minister of Propaganda	Tran huy Lieu	Communist-Viet Minh
	[Superceded by Gov't DRV, 2 March 1946]			Minister of National Defense	Chu van Tan	Viet Minh
				Minister of Youth	Duong due Hion	Democrat
				Minister of National Economy	Nguyen manh Ha	Catholic
				Minister of Social Welfare	Nguyen van To	Non-party
				Minister of Justice	Vu trong Khanh	Democrat
				Minister of Health	Pham ngoc Thach	Viet Minh
				Minister of Public Works & Communications	Dao trong Kim	Non-party
				Minister of Labor	Le van Hien	Communist-Viet Minh
				Minister of Finance	Pham van Dong	Communist-Viet Minh
				Minister of National Education	Vu dinh Hoe	Democrat
				Minister without Portfolio	Cu Huy Can	Democrat
				Minister without Portfolio	Nguyen van Xuan	Viet Minh
Government of South Vietnam	14 Feb 1946	Saigon	4 French 8 Vietnamese	Consultative Council of Cochinchina		
Democratic Republic of Vietnam	2 March 1946	Hanoi	2 ICP	President	Ho chi Minh	Communist-Viet Minh
				Vice President	Nguyen hai Than	Dong Minh Hoi
				Minister of Foreign Affairs	Nguyen tuong Tam	Vietnam Nationalist Party
			3 VN Nationalist	Minister of	Huynh thuc	Independent

	Interior	Khang	
	Minister of National Defense	Phan Anh	Socialist
	Minister of National Economy	Chu ba Phuong	Vietnam Nationalist Party
1 Dong Minh Hoi	Minister of Justice	Vu dinh Hoo	Democrat
2 Democrats	Minister of Education	Dang thai Mai	Viet Minh ^[4]
	Minister of Agriculture	Bo xuan Luat	Dong Minh Hoi ^[5]
1 Socialists	Minister of Social Welfare	Truong dinh Tri	Vietnam Nationalist Party
3 Independents	Minister of Finance	Lo van Hien	Communist-Viet Minh
	Minister of Public Works & Communications	Tran dang Khoa	Democrat
The Vice Ministries were divided as follows:			
	Vice Minister of the Interior	Hoang minh Giam	Socialist
	Vice Minister of National Defense	Ta quang Buu	Independent
	Vice Minister of Justice	Nguyen van Huong	Independent
	Vice minister of Public Works & Communications	Dang phuc Thong	Viet Minh
	Vice Minister of Finance	Trinh Van Binh	Independent
	Vice Minister of National Education	Do duc Duc	Democrat
[Reorganized under constitution adopted by National Assembly, November 1946]	Vice Minister of Agriculture	Bo Xuan Luat	Dong Minh Hoi
	Vice Minister of Social Welfare	Do Tiep	Dong Minh Hoi
	Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs	Nghiem ko To	Vietnam Nationalist Party
In addition, the following were elected: (1) a Consultative High Council headed by Nguyen vinh Thuy (ex-emperor Bai Dai); (2) A supreme council of National Defense with Vo nguyen Giap (Communist) as president and Vu khong Khanh (Nationalist Party) as vice-president; (3) the President of the National			

Assembly, Ngo tu Ha (Catholic); (4) the permanent Committee of the Assembly headed by Bui bang Doan (Independent)

Republic of Cochinchina	1 June 1946	Saigon	All French Appointees	President	Nguyen van Thinh	Democratic
Democratic Republic of Vietnam	3 Nov 1946	Hanoi	5 ICP	President	Ho chi Minh	Communist-Viet Minh
				Vice-President	Vacant ^[6]	
			5 Independents	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Ho chi Minh	Communist-Viet Minh
				Minister of Interior	Huynh thuc Khang	Independent
				Minister of National Defense	Vo nguyen Giap	Communist-Viet Minh
				Minister of National Economy	Vacant ^[7]	
				Minister of Justice	Vu dinh Hoe	Democrat
				Minister of Finance	Lo van Hion	Communist-Viet Minh
				Minister of National Education	Nguyen van Huyon	Socialist
				Minister of Agriculture	Ngo tan Hnon	Independent
				Minister of Communications & Public Works	Tran dang Khoa	Democrat
				Minister of Labor	Nguyen van Tao	Communist-Viet Minh
				Minister of Health	Hoang tinh Tri	Independent
				Minister of Social Welfare	Chu ba Phuong	Vietnam Nationalist Party
				Minister without Portfolio	Nguyen Van To	Independent
				Minister without Portfolio	Bo xuan Luat	Independent
				Supreme Councillor	Nguyen vinh Thuy (Bao Dai)	
				Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs	Hoang minh Giam	Socialist
				Vice Minister of Interior	Hoang huu Nam	Communist-Viet Minh
				Vice Minister of	Ta quang Buu	Independent

