

Chapter XIV

HO CHI MINH—THE DIPLOMAT

The fact that Ho Chi Minh proclaimed Vietnamese independence and the formation of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam [DRVN] on September 2, 1945 did not assure its international recognition. The French—reactionaries and progressive alike—adamantly insisted on the reintegration of Indochina into the French Empire, by force if necessary. Other great powers, for various reasons, independently supported the French reconquest.

Ho's diplomacy during the period between August 1945 and December 1946, therefore, mainly concentrated on the survival of his regime. To attain this goal, Ho attempted to internationalize the Vietnamese nationalist cause, calling for international recognition of Vietnamese independence and opposition to French reconquest. This included various petitions to and correspondence with the great powers, protesting French aggression and recalling the "noble principles" in the Atlantic Charter, the United Nations Declaration and the San Francisco Charter. Ho was particularly interested in American support, going so far as to seek the same status as the Philippines within the American sphere of influence. All of these petitions fell on deaf ears. Ho had to deal with both the Chinese occupying force and the Anglo-French alliance (later, the French alone) for the survival of his government. Regarding the Chinese, Ho simply bribed them to obtain their *de facto* recognition. Concerning the French, the matter was more complicated. Immediately after the August Revolution, Ho adamantly opposed the French return and insisted on full independence of Viet Nam. Thereafter, he scaled down his demands in an attempt to accomplish as much as possible in light of power realities of the situation, accepting the notion of a "free" Viet Nam within the French Union. Although the French negotiated with Ho only in order to buy time for them to build up their forces and establish military control over Indochina, Ho was given a chance to play a full-time diplomatic role for nearly a year in both Viet Nam and France. Ho failed to obtain what he wanted, but through these negotiations he did partially achieve the goals of internationalizing the Vietnamese cause and identifying his party's end with Vietnamese nationalist aspiration.

I. IN SEARCH OF LEGITIMACY:

After spending more than a quarter of a century in foreign countries and serving as a Russian international intelligence agent—first, for the Soviet-sponsored *Comintern* in China and Siam [present Thailand] and American intelligence organizations in Viet Nam—Ho Chi Minh had a keen appreciation of the brutality of world politics. Ever since the dark days in Paris compiling his unpublished *Les Opprimés [The Oppressed]* in 1920 Ho had known that in order to regain independence for Viet Nam, he must break through the ice of global indifference (if not complicity) regarding the colonial world. Ho (then Nguyen Ai Quoc, officially born on January 15, 1894) reportedly went so far as to hope that the publishers and authors of the works cited would give him notoriety by suing him over

unauthorized citations.¹ It was not to be. Ignored by the great powers and closely watched by French police, Ho found support only in the Soviet Union.

During World War II, the grand Alliance against the Axis powers provided Ho with a new opportunity to internationalize the Vietnamese cause. Anticipating America's dominating role in the postwar world, Ho tirelessly courted the Americans. Joseph Stalin's dissolution of the *Comintern* in March 1943 allowed Ho to devise a flexible strategy—he was at least temporarily free to offer service to both the Chinese and American intelligence agencies. In return he received his own release from a Chinese prison, freedom of activity in China, needed supplies and the possibility of future American support.

Ho resorted to various tactics to cultivate the good will of American field commanders and officers. On the one hand, Ho attempted to portray himself and his comrades as true nationalists who were unjustly accused by the French of being “Communists.”² On the other hand, he psychologically and materially flattered the Americans and provided them with useful services.

Ho was very generous in his professions of admiration for America's greatness and its tradition of democracy and anti-colonialism. As early as July 1945 Ho had discussed with an American officer attached to his headquarters the American Declaration of Independence, demonstrating his familiarity with this document.³ Several months later, Ho went so far as to begin his own proclamation of independence with the first paragraph of the American Declaration. Thereafter, he often referred to the United States as “a champion of democracy”, or “guardian and champion of World Justice.”⁴

The American-inspired Atlantic Charter (1941) and the United Nations Declaration and, then, the San Francisco Charter (1945), and even President Harry Truman's Naval Day speech on October 27, 1945 were as highly praised as Lenin's Theses.

In his letter to Secretary of State James Byrnes dated October 22, 1945, Ho wrote:⁵

The noble principles of international justice and equality of status laid down in [the Atlantic] Charter strongly appealed to the Vietnamese and contributed in making of the Viet Minh resistance in the war zone a nation-wide anti-Japanese movement which found a powerful echo in the democratic aspirations of the people. *The Atlantic Charter was looked upon as the foundation of future Viet-Nam.* A nation-building program was drafted

¹CAOM (Aix), SLOTFOM, Series II, Carton 6. For details, see Chinh Dao, *Ho Chi Minh: Con nguoi va huyen thoai, 1892-1969 [Ho Chi Minh: The Man and His Myths, 1892-1969]*, 3 vols (Houston: Van Hoa, 1993 [rev. ed., 1997], 1994, 2001), vol I (1997 revised edition). Cited henceforth, *Ho Chi Minh*.

²Cable of 20 July 1945, Thomas to Wampler; United States Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Causes, Origins, and Lessons of the Vietnam War, Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, Ninety-Second Congress, Second Session on Causes, Origins, and Lessons of the Vietnam War, May 9, 10, and 11, 1972* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1973), p. 249. Cited henceforth, US Senate, *Hearings (1972), Causes, Origins, and Lessons*.

³See, for instance, Robert Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution* (New York: 1965), pp. 28-30.

⁴See, Memorandum of 22 Aug. 1945, William J. Donovan to Secretary of State; Department of Defense, *U.S.-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967* (Washington: GPO, 1971), Bk 1, C-68; Letter of 16 Feb 1946, Ho Chi Minh to Truman; *Ibid.*, Bk 1, C-96. Cited henceforth, *US-Vietnam Relations*. Also see note 15 *infra*.

⁵*US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-80 (*italics mine*).

which was later [to be] found in keeping with San Francisco Charter and which has been fully carried out these last years. . . .

Meanwhile, Truman's October 27, 1945 speech on American postwar foreign policy—in which the President made no direct reference to Indochina and phrased his statements so ambiguously that one could freely interpret them—received special approbation from Ho. Immediately after Truman's speech, he praised it as containing a "high ideal of generosity and humanity."⁶ Later, he stated that his Republic of Viet Nam was "based on and [drew] her strength from . . . the second, fourth [and] sixth points of President's twelve-point [speech]."⁷

Materially, Ho took good care of the OSS agents and officials with whom he came in contact. Lieutenant Phelan observed:⁸

[Ho] was an awfully sweet guy. If I had to pick out the one quality about that little old man sitting on his hill in the jungle, it was his gentleness.

Frank Tan, a Chinese-American radio operator of the GBT/AGAS team attached to Ho's headquarters in Tuyen Quang from April to June 1945 was also full of enthusiasm for Ho. According to his own accounts, after having been told that Tan had recently been turned down by a young American girl, Ho encouraged Tan "to meet some of the [Vietnamese] girl guerrillas." Ho also reportedly disclosed that "he himself had been very fond of a girl but when he had gone off to sea [in 1911] he had had to forget her."⁹ Even after leaving Viet Nam, Tan received a few silver bracelets sent by Ho for distribution among the GBT staff in China.¹⁰

After seizing power in August 1945, Ho continued to cultivate his American "friends of the forest." Major Thomas and his *Deer Team* were "well-fed and cared" for

⁶Tel. [undated], Ho Chi Minh to Secretary of State; Enclosure 3, Despatch No. 890, 26 Nov 1945, Chungking to Washington; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, p. C-92.

⁷Democratic Republic of Vietnam, "Note to the Governments of China, United States of America, Union of Socialist Sovietic Republics and Great Britain (18 Feb 1946);" *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, p. C-99. The three points mentioned by Ho were as follows: (2) "We believe in the eventual return of sovereign rights and self-government to all peoples who have been deprived of them by force;" (4) "We believe that all peoples who are prepared for self-government should be permitted to choose their own form of government by their own freely expressed choice, without interference from any foreign source. That is true in Europe, in Asia, in Africa as well as in the Western hemisphere;" and (6) "We shall refuse to recognize any government imposed upon any nation by the force of any foreign power. In some cases it may be impossible to prevent forceful imposition of such government;" *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Harry S. Truman*, April-December 1945 (Washington: GPO, 1965), pp. 433-434.

⁸Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution*, 1966:29.

⁹Fenn, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 83. It was circulated in South Viet Nam prior to 1975 that Ho's main motive to leave the country in 1911 was his heart-broken love with a pretty food-hawker in the Da Kao market; see Vu Ngu Chieu, "Social and Cultural Change in Viet-Nam Between 1940 and 1946," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Dec 1984.

¹⁰Fenn, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 83.

in Thai Nguyen while the revolution spread around the country, and they enjoyed a great time in Hanoi prior to their homecoming.¹¹

The two figures who were singled out by French sources as close friends of Ho and who, in fact, received special treatment, were then Captain Archimedes L. A. Patti, the OSS command in Hanoi, and General Philip E. Gallagher, head of the Liaison Group attached to the Chinese occupying forces. Patti, one of the first Americans arriving in Hanoi in August 1945, was given a red carpet treatment and the title of “delegate of the Allies.” Four days after Patti’s arrival, on Sunday August 26, Vo Nguyen Giap led a four-member delegation to visit Patti at his residence. After conveying Ho’s personal welcome, Giap invited Patti and his men to a special military parade in honor of them.¹² The same afternoon, Patti was granted a private meeting with Ho Chi Minh at his secret residence in Hanoi.¹³ From that day on, Patti served informally as Ho’s political advisor, transmitting his messages to Washington, via the American Embassy in China or the Consulate in Kunming, arranging the Franco-Vietnamese talks and occasionally intervening with the Chinese generals on behalf of Ho and his Republic.¹⁴ Patti’s role in Hanoi overshadowed that of his colleague in Saigon, Major A. Peter Dewey, the head of the Embankment Team, who also kept frequent contacts with the Viet Minh leaders prior to his death on September 26, 1945.¹⁵

¹¹Report No. 1, 17 July 1945, Deer to Chow; US Senate, *Hearings (1972), Causes, Origins, and Lessons*, p. 244 (beer and beefsteak at Kim Lung, Tuyen Quang); Report of 17 Sept 1945, Thomas to OSS Chief; *Ibid.*, p. 263 (“housed in the former Provincial Governor’s headquarters,” “well-fed and cared for,” “time to getting fat, getting a sun-tan, visiting the city,” “key to the villages”).

¹²Patti, *Why Viet-Nam*, pp. 196-197; “Cuoc bieu tinh vi dai, gan 30 van nguoi de nghenh tiep mot so uy vien trong chinh phu lam thoi va phai bo dieu tra My” [Massive Demonstration, Nearly Three Hundred Thousand People Welcomed A Number of the Provisional Government’s Commissars and the American Inquiry Delegates], *Cuu Quoc [National Salvation]* (Hanoi), No. 33, 29 Aug. 1945. (Vo Nguyen Giap, in his 1974 memoirs, did not mention the presence of “the American Inquiry Delegates”; *Idem.*, *Khong the nao quen*, p. 25. This omission is understandable: During the second Vietnam War (1955-1975), all American-affiliated Vietnamese were accused of being American puppets or lackeys, or national traitors).

¹³Patti, *Why Viet-Nam*, pp. 199-203.

¹⁴Philippe Devillers, in his *Histoire du Viet-Nam* (Paris: Seuil, 1952, p. 202), alleges that Patti was given a portion of money or gold produced from Ho’s “Gold Week” (Sept 18-25, 1945). In his memoirs, Patti did not discuss this allegation and in his bibliography, labels Devillers’ book as “the most accurate French account of the period” and “by far one of the most reliable histories;” Patti, *Why Viet-Nam*, p. 572. Devillers’ work, however, is no more than a journalistic account or a popular history at best.

¹⁵The advance element of the Embankment, a prisoner of war evacuation team under First Lt Emile R. Connasse, was parachuted into Saigon on Sept 1. Connasse considered the Vietnamese revolutionary government as “a drugstore revolution,” but acknowledged that “for the present [its] control is complete.” Report of 8 Sept 1945, OSS records; cited by Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 66. Dewey replaced Connasse on Sept 4. Shortly after the British arrival, Dewey was under pressure to break off all contacts with the Viet Minh; Int. with Frank White, 18 Feb 1972; Memorandum on Investigation of the Death of Major Peter Dewey, 25 Oct 1945, by Maj. F.M. Small, and Meg. Dewey to HQ, 404, 14 Sept 1945, both in records of the OSS; quoted by Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 67. On 24 Sept, Captain Joseph Coolidge was ambushed along with a British officer on a trip to Da Lat. Coolidge was seriously wounded and had to be evacuated to Ceylon. Two days later, Dewey and Captain Herbert J. Bluechel were fired upon while riding a jeep. Dewey was killed instantly, but Bluechel managed to withdraw to a nearby villa where the OSS headquartered. The Vietnamese attacked this villa but Captain Frank White and Sgt George Wickes held them off until help

Immediately after his arrival in Hanoi, Gallagher was visited by Ho. In a letter to General Robert B. McClure, Deputy Commander of American forces in China, Gallagher recalled about his meeting:¹⁶

[Ho] called upon me and welcomed us most profusely, gave me a very beautiful banner with my name on it and some remarks about the “Great American nation,” etc. . . . He looks upon America as the saviour of all nations, and is basing all of his actions on the statement in the Atlantic charter that the independence of the smaller nations would be assured by the major powers. Of course, we know that charter was never signed. . . .

Ho’s courtesy and Gallagher’s sympathy for Vietnamese independence enabled the development of a close working relation between them. At their first meeting, Gallagher advised Ho that he “must gain the confidence of [General] Lu Han [i.e., the Chinese Supreme commander in Hanoi] and deal with him altogether.”¹⁷ Immediately after Patti’s departure from Hanoi at the end of September 1945 and afterwards, Gallagher took on the unofficial role of Ho’s political advisor. Records show that most of Ho’s messages to the outside world were transmitted by Gallagher’s channel to the American Embassy in Chungking. Gallagher also reportedly attended the founding ceremony of the Vietnamese-American Friendship Association in Hanoi in October 1945, and on that occasion sang a Vietnamese song.¹⁸

However, good relations between Ho and the American field officers were not a sufficient base from which to secure the support of the Truman administration. Gallagher himself reflected:¹⁹

Confidentially, I wish the Annamites [i.e. Vietnamese] could be given their independence, but, of course, we have no voice in this matter.

Indeed, despite their value to Ho as visible evidence to display his alleged close relations with the United States, the most that American field commanders could do was to transmit Ho’s petitions to Washington and other world capitals or to help Ho survive the Chinese occupation.²⁰

arrived from a nearby British post; Affidavits by Bluechel and Wickes, both in records of the OSS; and Int. with White on 26 Feb 1972, quoted by Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 67. Dewey was promoted posthumously to Lt-Colonel. In 1981, a Vietnamese refugee in France told the US officials that Dewey had been ambushed by Muoi Cuong, a leader of the Avant Guard Youth, and Bay Tay. Both were later killed in a battle against the French; *Ibid*.

¹⁶Letter of 20 Sept 1945, Gallagher (Hanoi) to McClure (Kunming), Gallagher Papers, Center for Military History, US Army, Washington, DC; quoted by Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp.60, 61; reprinted in Porter, *Documentation*, vol. I, p. 78.

¹⁷*Ibid*.

¹⁸Leon B. Blum, *The United States and Vietnam, 1944-1947* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1972), pp. 4-5. According to a Vietnamese source, in October 1945 this Association had 500 Vietnamese members and about 20 Americans; *Viet Nam Thoi Bao [Viet-Nam Times]* (Hanoi), Nos. 3 and 4 (24 and 25 October 1945).

¹⁹Letter of 20 Sept 1945, Gallagher to McClure, cited in note 14 *supra*. Gallagher’s advisory staff was closed down on December 12, 1945; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 72.

²⁰*US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-63-104.

Another messenger between Ho and the outside world was Colonel Stephen Nordlinger, Commander of the M-5 Team responsible for prisoner-of-war rescue work in Hanoi. Nordlinger was somehow more sympathisant to the French, proposing to release French military prisoners of war from the concentration camps but both Patti and Gallagher refused for fear of violent disturbance as in the case of South Vietnam.²¹

Ho's attempts to secure the support of the Truman administration began as early as April 1945. However, Patti reportedly made it clear to Ho that their working relations were to be strictly intelligence business. Beginning in August, as Ho's position was on the rise, he repeatedly appealed for American assistance. On August 15, one of his representatives in Kunming reportedly made the following statement on behalf of the Hanoi Liberation Committee:²²

The Central Committee wishes to make known to the United States Government that the Indochinese people first of all desire the independence of Indochina, and are hoping that the United States, as a champion of democracy, will assist her in securing this independence. . . .

In conclusion, the Indochinese would like to be placed on the same status as the Philippines for an undetermined period.

This request for the same status as the Philippines was repeated twice in 1946. In the letter addressed to President Truman dated February 16, 1946, after denouncing "murderous and pitiless" aggression of the French in the South and calling on the "Great Democracies" to keep their word, Ho appealed to the United States "as guardians and champions of World Justice to take a decisive step in support of our independence." He specified:²³

What we ask has been granted graciously to the Philippines. Like the Philippines our goal is full independence and full cooperation to make this independence and cooperation profitable to the whole world.

Seven months later, in a conversation between Ho and the First Secretary of the American Embassy in Paris, George M. Abbott, on September 11, 1946—three days prior to the signing of the *modus vivendi* between Ho and Marius Moutet, the French Overseas Minister—Ho asked directly for American military and economic aid. In passing, Ho referred to the naval base at Cam Ranh Bay (southern Central Viet Nam).²⁴ Until December 1946, Ho continued to seek American assistance. His Vice Foreign Minister, Hoang Minh Giam, bluntly asked Abbott L. Moffat, the American Chief of the Southeast division at the State Department who was touring Southeast Asia at that time, for American

²¹*Ibid.*, C-76.

²²Memorandum of 22 Aug. 1945, William J. Donovan to Secretary of State; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-68.

²³*US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-95-97.