National Defense		
Vice Minister of National Economy	Pham van Dong	Communist-Viet Minh
Vice Minister of Agriculture	Cu huy Can	Democrat
Vice Minister of Justice	Tran cong Tuong	Democrat
Vice Minister of Finance	Trinh van Binh	Independent
Vice Minister of National Education	Nguyen khanh Toan	Communist-Viet Minh
Vice Minister of Communication & Public Works	Dang phue Thong	Socialist
Vice Minister of Health	Vacant ^[8]	
Vice Minister of Labor	Vacant	
Vice Minister of Social Welfare	Vacant	
Vice Minister of Health	Ton that Tung	Independent
Vice Minister of Labor	Vacant	
Vice Minister of Social Welfare	Vacant	
Vice Minister of War Veterans and Invalids	Ngo tu Ba	Independent (Catholic)

Provisional Government of South Vietnam	13 Oct 1947	Saigon	French-sponsored regime Nguyen Van Xuan,President
Administrative Committee of Tonkin	May 1947	Hanoi	French-sponsored regime
Administrative Committee of Annam	May 1947	Hue	French-sponsored regime
Provisional Vietnam Central Government	6 June 1948	Hanoi	Nguyen Van Xuan, President
Government of Vietnam	1 July 1949	Saigon	Emperor Bao Dai, Head of State

Democratic
Republic of
Vietnam

5 ICP	President	Ho chi Minh	Communist-Viet Minh
5 Independent	Vice President	Pham van Doag	Communist-Viet Minh
2 Democrat	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Hoang minh Giam	
3 Socialist			
1 Nationalist	Minister of Interior	Phan ke Toai	Independent
1 Dong Min Hoi	Minister of National Defense	Vo nguyen Giap	Communist-Viet Minh
	Minister of National Economy	Phan Anh	Socialist
	Minister of Justice	Vu dinh Hoe	Democrat
	Minister of Finance	Lo vanh Hien	Communist-Viet Minh
	Minister of National Education	Nguyen van Huyen	Socialist
	Minister of Agriculture	Ngo tan Nhon	Independent
	Minister of Communications & Public Works	Tran dang Khoa	Democrat
	Minister of Labor	Nguyen van Tao	Communist-Viet Minh
	Minister of Health	Hoang tich Tri	Independent
	Minister of Social Welfare	Chu ba Phong	Vietnam Nationalist Party
	Minister of War Veterans & Invalids	Vu dinh Tung	Independent (Catholic)
	Minister without Portfolio	Bo xuan Luat	Dong Minh Hoi
	Minister without portfolio	Dang van Huong	Independent (Buddhist)
	Vice Ministers were divided as follows:		
	Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs	Vacant	
	Vice Minister of Interior	Tran duy Hung	Independent
	Vice Minister of National	Ta quang Buu	Independent

As of July 1949

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

3. Nationalism During the Franco-Viet Minh War

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

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

Vietnamese Political Movements, 1947–1950

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

Vietnam Nationalist Party
(VNQDD)

A small, uninfluential faction of the VNQDD, operating within the Viet Minh.

Vietnam Revolutionary League
(Dong Minh Hoi)

A second splinter group of little political power.

Trotskyist Movement

A Saigon centered, left-wing communist faction opposed to the French and to the Viet Minh alike. Principal significance was its continued impairment of communist effectiveness in Cochinchina.

The Bao Dai Restoration Movements

National Union Front
(Mat Tran Thong Nhut Quoc Gia Lien Hiep)

Formed in Nanking in February, 1947, by VNQDD and Dong Minh Hoi leaders; gained support of Tran Trong Kim (Bao Dai's premier in the March–August 1945 Government), Nguyen Hai Than (Ho's onetime Dong Minh Hoi Vice President), and Nguyen Tuong Tam (VNQDD, sometime Foreign Minister of the DRV). Claimed to unite the VNQDD, the Dong Minh Hoi, the Cao Dai, and the Buddhists behind Bao Dai, but splintered with withdrawal of sect supporters, and under impact of French political maneuvers.