²⁴*US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-103-104.

collaboration in developing the Cam Ranh Bay base and intervention to prevent the French military occupation of the rest of Viet Nam.²⁵

During the period between September 1945 and March 1946, Ho also opened other doors to possible American-Vietnamese friendship. Beside the creation of the Vietnamese-American Friendship Association, Ho also proposed to send 50 Vietnamese students to the United States to establish cultural relations between the two nations—the same tactic he had used two decades earlier, resulting in the first crop of Vietnamese Communists trained in Moscow.²⁶

The American government remained neutral. It took no official action regarding Ho's petitions. Unofficially, however, American field commanders and diplomats constantly advised Ho to reach a peaceful arrangement with the French. On September 29, Gallagher advised Ho to send a delegate to Chungking to negotiate with the French, despite the fact that the French Delegate for North Indochina, General Marcel Alessandri, had only invited the Viet Minh as one of the revolutionary parties, not as a government in power.²⁷ As late as December 1946, the American special envoy to the Far East, Moffat, was still attempting to convince Ho and Giam, his Vice Foreign Minister, to deal peacefully with the French.²⁸ Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson even wanted to advise Ho to temporarily drop his demand for a referendum regarding the unification of the South in order to avoid war.²⁹

During the period between August 1945 and March 1946 Ho also sought legitimacy among the United Nations organizations. One of his first petitions related to the issue of membership in the Far Eastern Advisory Commission, convened in Washington on October 30, 1945. Thirteen days prior to the opening meeting of this Advisory

²⁵Letter from Moffat to State Department (December 1946); in Blum, *United States and Vietnam*, Appendix II, pp. 40-42. It should be noted that a quarter of century later, in securing the Soviet aid, Le Duan, the First Secretary of the Vietnamese Labor Party, used the same courteous and generous wording to praise the Soviet victory over the German and Japanese fascism "created exceptionally favourable situation for the victory of [the ICP] August revolution;" *Pravda*, 7 April 1977; cited in R. A. Ulyanovsky (ed), *The Comintern and the East* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979), p. 226. The Cam Ranh Bay might be bait for the Soviet assistance. Nevertheless, the VCP official policy after 1991 has changed to denying any foreign strategic bases on the Vietnamese territory.

²⁶Letter of 1 Nov 1945, Ho Chi Minh to James Byrnes; Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch No. 890, 26 Nov 1945, Embassy Chungking to State; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-90. According to French sources, in 1933, there were 33 Vietnamese youth being sent to Moscow for training; CAOM (Aix), SLOTFOM, Series II, Carton 22; Chinh Dao, *Ho Chi Minh*, vol II. A Russian scholar reports that the *Comintern* archives show that there were 52 Viet students in the USSR, including Ho. For their biographical sketches, see Anatoli A. Solokov, *Quoc te Cong San va Viet-Nam [International Communism and Viet-Nam]*, trans. from Russian into Vietnamese by Dao Tan (Hanoi: NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 1999), pp. 227-283, and Chinh Dao, *Viet Nam Nien Bieu, 1939-1975 [Viet Nam Chronicle, 1939-1975]*, vol. III: *Nhan vat chi [Biographies]*, rev. ed. (Houston, TX: Van Hoa, 1997). Cited henceforth, *VNNB*, III: *Nhan Vat chi* (1997).

²⁷Memorandum of 29 Sept 1945 by General Gallagher, Gallagher Papers; reprinted in Porter, *Documentation*, vol I, pp. 80-81.

²⁸Letter from Abbot L. Moffat to State Department (December 1946); in Blum, *United States and Vietnam*, Appendix II, pp. 40-42.

²⁹Tel of 5 Dec 1946, Acheson to Moffat (Saigon); *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, pp. 85-86.

Commission, on October 17 Ho sent a cable to Truman, arguing that French membership in this organization was “groundless,” being neither *de jure* nor *de facto*, and that Viet Nam was “qualified by [the] Atlantic Charter and subsequent peace agreement and by her good will and her [unflinching] stand for democracy to be represented at the Advisory Commission.”³⁰ Ho again returned to this issue in a letter to Secretary of State Byrnes dated October 22, 1945. After disputing British and French accounts of what was actually happening in Indochina, Ho urgently asked for the presence of a Vietnamese representative at the opening session of the Advisory Commission in order to clarify the Vietnamese case. In addition, he proposed that an Inquiry Commission be sent to South Viet Nam and that the United States recognize Vietnamese independence.³¹ After neither of his messages had received a reply, Ho cabled Byrnes again, categorically denying “France [any] right to speak on behalf of [the] Vietnamese people” at the Washington Conference for the Far East and asking for international intervention to “put a stop to murderous conflict in South Viet Nam.”³² Again, the Americans thought that “no action should be taken.”³³

Beside calling for United Nations support and recognition, Ho tried to use the United Nation Relief and Rehabilitation Administration [UNRRA] to obtain *de facto* recognition of his regime. He requested UNRRA relief aid for the Vietnamese population in the North to prevent another famine.³⁴ The UNRRA, however, preferred to deal with the French authorities rather than with Ho’s regime. One of the main reasons was that the French controlled sizable stocks of rice and rubber much needed for the British Gurkha units in the South and 152,000 Chinese troops in the north, as well as the alarming shortage of foods in the war-torn Southeast Asia.

In January and February 1946, Ho’s patience grew thinner. Faced with the return of French troops to North Viet Nam, he wrote to Truman on February 16, 1946:³⁵

[French] aggression is contrary to all principles of international law and to the pledges made by the Allies during the World War. . . .

The French aggression on a peace-loving people is a direct menace to world security. It implies *the complicity, or at least, the connivance of the Great Democracies*. The United Nations ought to keep their word. They ought to interfere to stop this unjust

³⁰Cable of 17 Oct 1945, Ho Chi Minh to Truman; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-73-74. The Far Eastern Advisory Committee included nine nations: The United States, Great Britain, France, China, New Zealand, Holland, the Philippines, Australia and India.

³¹*US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-80-81.

³²*US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-92. Also see “Phai co dai bieu Dong Duong trong nhung cuoc hoi ban ve van de Dong Duong” [There Must Be An Indochinese Delegation In the Conferences Regarding the Indochinese Issues]; *Cuu Quoc*, No. 39, 10 Sept 1945.

³³Office Memorandum of 15 Nov 1945, Moffat to Vincent; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-71.

³⁴This cable was forwarded to the US Embassy in Chungking, via the Army channel, by Gallagher in early Sept 1945; Incoming Tel No. 2026, 23 Nov 1945, Embassy Chungking to State; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-87-88.

³⁵Letter of 16 Feb 1946, Ho to Truman; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-96. [*Italics mine*]

war, and to show that they mean to carry out the principles for which they fought in wartime.

Two days later, in a petition addressed to the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain and China, Ho called for the urgent interference of the four powers, first, to stop the war in Indochina in order to mediate a fair settlement and, second, to bring the Indochinese issue before the United Nations Organization. He ended the petition with the statement that the Vietnamese were “determined to fight to our last drop of blood against the reestablishment of French imperialism.”³⁶

The “Great Democracies” took no “urgent interference” on behalf of Ho’s government, and may not take his threat seriously. In contrast, for various reasons, they agreed in principle that the Viet Nam issue was an internal French matter. Moreover, Ho’s communist background caused concern among the Americans. Even Ho’s “advisors,” Patti and Gallagher, could not ignore his Communist affiliation. Patti reportedly said that Ho was “an outright Communist.”³⁷ In one of the first reports to Chungking in the fall of 1945, Gallagher also noted that Ho was “an old revolutionist, . . . a product of Moscow, a Communist.”³⁸ More importantly, the American higher-ranking officials and diplomats did not fail to note Ho’s affiliation with international communism. In late August 1945, General Donovan, Director of the OSS, reported that Ho’s Viet Minh was “a 100% Communist Party.”³⁹ On December 5, 1946, while instructing his special envoy to see Ho in Hanoi after the French massacre of Vietnamese and Chinese residents in Hai Phong, Acting Secretary of State Acheson insisted:⁴⁰

Keep in mind Ho’s clear record as [an] agent [for] international communism, absence evidence recantation Moscow affiliations . . . and support Ho receiving [from] French Communist Party.

Although the American envoy, Moffat, did not receive Acheson’s telegram before his meeting with Ho in Hanoi, he apparently shared the same feeling toward Ho. In mid-December 1946, Moffat reported:⁴¹

[Ho] spoke in English, but I am not sure of his exact words. The intent at any rate, was a smiling, and friendly “Don’t worry!”—which coincides with the able French view (not popular view) that the group in charge of Viet-Nam are at this stage nationalist first, utilizing party techniques and discipline to the end; that an effective nationalist state is a prerequisite to any attempt at developing a communist state—which objective must for the time being be secondary.

³⁶*US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-100.

³⁷US Senate, *Hearings (1972), Causes, Origins and Lessons*, p. 266.

³⁸Porter, *Documentation*, vol I, p. 78.

³⁹*US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-66.

⁴⁰Tel of 5 Dec 1946, Acheson to Moffat (Saigon); *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, pp. 85-86.

⁴¹Letter from Moffat to State Department ([17]December 1945); in Blum, *United States and Vietnam*, Appendix II, pp. 40-42.

No less decisive, at least prior to the development of anti-Soviet policy in the United States, was the official American consensus that the Vietnamese were incapable of self-government. In early 1946, in a conversation with Richard L. Sharp of the Southeast Asian division at the State Department, Gallagher expressed his opinion that although the demand for independence was widespread among the populace, “[the Vietnamese were] not yet ready for self-government and in full-fledged competition with other nations they would ‘lose’.”⁴²

In any case, the international arena was completely closed to Ho. For the survival of his regime and party, he had to deal directly with the foreign actors on Vietnamese soil. Such a task was certainly not easy.

II. HO CHI MINH AND THE CHINESE:

It is unknown when Ho became aware of the terms of the Chinese occupation of North Viet-Nam where Hanoi, his capital, was located. What can be ascertained is that on August 26, 1945—two days after Chiang Kai-shek’s official announcement regarding Chinese occupation policy and the same day that Ho entered Hanoi—Patti informed Giap and, later, Ho about the Potsdam decisions. The next day, this bad news was repeated to Giap and Duong Duc Hien by Jean Sainteny (Roger), the French intelligence chief in Hanoi, in a conversation in the presence of Patti.⁴³

Ho and his men were in apparent disarray. The Chinese occupation posed seemingly unsurmountable difficulties. On the one hand, quite contrary to the Vietnamese masses who were only faintly informed about Ho via rumors and Viet Minh propaganda, the Chinese knew Ho quite well. They had imprisoned Ho for over a year because of his Communist background and because of his agents’ attempts to obstruct the Chinese-sponsored *United League of Vietnamese Revolutionaries*, often known as either the *Unified League [Dong Minh Hoi]* or *Viet Revolutionaries [Viet Cach]*. Also, in 1943 the Chinese were forced to release Ho, probably because of American pressure, and integrate him into the *Unified League*. Some local Chinese generals also disliked Ho. On the other hand, the Chinese occupying forces brought back to Viet Nam various groups of Vietnamese refugees in China. Save for two small groups led by two *ICP* members attached to the *Unified League* headquarters in China, a majority of these refugees were as ardently anti-Communist as they were anti-French. The *Unified League*—under the nominal leadership of Nguyen Hai Than (1878-1959), who had left Viet Nam for China in the late 1900’s and had been given a death sentence by the French in 1913 because of his anti-French activities—also had important armed forces. In the coastal areas of North Viet Nam, Vu Kim Thanh, one of Than’s associates, led an armed force with the strength of about 1,000

⁴²Memorandum of 30 Jan 1946, by Richard L. Sharp; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, pp. 53-57. Also see Dispatch of 28 Aug 1924, Am Consul (Saigon) [Leland L. Smith] to Dept of State, Record Group [RG] 59, National Archives, Washington, DC; Dispatches of 20 Oct 1927 & 5 June 1928, Am Consul (Saigon) [Harris M. Cookingham] to Dept of State, RG 84; *Ibid.* (no evidence that the Vietnamese had either desire or the capacity for self-government, . . . “the natives” were too backward to be entrusted with Western-style political rights and civil liberties); quoted in Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, US Army, 1983), p. 11n27.

⁴³Patti, *Why Viet-Nam*, pp. 202; Sainteny, *Paix manquee*, pp. 86-87.

men, who had raided the border regions in the summer of 1945.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, the leaders of the *Vietnamese Nationalist Party [VNQDD]* would also accompany Yunnanese troops entering the country. Whatever their strength, these non-Communist refugees would challenge the Viet Minh's authority.

In fact, in late August 1945, Vu Kim Thanh's forces returned to Mong Cay and established a Provisional Government of Viet Nam with Than as president. Several days later, Than arrived in Lang Son with another armed group, led by Nong Quoc Long, a local Nung leader, who had fled to China after the anti-French uprising in late 1940. The Viet Minh tried to resist but were finally driven out. While Than went on to Hanoi to secure political support from General Lu Han and the non-Viet Minh groups, especially the Dai Viet parties and several youth organizations who had been outlawed and ruthlessly purged by the Viet Minh, Long retreated to Ky Lua, a small district town near the border.⁴⁵

In the western areas, the followers of Vu Hong Khanh and Nguyen Tuong Tam (VNQDD) accompanied Lu Han's 93rd Yunnanese Army entering Viet Nam through Lao Kay.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Due to the Autumn flood and Chinese troops' preoccupation with looting, the 93rd marched as slowly as a huge stream of locusts. It was not until mid-October that the non-Communist Viet refugees arrived in Hanoi and by then most of their comrades inside Viet Nam had been labeled as Viet traitors [*Viet Gian*] and assassinated by Giap's death squads or executed by the People's Revolutionary Tribunals.⁴⁶

More dangerous to Ho than these armed Vietnamese groups was the Chinese perception of the Viet Minh. While secretly instructing his field commanders to avoid any formal relations with Ho's regime,⁴⁷ Chiang Kai-shek also pointedly ignored Ho's petitions, including the proposal for a good will visit to Chungking, and an appeal for Chinese intervention to stop the French reconquest in the south.⁴⁸

In Indochina, the Chinese generals simply considered Ho's regime an administrative tool to extract war booty during the occupation. Since the Chinese military administrations strictly controlled all of the major northern cities, any demonstrations or mass gatherings had to seek Chinese authorization. Even Ho's cabinet members had to

⁴⁴DGER, *Bulletin de Renseignements*, No. EO/63-2158/SD (10 Sept 1945), p. 9; CAOM (Aix), INF, Carton 121, d. 1102. For Than's vita, see Chinh Dao, *VNNB, III: Nhan Vat Chi* (1997), pp. 319-320. For more details, see chapter XII.

⁴⁵Tran Huy Lieu et al., *Cach mang thang tam: Tong khoi nghia o Ha Noi va cac dia phuong [The August Revolution: General Uprisings in Hanoi and Other Regions]*, 2 vols, compiled by the Group for the History of the August Revolution, edited by Tran Huy Lieu (Hanoi: NXB Su hoc, 1960), vol. I, p. 111. Cited henceforth, *CMTT*.

⁴⁶Le Tung Son, *Nhat ky mot chang duong [Diaries of A Journey]* (Hanoi: 1978), p 180. Cited henceforth, Son, *Nhat ky*. For an American account during this period, see "Report by Arthur Hale of the U.S.I.S. Based on A Thirteen Day Stay In Hanoi in October 1945;" Blum, *United States and Vietnam*, Appendix I, pp. 23-36. Cited henceforth, Hale (1945).

⁴⁷Chen, *China*, pp. 126-127; For details, see Chapter IX, section dealing with the Viet Minh's national unity, *supra*.

⁴⁸Letter of 22 Oct 1945, Hu Chih-ming and Yuan Yung-Jui to Chiang Kai-shek, c/o Minister Ch'en Cheng; *US-Vietnam Relations*, vol I, p. C-83; and Tel of 28 Oct 1945, Ho Chi Minh to Chiang Kai-shek; *Ibid.*, vol. I, C-91.

obtain Chinese passes for their vehicles. Minister of Interior Giap was once detained for several hours by Chinese guards en route to an adjacent town.⁴⁹ In November 1945, General Zhou Fusheng [Chu Phuc Thanh], Commander of the 53rd Central Army in Hanoi, reportedly interrogated Ho for nearly a day regarding the assassination of a French citizen in Hanoi. Finally, Ho was released, but his driver and personal car were impounded by Zhou.⁵⁰ Chinese intimidation was so intense that Ho had to change his residence almost every night.⁵¹

An experienced survivor, Ho swiftly altered his *duong kach menh* [road to revolution] to accommodate the Chinese generals. Three decades later, Giap recalled:⁵²

To Uncle [Ho], revolutionary truth and application of strategies are concrete. Chiang's reactionary gangs were concrete objects and we needed concrete treatment regarding each of these objects. . . . Such strategic maneuvers were possible because their basis was our revolutionary strength.

Simply put, according to Giap, Ho's general strategy concentrated on avoiding any clashes with Chinese troops at all costs.⁵³ (54) Meanwhile, he also implemented a much more concrete and creative policy of bribing the Chinese generals, psychologically and materially. Regarding the most powerful generals, particularly Lu Han and Hsiao Wen, his political advisor, Ho personally visited them to "receive" instructions and directions, and to flatter them with his admiration of Sun Yat-sen's The People's Three Principles [*San Min Chu I*]. As a matter of fact, Ho's regime was allegedly "based on and [drew] her strength from the first of People's Three Principles."⁵⁴ Moreover, to the astonishment of his close associates, Giap particularly, Ho swiftly cultivated support among influential junior officers, using them as middlemen for bribing the generals.⁵⁵ (56) In order to acquire money, Ho launched several fund-raising campaigns, including the "Independence Fund" [*Quy Doc Lap*] on September 4, the "Gold Week" [*Tuan le vang*] on September 16 and the "Culture Week" [*Tuan le Van hoa*] on October 7. A large portion of the funds collected during his campaign—reportedly up to about 20 million piastres and 375 kilograms of gold⁵⁶—ended up in the hands of Chinese generals.⁵⁷

While squeezing Ho's gold, opium, and rice, the Chinese also attempted to arrange a coalition government composed of the former refugee leaders. As early as mid-September 1945, rumors of the formation of a pro-Chinese, united government were spread

⁴⁹Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, p. 63.

⁵⁰Le Tung Son, Ho's representative at the Chinese Headquarters, was also detained as the main suspect; *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108; Son, *Nhat ky*, pp. 200 and *passim*.

⁵¹Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, p. 64.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁵⁴"Note" of Feb 18, 1946; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-99. Also see Chen, *China*, pp. 84-85.