Vietnam Revolutionary League
(Dong Minh Hoi)

Re-established in China in 1946, but never again influential in Vietnam; probably numbered 5,000 or less. When war broke out, sought reconciliation with Viet Minh, but was rebuffed. Swung to Bao Dai, although supporting a hard line with the French.

Vietnam Nationalist Party
(VNQDD)

Enjoyed prestige of tradition dating to 1930's, but fortunes waned with Chiang Kai-shek's, with whom it had associated itself closely. Probably numbered 5,000 or less, and influence within Vietnam largely confined to Hanoi, and to northern Tonkin, in Viet Minh heartland. Support for Bao Dai highly tentative and heavily conditioned.

Vietnam Democratic Socialist Party
(Viet Nam Dan Chu Xa Hoi Dang)

A Cochinchinese faction which splintered from the Viet Minh over quarrels with Viet Minh leaders. Included Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Binh Xuyen leaders, and participated in the National Union Front. Party fractured in November, 1947, over dispute with Hoa Hao, and thereafter became defunct.

Popular Movement
(Doan The Dan Chung)

A Hanoi-centered anti-DRV Tonkinese movement which acquired no widespread following, and by 1949 seemed to have fallen apart.

Vietnamese Nationalist Youth Alliance
(Viet Nam Quoc Gia Thanh Nien Doan)

Another small Tonkinese movement which was of little significance.

Cao Dai League
(Doan The Cao Dai)

Headed by Pham Cong Tac, the Cao Dai Pope (in 1946 returned to the French from exile in Madagascar). The League claimed 1,000,000 to 2,000,000 adherents in Cochinchina and maintained (with some French aid) armed forces. Clashes between the Cao Dai and Viet Minh troops were frequent within the regions governed by the Cao Dai. The Cao Dai were divided on the issue of French support, since xenophobia was common within the sect. In January, 1948, the Cao Dai signed a peace with the Hoa Hao, and pledged support for Bao Dai. Pham Cong Tac openly aligned himself with the Bao Dai government in July, 1949. Nonetheless, the sect remained religiously, rather than politically oriented, and harbored a wide range of political opinion. The principal commitment remained Cao Daim.

Hoa Hao
(Phat Giao Hoa Hao)

Another Cochinchinese armed sect with a following of 200,000 to 1,000,000. During World War II the sect, with Japanese support, preached an anti-foreigner creed, and in 1945, joined the anti-French, anti-British resistance. In 1947, Huynh Phu So, the sect's leader, was executed by the

Viet Minh, which lead to the defection of the Hoa Hao from the resistance, and the sect's support of Bao Dai's restoration. Relations with the French, and with rival Vietnamese factions, remained strained.

Buddhist Group

(Tinh Do Cu Si)

A movement centered chiefly on the overseas Chinese community, and advocated passive resistance to the Viet Minh.

Vietnam Catholic League

(Viet Nam Lien Doan Cong Giao)

Organized by and around the Catholic clergy, the League exercised varying degrees of influence over some 2,000,000 Catholics, chiefly in Annam. The League supported the DRV in 1945 and 1946, and approved struggle for Vietnam's independence. Ngo Dinh Diem led the League into the National Union Front, but the League split with the Front over the desire of the majority to back the resistance, and the repugnance of the remainder, including Diem, at Bao Dai's inability to break France's control over Vietnam.

Binh Xuyen

(Lien Khu Binh Xuyen)

A Saigon-sited gangster apparatus which originally fought as allies of the Viet Minh, but — like the Hoa Hao — were disaffected by the Viet Minh's shooting of several of their leaders. Provided tepid support for Bao Dai, and remained wary of the French.

Vietnam National Rally

(Viet Nam Quoc Gia Lien Hiep)

An outgrowth of the National Union Front formed in December, 1947, in Hanoi, the Rally attempted to merge the various pro-Bao Dai parties in Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin. Such success as it enjoyed was a matter of form rather than substance, and its influence was quite limited.

Vietnam Restoration League

(Viet Nam Phuc Quoc Dong Minh Hoi)

Revived in 1947, the descendant of Japanese-oriented nationalist groups, the Phuc Quoc, under Prince Cuong De, at first attempted to offer an alternative to both the Viet Minh and Bao Dai. In June, 1947, and May, 1948, Prince Cuong De vainly solicited aid from the President of the United States against the French, and urged reconciliation between Ho chi Minh and Bao Dai. The party remained chiefly in exile, and was unable to exert any appreciable influence over events in Vietnam.