⁵⁵Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, p. 98.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁵⁷Chen, *China*, p. 127; Devillers, *Histoire*, p. 193.

around Hanoi. According to rumors, Nguyen Hai Than was to be the head of a shadow coalition government, while Ho was purported to be the Vice President.⁵⁸

The stumbling block, however, was the mutual distrust between the Communists and non-Communists, the history of which could be traced back to the 1920's in China. (Phung The Tai's memoirs) Ho's assassination and imprisonment of thousands of non-Communists, notably members of the Greater Viet and VNQDD parties, created an incipient civil war in the countryside and raising tensions in the cities. Both Nguyen Hai Than's *Unified League* and Nguyen Tuong Tam's *Viet Quoc* [Viet Nationalists, a coalition of the Greater Viet and VNQDD] publicly denounced Ho's ideology, character and past. The *Viet Nam Times* [*Viet Nam Thoi Bao*], official organ of the VNQDD, and other non-communist newspapers, which were independently published in Hanoi from October 1945 onward, vehemently criticized Ho's Viet Minh.⁵⁹

Ho and his men reacted by insulting the *Unified League* and *Viet Quoc* as "Viet traitors" in their official organs (*Cuu Quoc* and *Co Giai Phong*), and entrusted the *Democratic Party* to wage a "pen-war" against the non-Communist leaders.⁶⁰ These pen-wars, including name callings, were restrained within the educated circles only, because a majority of Vietnamese could neither read nor write. The best information agents turned out to be the Viet Minh death squads.

Even so, their opposition was so strong that Ho could not carry out his promised national election of representatives for the National Assembly, originally scheduled to be held on November 8, 1945. Although both sides began to discuss a truce in October, talks soon broke down.

Faced with seemingly unsurmountable difficulties, Ho executed an extremely skillful maneuver. On November 11, he officially "dissolved" the Indochinese Communist Party [ICP] "in order to destroy all misunderstanding, internal and external, which can hinder the liberation of the country." Subsequently, all Communist adherents could affiliate with the Association for the Study of Marxism [*Hoi nghien cuu chu nghia Ma-khac-tu*].⁶¹ In fact, this was merely theater. Beginning in October 1945 nearly all ICP cadres in the local Viet Minh committees were instructed to go underground. The ICP organ, the *Liberation Flag* was superseded by *The Truth* [*Su That*]. The dissolution of the

⁵⁸Department of State, Interim Research and Intelligence Service, Research and Analysis Branch, RAA No. 3336, "Biographical Information on Prominent Nationalist Leaders in French Indochina (25 Oct 1945)" (entries Ho Chi Minh and Nguyen Hai Than).

⁵⁹*Viet Nam Thoi Bao* [*Viet Nam Times*] was often mentioned by its abbreviated title *Viet Nam*. In 1983, there were 20 issues of this newspaper at CAOM (Aix), Library Section. According to an American official, the seven major newspapers were *Cuu Quoc* [*National Salvation*], *Dan Quoc* [*Nationalist*], *Viet Nam Thoi Bao*, *Co Giai Phong* [*Liberation Flag*], *Quoc Gia* [*Nation*], *Thanh Nien* [*Youth*] and *Dan Thanh* [*People's Voice*]. The government also published a newspaper in French, the *La Republique* [*The Republic*]. *Cuu Quoc* had the highest circulation, estimated at 75,000 per day; *Co Giai Phong* had the circulation of about 25,000; Hale (1945), p. 25 [reference in note 46 *supra*].

⁶⁰See *Doc Lap* [*Independence*], the organ of the *Democratic Party*, which assembled the best educated ICP members and leftist intellectuals. A series of this title is preserved at the CAOM (Aix), Library section.

⁶¹*Co Giai Phong*, No. 33, 18 Nov. 1945.

ICP, thus, was aimed mainly at appealing for support from the masses, securing Chinese tolerance and deceiving the outside world.

Ho's move was well received by the Chinese. In the following days, they actively accelerated their good offices between Ho and his adversaries. However, Ho had to postpone the scheduled election for a second time before a truce was concluded on December 24. Both sides agreed to the establishment of a provisional coalition government on January 1, 1946, with Ho as President, Nguyen Hai Than as Vice-President, and Nguyen Tuong Tam, Foreign Minister. Both Vu Hong Khanh and Vu Kim Thanh (not related) joined Vo Nguyen Giap and other Viet Minh leaders to form the Commissariat for National Defense. Moreover, it was also agreed that a national election would be held on January 6, 1946 and that 70 appointed seats would be reserved for the *Unified League* and Viet Quoc.⁶²

The coalition was simply expedient. The Chinese generals' main aim was to weaken Ho, forcing him to settle the issue of the French return as soon as possible. This was also a face-saving measure for their protégés, who had been outmaneuvered by Ho. As for Ho, he needed to establish the legitimacy of his regime through a national election, which had been rescheduled twice—more because of the Chinese intimidation than the non-Communist Vietnamese opposition. Meanwhile, the French insisted that they would only conclude a treaty with a government representing all parties in Viet Nam. Worst, amidst popular anti-French sentiment it would have been a political suicide if Ho had unilaterally conceded to a French return to North Viet Nam. Understandably, although Nguyen Hai Than had left Hanoi for Mong Cay, a border town, immediately after the publication of the Sino-French treaty of February 28, 1946, on March 2—the day on which the National Assembly convened for the first time to ratify the new government—Ho kindly announced that the position of Vice-President was still reserved for Than.

Even so, the coalition would not last any longer than the presence of Chinese troops in Viet Nam. In fact, as early as April 3, Giap had allowed the French to reoccupy several cities and towns under the non-Communist parties' control. His forces also seized by surprise some military bases of the *United League* and Viet Quoc. Thanks to the complicity of Huynh Thuc Khang, the new Minister of Interior and Acting President during Ho's visit to France, Giap wiped out all adversaries to the Viet Minh. Although Nguyen Tuong Tam and Vu Hong Khanh retained their positions in Ho's government for several additional months they had to leave the country for China before the complete withdrawal of Chinese troops in late June 1946.

III. HO CHI MINH AND THE BRITISH:

Ho Chi Minh's first attitude toward the British occupation of south Indochina was lukewarm. Britain's pronounced "neutrality" and "non-intervention in Indochinese politics" lit some hope, but it soon became clear that the British had their own definitions of neutrality, non-intervention and restoration of law and order. In fact, British officials,

⁶²See Communiqué between Ho, Nguyen Hai Than, and Vu Hong Khanh of December 24, 1945 in *Cuu Quoc*, 26 Dec. 1945, and subsequent events in *Ibid.*, 28 Dec 1945; Chinh Dao, *VNNB*, vol. I-A: 1939-1946, pp. 293, 294-295. French political police's source reports that both sides reached the agreement on December 23, 1945; see "Rapport mensuel, Decembre 1945," CAOM (Aix), HCIF, CP, c.125.

from Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin to Admiral Louis Mountbatten, aided the French attempt to reconquer Indochina.⁶³

On September 13, a day after the arrival of the first British and Gurkha units, the British commander in Saigon ordered the Viet Minh to evacuate the former French Governor's palace. Pouring oil on the fire, the British then gave the French prisoners-of-war temporary passes. Meanwhile, jubilant French civilians and newly arrived commandos displayed French flags and assaulted or insulted the Viets while celebrating their liberation. The Viet Minh reacted promptly. In Saigon, Pham Van Bach, Chairman of the Provisional Executive Committee, ordered a boycott and strike, aimed at economically strangling the Europeans in Saigon. In Hanoi and other cities, the Viet Minh organized mass demonstrations, resulting in various petitions addressed to both Mountbatten and General Douglas D. Gracey, Commander of the British occupying forces.

Lieutenant-Colonel A. Peter Dewey, the OSS Commander in Saigon, actively sought a truce. However Gracey and Cedile, the French representatives in Saigon, went ahead with their plan for a *coup de force*. On September 20, Gracey prohibited the publication of Vietnamese newspapers and took over control of Saigon's radio station. The next day, he rearmed French prisoners-of-war and ordered a curfew. On September 22-23, rearmed French prisoners-of-war took over Saigon, driving the Viet Minh Executive Committee out of the city. In a chain reaction, the Viet Minh decided to fight fire with fire. Fighting flared up in Saigon and then, after a short cease-fire in early October, spread around all South Viet Nam.

From Hanoi, Ho and his men also waged a propaganda campaign against the British. It evolved from studied appeasement to violently anti-British invective. On September 17, 1945, for instance, the ICP organ, *Liberation Flag*, only categorically protested the British support for French return and mollified its readers with a call for unity to fight the French.⁶⁴ Three days later, it asserted that in supporting the French, the British wanted to incorporate Indochina into their sphere of influence and that "the other Allies" would not support the British plot.⁶⁵ Four days after the French takeover of Saigon, the *Liberation Flag*, still measured in tone, referred to the British as a "delegation" [*phai bo*] instead of using such terms as "gang" or "bandits" as were applied to the French. In the same issue, the editor urged "the British delegation" to "reread the Atlantic and San Francisco Charters," and a cartoonist satirically portrayed the flagrant contradiction between Britain's rhetoric and its acts.⁶⁶ On October 4, the *Liberation Flag* began to refer to the British as "reactionaries" and liars.⁶⁷ Three days later, while a truce was still in effect in the South, *Liberation Flag* dropped the rank "General" before Gracey's name—a sign of disrespect—in its editorial concerning Gracey's mediation between the French and the Viets. Its editor insisted that the Viet Minh did not expect much from Gracey's effort

⁶³For details, see Chapter XI.

⁶⁴*Co Giai Phong* (Hanoi), No. 17, 17 Sept 1945.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, No. 18, 20 Sept 1945.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, No. 20, 27 Sept 1945.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, No. 22, 4 Oct 1945.

because the latter was not impartial and lacked dignity [*thieu tu cach*].⁶⁸ On October 11, Truong Chinh [Dang Xuan Khu], the *ICP* Secretary General, wrote a long article about British Premier Attlee's policy toward Viet Nam, entitled "Attlee the Faithful Servant of British Imperialism." Carried away by emotion, Truong Chinh used such vulgar terms as "*ten*" and "*han*"—two disrespectfully terms denoting a third person—and described Attlee as "a British imperialist who was "ambitious and lying." He ended his article with the following statement:⁶⁹

No matter how reactionary the policy of Attlee and his clique, the Indochinese peoples will, hand in hand with the peoples of Indonesia, Malaysia, India, etc., continue to fight bravely.

Indeed, Attlee, the faithful servant of British Imperialism, cannot destroy the united front fighting for independence of the Southeast Asian peoples.

On November 5, the "National Day for Resistance," Nguyen Luong Bang—on behalf of the Viet Minh Central Committee [*Tong Bo*—accused Gracey of the "crime" of "using Japanese Fascists to shoot and kill Vietnamese, who had recently fought against Fascism beside the Allies."⁷⁰

Acting as Foreign Minister, Ho also issued a series of official protests against British support for French aggression. On September 26, three days after the French takeover of Saigon, Ho sent the following message to Attlee:⁷¹(72)

The release of French prisoners of war with arms and ammunition leading to the French attack against Saigon and the arrests of members of the People's Committee constitutes a great violation of our national rights and is an offense to our national dignity, a non-fulfillment of the mission placed on Commander [of] British forces in South Indo-China by the United Nations, a failure in carrying out the Atlantic Charter and non-observation of [the] attitude of neutrality by the British Disarmament Forces. We therefore lodge a most emphatic protest against such smoke-screening of French aggression and express earnest hope that you would interfere on basis full respect for the independence of Viet-Nam Republic.

During September and October 1945, Ho also repeatedly filed his complaints against Anglo-French acts in Viet Nam with the governments of the United States, China, and the Soviet Union. However, regarding the British, Ho had no other alternatives but to fight them in the battlefield. Unfortunately, his forces were no match for British troops. From September 1945 to January 1946, British forces incurred losses of only 81 deaths (4

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, No. 23, 7 Oct 1945.

⁶⁹Truong Chinh, "At-ly ten day to trung thanh cua chu nghia de quoc Anh;" *Ibid.*, No. 24, 11 Oct 1945. It should be noted that this was not the sole article written by Truong Chinh in the fall of 1945. In fact, he wrote quite frequently in *Co Giai Phong*. See, for instance, "Cach mang hay dao chinh?" [Revolution or Coup de force?]; *Ibid.*, No. 16, 12 Sept 1945.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, No. 32, 11 Nov 1945.

⁷¹Great Britain, House of Commons, 1945-1946, *Cmnd* 2834, p. 53.

British and 77 Gurkhas) as compared with an estimated 2,700 Viet deaths.⁷² Finally, Gracey and his 20th Division began to withdraw at the end of January 1946, leaving the disarmament of Japanese troops still unfinished, some American Lend-Lease equipment, and an ongoing war between the French and the Viets.

IV. HO CHI MINH AND THE FRENCH:

During the period September 1945 and December 1946, Ho's most difficult task was dealing with the French. Although Ho was later credited with the famous slogan "*Nothing is more precious than independence*," a closer examination of his negotiations with the French in 1945 and 1946 shows that the issue of independence for Viet Nam was secondary to the survival of Ho's regime and, thus, his party. The stumbling block throughout Ho's painful negotiations with the French was the central issue of territorial unification of Viet Nam. On this issue the French themselves were not inclined to compromise either.⁷³ Consequently, despite the fact that Ho concluded two provisional agreements with the French—i.e., the March 6, 1946 Preliminary Convention and the September 14, 1946 *modus vivendi*—his diplomatic effort was only partially successful. For his part, Ho was able to internationalize the Vietnamese cause, received a certain degree of legitimacy for his government and identified his regime with Vietnamese independence. However, the price was high: French troops were allowed to enter North Viet Nam, preparing for a *coup d'Etat* to reestablish French rule over the country.

A. THE CIRCLE IS ROUND: FROM "SELF-GOVERNMENT" TO "FREE STATE":

As mentioned in previous chapters, Ho's Viet Minh was the only Vietnamese political party which wanted to discuss the future status of Viet Nam with the French on the basis of the French declaration of March 24, 1945, in which the French promised to give the five states of Indochina economic autonomies and to carry out some minor

⁷²Great Britain, House of Commons, *Debates*, 16 Oct 1945 (p. 1864) and 28 Jan 1946 (p. 257). The total casualties of the Anglo-French alliance were listed as 126 killed and 424 wounded; *Ibid.* According to Leclerc, from Oct 20, 1945 to March 25, 1946, the French lost 620 men and 1,600 others were seriously wounded; Leclerc's report of 27 March 1946; reprinted in Sainteny, *Paix manquée*, p. 244.

⁷³The unsurmountable barrier of this issue is that South Viet Nam i.e., Cochinchina or Nam Bo), according to the French, was a French colony (or, overseas territory) and it would be unconstitutional to cede it to Ho's demand. Not until 1949 did the French Parliament agree to return Cochinchina to former Emperor Nguyen Phuoc Dien's State of Viet Nam (1949-1955).

reforms.⁷⁴ As late as July 25, 1945, Ho was still asking for "self-government" for Viet Nam within the Indochinese Federation and the French Union.⁷⁵

The French made a grave mistake in not dealing with Ho. Within three weeks, Ho's public attitude toward the French rotated 180 degrees. On August 15, the Viet Minh representative in Kunming declared that he wanted the United States, among the other things, to help prevent the French return to Indochina.⁷⁶ As the August Revolution spread across the country, Ho himself was caught up with the independence fervor. Writing his independence declaration in the last days of August 1945 in the festive capital of Hanoi, he inserted into this crucial document a strong indictment of French rule. On September 2, after reading his independence declaration, Ho asked ten of thousands of Hanoi inhabitants to take the famous four-no oath (i.e., if the French reconquered Viet-Nam, the Viets *would not* serve in the French Army, *would not* collaborate with the French administration, *would not* sell foodstuffs to the French and *would not* act as scouts for the French).

Meanwhile, Propaganda Minister Tran Huy Lieu launched a violent anti-French campaign. On the one hand, Lieu and his men shamelessly denied the truth of the French disclosure of Ho's July 25, 1945 message.⁷⁷ On the other hand, the Ministry of propaganda culled the newly acquired French archive in Hanoi to expand and substantiate Ho's indictment of French rule in Viet Nam in his Declaration of Independence. *Independence*, the organ of the *Democratic Party*, portrayed the French civilizing mission [*mission civilisatrice*] as building more prisons than schools and improving the Vietnamese intellectual level by steadily increasing the production and sale of opium.⁷⁸(79) French Premier de Gaulle, General Leclerc, Commander of the French Expeditionary Forces, and d'Argenlieu, the High Commissioner of Indochina, became the subjects of much violent and satirical criticism. D'Argenlieu was given "special treatment." He was once referred to as "a priest who flunked out of his monastery" [*thay tu pha gioi*]. Viet Minh propaganda

⁷⁴It should be noted that not until August 3, 1945 could Henri de Laurentie and Saller come up with the five principles of "economic autonomy" for Indochina: autonomy of customs tariff, liberty of the Indochinese currency (the *piaster*) concerning the metropolitan *franc*; autonomy of the Indochinese Exchange Office, non-application of French laws on nationalization and economic regulations and structures and, equal economic opportunities for foreign nationals; CAOM (Aix), Affaires economique [AE], c. 576. These principles were approved by the French government on August 20, 1945, two days before de Gaulle's official tour of the United States; *Ibid.*, INF, c. 128, d. 1152.

⁷⁵A Chinese source indicates that on August 18, 1945, Ho sent to the French another message in which he demanded an "internal autonomy" for Viet Nam for five to ten years under French rule; Chen, *Vietnam and China*, p. 107. The authenticity of this message, however, is speculative. Although Chen quotes the 10 Oct 1945 report of Hsing Shen-chow, the Chinese intelligence chief in North Viet Nam, this was probably the same message sent by Ho on July 25, 1945. Also see the French debate on this message in ICG, *General de Gaulle*, pp. 205-206.

⁷⁶US-Vietnam Relations, Bk I, C-67..

⁷⁷See, for instance, "Giong luoi cua bon thuc dan Phap" [The French Bandits' Voice and Tongue]; *Cuu Quoc*, No. 59, 24 Sept 1945; "Luoi giac Phap" [The French Bandits' Tongue]; *Co Giai Phong*, No. 19, 23 Sept 1945; "Dap tan luan dieu cua giac Phap" [Smashing the French Bandits' Arguments]; *Ibid.*, No. 21, 30 Sept 1945.

⁷⁸*Doc Lap* (Hanoi), No. 5, 18 Sept 1945.

ridiculed both his title of High Commissioner of Indochina and his trip to Chungking on the Chinese National Day of October 10, 1945.⁷⁹ It was not until November 1945, after Ho and the new French representative in Hanoi, had opened secret talks, that Viet Minh propaganda scaled down its attacks on French leaders.