French Sponsored Movements

With French encouragement, a number of Vietnamese parties were formed to give body to the several governments established by the French. These included the Indochinese Democratic Party, the Cochinchinese Democratic Party, the Popular Front of Indochina, and the Popular Movement of Cochinchina. In general, these parties supported the French policies of maintaining Cochinchina separate from Annam and Tonkin, and of strong ties with France. Eventually, such minimal popular support as they commanded was thrown behind the "Bao Dai solution."

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

"TWELVE RECOMMENDATIONS

"The nation has its root in the people.

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

"Six forbiddances:

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

- 2 – Not to insist on buying or borrowing what the people are not willing to sell or lend.
- 3 – Not to bring living hens into mountainous people's houses.
- 4 – Never to break our word.
- 5 – Not to give offense to people's faith and customs (such as to lie down before the altar, to raise feet over the hearth, to play music in the house, etc.)
- 6 – Not to do or speak what is likely to make people believe that we hold them in contempt.

"Six permissibles:

- 1 – To help the people in their daily work (harvesting, fetching firewood, carrying water, sewing, etc.)
- 2 – Whenever possible to buy commodities for those who live far from markets (knife, salt, needle, thread, pen, paper, etc.)
- 3 – In spare time, to tell amusing, simple, and short stories useful to the Resistance, but not to betray secrets.
- 4 – To teach the population the national script and elementary hygiene.
- 5 – To study the customs of each region so as to be acquainted with them in order to create an atmosphere of sympathy first, then gradually to explain to the people to abate their superstitions.
- 6 – To show to the people that you are correct, diligent, and disciplined."

"STIMULATING POEM

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

April 5, 1948⁶⁷

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

"C. International Relations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Opposed to the French forces are about 75,000 Vietnamese troops of various political complexions, largely under communist dominated leadership. There is considerable French-furnished evidence of communist political commissars and indoctrination extending down to company strength levels. It is certain that the disciplined communist element has been the largest factor in maintaining the vigor and cohesiveness of the resistance. In this, they have been greatly helped by French indecision and bad faith, and the terrorism of French troops.

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

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

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

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

"The Viet Minh. The Vietnam Independence League (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi), or Viet Minh, is the most influential political organization within the Vietnam Government [DRV]. It is the only political group whose organization extends down to the smallest villages. Its members include both individuals and parties, i.e., the Vietnam Socialist Party, the Vietnam Democratic Party, etc. As a League, it groups together a wide coalition of political personalities from moderate nationalists to doctrinaire communists. It most closely resembles the Chinese Kuomintang during the period 1924-26, when the communists and Chang Kai-shek collaborated in China's nationalist movement.

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

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

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

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

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

A non-free image has been removed from this page.

This page included a map of Vietnam and surrounding countries, with shaded sections indicating areas controlled by the Viet Minh in 1949. The removed content can be viewed in the original document [here](#) (PDF).

L. Bodard, The Quicksand War
(Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1967),
pp. 4–5

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ho then went on to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the resistance against the French, to describe the world situation in terms of a monolithic bloc of "democratic" nations against which was arrayed the United States and other reactionary powers, and to depict, as part of that larger clash, Vietnam's war in common with Laotians and Cambodians against the French and the United States. He called for "a legal party appropriate to the situation in the world and at home in order to lead our people's struggle to victory. This party is the Vietnam Worker's Party [Lao Dong]. As regards its composition...it will admit the most enthusiastic and most enlightened workers, peasants, and intellectuals. As regards theory, it adheres to Marxism-Leninism. As regards discipline, it has an iron discipline..."

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

1. Reproduced from Memorandum of Conversation by Mr Richard L. Sharp, of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs, Department of State, dated January 30, 1946.
2. Telegram, Hanoi 20 to State, 20 May 1946
3. Telegram, Hanoi 69 to State, 26 July 1946
4. The post of Minister of National Education was held only temporarily by Dang thai Mai for Cao van Thinh (Independent).
5. Bo xuan Luat became Vice Minister of Agriculture and Huynh thien Loc (Independent) assumed the Ministry
6. Pham ngoc Thach (Viet Minh) apparently acted as assistant to Ho Chi Minh in the cabinet. The Vice-president was not filled until July 1949, when Pham van Dong (Communist-Viet Minh) was given the post.
7. Phan Anh (Socialist) was appointed Minister of National Economy on January 26, 1947.
8. Nguyen kinh Chi (Independent) was appointed to the Vice Ministry of Health.

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