This campaign of anti-French propaganda took place concurrently with the manifestation of a hunt for French spies north of the 16th parallel, the conscription of military cadres, boycotts against the French community and occasional street violence. In some cases the situation got out of hand and innocent Viets and Frenchmen were victimized by overzealous local Viet Minh. However, the Viet Minh propaganda campaign successfully obscured its pre-Revolutionary willingness to collaborate with the "progressive" New French by adopting a more popular policy of challenging the "dirty," "lying" and "treacherous" New French "bandits" at every opportunity. At the same time, the anti-French passion was lethally used by the Viet Minh to silence its opponents.

In his message and petitions addressed to the big powers prior to March 6, 1946, Ho himself echoed the consensus of Vietnamese hostility towards French imperialism. France was more than once described as having "ignominiously sold Indochina to Japan and betrayed the Allies"⁸⁰ and was accused of conducting a policy of "murderous" aggression,⁸¹ and "starvation"⁸² in Indochina. As late as February 18, 1946—when Ho was reportedly only demanding "self-government" for Viet Nam within the French Union—he still wrote to the United States, the Soviet Union, China and Great Britain:⁸³(84)

. . . [On] September 23, 1945, the French troops attacked Saigon, starting an invasion that is now in its fifth month. That invasion is menacing North Viet Nam and French troops have begun to filter through our Chinese frontier. That aggression, carried on by an experienced and numerous army, fully equipped with the most recent inventions of modern warfare, has brought about the destruction of our towns and villages, the assassination of our civilian population, the starving of a great part of our country. Untold atrocities have been committed, not as reprisals upon our guerrilla troops, but on women and children and unarmed people. These atrocities are beyond imagination and beyond words, and remind one of the Darkest Age: assault on the sanitary [establishments], on Red Cross personnel, bombing and machine-gunning of villages, raping of women, looting and indiscriminate pillaging of Vietnamese and Chinese houses, etc.

Despite this anti-French tone, Ho and his close associates met secretly with French representatives as early as September 1945. General Marcel Alessandri, the French Delegate in North Viet Nam, and Leon Pignon, his political advisor—with the knowledge of the Americans, especially General Gallagher—contacted Ho on various occasions.

⁷⁹[80]See, for instance, "Vu khong: Mot thu doan hen nhat cua Do Gon" [Libeling: A Coward Act of de Gaulle]; *Co Giai Phong*, No. 17, 17 Sept 1945. Also see *Co Giai Phong* and *Cuu Quoc* in September and October 1945. This line of propaganda apparently touched the High-Commissioner. As early as October 1945, he already asked Alessandri to intervene with the Chinese authorities on this issue. On April 30, 1946, he personally brought up the issue with Vo Nguyen Giap at Da Lat. D'Argenlieu, *Chronique*, 1985:66,

⁸⁰Tel of 17 Oct 1945, Ho to Truman; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-74.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, Bk 1, C 80, 85, and 93.

⁸²*Ibid.*, Bk 1, C 87-88

⁸³[84]Ho's note of 18 Feb 1946; . *Ibid.*, Bk 1, C 99.

Finally, after replacing Alessandri in early October, Jean Sainteny and Ho began their secret talks on October 15 on the basis of the March 24, 1945 declaration.⁸⁴

Ho, at first adamantly demanded Viet Nam's independence and territorial unity. Gradually, he retreated from independence to "self-government" and, finally, accepted the ambiguous status of "a free state" within the French Union. The term "free state" certainly did not exceed what the French meant by "autonomy."⁸⁵ In February, Ho conceded more: he accepted France's vague promise to organize referendums to decide the issue of unification of the three regions of Viet Nam, a promise France would never fulfill. Meanwhile, Sainteny stated in passing that France would only conclude a treaty with a government that "represented not only the Viet Minh but all political parties of any standing in Viet Nam."⁸⁶ This final demand killed two birds with one stone: on the one hand, it forced Ho to expand his government, thus diluting his authority; and on the other hand, it created an opportunity for the French to bargain with any of the non-Viet Minh parties.

During this period, an American envoy, Kenneth Landon, was present in Hanoi. Apparently, both Ho and Sainteny concealed the true content of their negotiations from him. It was not until about a week before the signing of the Preliminary Convention of March 6, 1946 that Sainteny told Landon that "[the Vietnamese] in Cochinchina would probably prefer to remain [in a] French colony rather than come under the northern [Vietnamese] government."⁸⁷ This statement, together with Cochinchinese Commissioner Cedile's newly constituted Consultative Council of Cochinchina on February 7, 1946,⁸⁸ clearly indicated French bad faith regarding territorial unification of Viet Nam, as well as in their negotiations with Ho.

It is unknown whether Ho had any prior knowledge of French duplicity. In any case, pressed by the Chinese and intimidated by the French (who had sent troops to occupy Lai Chau in the Northwestern region and who had disclosed the terms of coming Sino-French agreement of February 28, 1946),⁸⁹ Ho swiftly made up for lost time. After toying with the idea of making ex-King Nguyen Phuoc Dien, often known under his reign calendar name of Bao Dai, a front leader of the coalition government in order to deal with the French,⁹⁰ Ho finally took matters into his own hands. On February 23, Ho and leaders of the *Unified League* and Viet Quoc held a special meeting in Hanoi to rename the provisional coalition government to "Government for National Unity and Resistance."

⁸⁴Sainteny, *Paix manquée*, p. 163

⁸⁵Tel No. 501/4, 14 Feb 1946, and No. 515/Cabinet, 17 Feb 1946, Leclerc (Saigon) to EMGDN; CAOM (Aix), AP, Carton 3441, d. 2.

⁸⁶Sainteny, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 61.

⁸⁷*US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 61. According to American sources, d'Argenlieu wanted to grant Viet Nam a status similar to that of the Philippines, but Leclerc opposed such idea and insisted on a military conquest of North Viet Nam; Tel. of 5 Feb. 1946, Landon to Byrnes; *Ibid.*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 58. Also see Tel of 6 Feb 1946, Caffery to Byrnes; *Ibid.*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 59.

⁸⁸This Consultative Council included four French and eight Viets, presided over by Cedile himself. Seven out of eight Viet counselors were naturalized French citizens.

⁸⁹Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, pp. 141-142.

⁹⁰Bao Dai, *Le Dragon*, pp. 150-151

Although the list of Ministers was identical to the former Provisional Coalition Government, the ministries of agriculture and public works were reserved for two southerners.⁹¹ Two days later, Ho issued a communique announcing his ongoing parley with Sainteny.⁹² On March 2, the National Assembly met for the first time and ratified the new government.⁹³ The Assembly also approved the creation of Commissariat for National Defense, under Vo Nguyen Giap and Vu Hong Khanh,⁹⁴ a Permanent Bureau of the National Assembly headed by Nguyen Van To, former Minister of Social Welfare,⁹⁵ and a Committee for the Preparation for Constitution.⁹⁶ Vinh Thuy, or ex-king Nguyen Phuoc Dien, retained his position of Supreme Advisor.

Although Nguyen Hai Than left Hanoi for a coastal town immediately after the publication of the Sino-French treaty of February 28, 1946, Ho Chi Minh and the Chinese successfully "convinced" Vu Hong Khanh, Vice Commissar for National Defense and a Viet Quoc leader, to co-sign the Preliminary Convention of March 6, 1946. As mentioned earlier, the major article of this Preliminary Convention—which was immediately carried out by the French—was Ho's pledge to permit the French to return to North Viet Nam (Art 2). Two other points included French promises to recognize Viet Nam as "a free state" within both the Indochinese Federation and the French Union and to ratify "the decisions taken by the populations consulted by referendums" regarding the territorial unification of Viet Nam (Art 1).⁹⁷

In the light of the Vietnamese aspirations for independence and territorial unification, the March 6, 1946 agreement—provided the French honored it—was a serious disappointment. However, regarding the preservation of Ho's regime, it was a major success. The March 6 treaty was the first that Ho's government had concluded with a foreign power. Especially important, it was signed by the French government which had

⁹¹*La Republique* (Hanoi), No. 21, 3 March 1946. The Joint Communique, dated February 25, 1946, was signed by Ho Chi Minh and Nguyen Cong Truyen (Viet Minh), Do Duc Duc and Hoang Van Duc (Democratic Party), Nguyen Hai Than and Nguyen Thuc (Viet Cach), and Nguyen Tuong Tam and Vu Hong Khanh (Viet Quoc).

⁹²See "Les negociations vietnam-francais;" *Ibid*

⁹³*Ibid.*, No. 22, 10 March 1946; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk I, B 52.

⁹⁴This committee included: Nguyen Van To (President), Le Thi Xuyen (Ms. Phan Thanh), Nguyen Tan Gi Trong, Nguyen Tri, Nguyen Van Chi, Bui Bang Doan, Hoang Minh Giam, Duong Duc Hien, Hoang Van Duc, Pham Van Dong, Nguyen Trong Nham, Duong Van Du, Dam Quang Thien, Cung Dinh Quy and Trinh Quoc Quang. Pham Ba Truc, Nguyen Van Luyen and Y Ngong (E-de [Rhade] representative) were alternate members.

⁹⁵This committee consisted of eleven members: Ms. Nguyen Thi Thuc Vien, Ton Quang Phiet, Nguyen Dinh Thi, Tran Duy Hung, Do Duc Duc, Cu Huy Can, Huynh Ba Nhung, Tran Tan Tho, Nguyen Huu Hach, Dao Huu Duong and Pham Gia Do.

⁹⁶In his 1974 memoirs, Giap arrogantly reports that the "Chinese masters" forced Khanh to sign this Convention; Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, p. 186. Ironically, however, a few years later, Ho and his associates were to experience the same frustrating situations more than once: In 1954, Zhou En-lai forced Ho to accept the division of Viet Nam at the 1954 Geneva conference, and in 1958, Pham Van Dong had to recognize the Chinese claim of sea territory extending to 12 miles from the Chinese shore in order to obtain the Chinese approval and assistance in conquering South Viet Nam. For details, see Chinh Dao, *VNNB, I-B: 1947-1954*, pp. 403-404, 406-407, 409; *I-C: 1955-1963*, p. 120; Jian (1993), pp. 109, *STVQHVNTQ* (1979), p. 32.

⁹⁷For a French text, see *La Republique*, No. 22, 10 March 1946; SHAT (Vincennes), 10H 143; D'Argenlieu, *Chronique*, pp. 188-189.

been regranted sovereignty over Indochina by the victorious Allies. In a sense, it established the legitimacy of Ho's regime, legally transforming a group of "outlaws" into a legitimate government.

Although the French were to sabotage this agreement, it was favorably received in the capitals of the great powers. In London, the British Chief of the Far Eastern Department at the Foreign Office told the French ambassador that he was in favor of the treaty, which he said reflected French liberalism and at the same time safeguarded French interests.⁹⁸ American diplomats also unofficially considered the convention to be a basis for peaceful settlement.⁹⁹ Meanwhile, major newspapers shared the sentiment that this agreement, in the word of the *New York Times*, was "encouraging."¹⁰⁰

B. HO CHI MINH AND D'ARGENLIEU (MARCH-MAY 1946):

The March 6, 1946 preliminary Convention, in fact, reflected neither French liberalism nor sincerity in dealing with the Vietnamese in general or Ho Chi Minh in particular. The main purpose of the French was to get their troops into North Viet Nam without endangering French civilians and prisoners-of-war in Hanoi.

On March 7, after about a week of floating on the Gulf of North Viet Nam and suffering a severe setback in a failed attempt to disembark on the city-port of Hai Phong the previous morning, Leclerc's troops finally set foot on the North. All misunderstandings between the French and local Chinese commanders were settled through diplomacy. On March 13, in Chungking the Chinese government announced the military agreement regarding replacement of Chinese troops north of the 16th parallel by the French (i.e., enacting the previously unpublished exchange of notes on February 28, 1946 specifying the scheduled Chinese withdrawal).¹⁰¹ (103) Finally, on March 18, Leclerc and about 1,000 French troops, escorted by tanks, entered Hanoi. In the following days, French troops occupied several major cities (including Nam Dinh, a center of the cotton textile industry) and the mining towns in the coastal zone of North Viet Nam where Nguyen Hai Than's forces had been in control since August 1945. On April 3, Vo Nguyen Giap and Raoul Salan, the French Military Commander in the North, signed a staff agreement, specifying the number and location of French garrisons.¹⁰²

Ho's popularity dropped precipitously after the March 6, 1946 Convention. As soon as the French propaganda organ, *L'Entente*, printed a Proclamation co-signed by Ho and Leclerc regarding the return of French troops on the following day, non-Communist

⁹⁸Tel No. 984-AS, 25 March 1946, Rene Massigli (London) to Georges Bidault (Paris); CAOM (Aix), AP, Carton 3441, d. 2.

⁹⁹Tel of 27 April 1946, Charles S. Reed (Saigon) to Byrnes; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 66.

¹⁰⁰*New York Times*, 9 March 1946.

¹⁰¹Lacking knowledge of this unpublished note, all existing accounts of the French return to North Viet Nam consider the Sino-French staff accord on March 13 as a new agreement. For my discussion on the Chungking agreement of February 28, 1946, see Chapter XII.

¹⁰²For a French text, see SHAT (Vincennes), 10H141

activists denounced Ho as a Viet traitor and “nation seller” [*ban nuoc*]. Ho and his lieutenants had to give urgent assurances to quiet the opposition. Ho reportedly was forced to pledge before a mass demonstration in Hanoi that “I, Ho Chi Minh, . . . would rather die than betray my country.”¹⁰³ The entry of Leclerc’s forces into Hanoi on March 18 and the festive atmosphere of the French residents in celebrating the “liberation of Hanoi” marked Ho’s lowest curve in public opinion. In the following days, he appealed continuously for the support of the people. As late as May 31, 1946, on the eve of his departure to France for peace talks, he still pledged that “Ho Chi Minh never sells his country.”¹⁰⁴(106) Meanwhile, the Viet Minh death squads were at work. But neither Ho nor his police could totally silence his domestic opponents.

What worried Ho the most were new political developments in South Viet Nam. The March 6, 1946 Convention was viewed by both anti-Communist activists and freedom fighters, or interpreted to them by French propaganda, as Ho’s betrayal of Vietnamese nationalism. Indeed, the non-Communist Viets could hardly forget that on November 5, 1945, Ho and his government had organized a National Day for Resistance. As late as February 25, 1946 Ho and leaders of three major parties had formed a coalition government for resistance. In order to reeducate those who misunderstood Ho’s diplomatic victory, the ICP Standing Bureau issued on March 9, 1946 a directive entitled *Make Peace in Order to Advance* [*Hoa de tien*]. Anticipating that it would be very difficult for the soldiers in the South to clearly understand this directive, Ho sent to the South a special envoy, Hoang Quoc Viet—the executor of hundreds of political assassinations during August-October 1945.¹⁰⁵(106)

¹⁰⁷ Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, pp. 192-208; *La Republique*, No. 22, 10 March 1946.

¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁹.

¹¹⁰ SHAT (Vincennes), 10H 141; Sainteny, *Paix manquée*, p. 197.

The most portentous developments for Ho were French maneuvers in Saigon, aimed at creating an autonomous government in the South. On March 12, Cedile convened a special meeting of the Consultative Council of Cochinchina. At this meeting, the Council endorsed a resolution petitioning France to grant Cochinchina the same status as Ho’s Viet Nam in the future French Union.¹⁰⁶(108) Meanwhile, as tensions steadily increased, French troops intensified their pacification operations in South Viet Nam. French authorities also waged a series of police campaigns to arrest as many “rebels”—i.e., Viet Minh cadres—as possible. Worse yet, in France, the Minister of Overseas France Marius Moutet announced on March 14 that France was to give Cochinchina its own Constitution.¹⁰⁷(109)

Even so, a day after signing the March 6, 1946 accords, Ho informed Sainteny that he wanted the future talks to be carried out in Paris, as soon as possible, and that he hoped to meet d’Argenlieu personally. On March 24, Ho met d’Argenlieu at Ha Long [Descending

¹⁰³ Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, p. 197.

¹⁰⁴ Also see Ho’s appeals on March 11 and March 16, 1946; reprinted in Porter, *Documentation*, vol I, pp. 97-98.

¹⁰⁵ Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, pp. 192-208; *La Republique*, No. 22, 10 March 1946.

¹⁰⁶ *Tan Viet* [New Viet] (Saigon), 13 March 1946.

¹⁰⁷ *La Republique*, No. 24, 24 March 1946.

Dragon] Bay, on board the *Emile-Bertin*. This was the first time that the two major adversaries had confronted each other face to face. D'Argenlieu's goal was to discuss the location of future talks envisioned by the March 6 Convention, and he proposed Da Lat, the summer capital of former French Governors General. Ho insisted on Paris. For different reasons, both Leclerc and Sainteny supported Ho's idea. It was then decided that the official talks would be held in France, but were to be preceded by preliminary talks in Da Lat in the first half of April. At the same time, a delegation of Vietnamese Assembly deputies would visit France.¹⁰⁸

In late March, tensions suddenly peaked with a series of assassinations in the south, particularly in Saigon. A journalist, Hien Si of the *Phuc Hung [Restoration]* newspaper, and a counselor of the Consultative Council of Cochinchina, the pharmacist Tran Tan Phat, were both assassinated within a week. Viet Minh death squads under Hoang Quoc Viet also spread word that they would liquidate all those who supported Cochinchinese separatism. Taking advantage of this situation, Cedile and Pignon, the new political advisor to d'Argenlieu, masterminded a complex political maneuver. On March 31, at the funeral of the assassinated counselor, a group of participants organized a demonstration denouncing Ho's terrorism. A number of Vietnamese newspapers in Saigon took on a violently anti-terrorist tone. The separatist newspapers also launched a campaign demanding autonomy for Cochinchina after the French had formed the *Cochinchinese Popular Front [Mat Tran Binh dan Nam Ky]*. On April 14, the Cochinchinese Popular Front organized mass demonstrations in Saigon and other major cities in the south, demanding that the French grant Cochinchina an autonomous government.¹⁰⁹ On April 19—the day on which the Da Lat preliminary talks began—the Front leader and also a counselor of the Consultative Council of Cochinchina, Nguyen Tan Cuong, wrote an article in the Saigon-based *Populaire*, demanding the French to "act" within the spirit of the March 24, 1945 declaration and the United Nations Charter, by granting Cochinchina its own government.¹¹⁰ At the same time, the new theme that Ho had betrayed the southern freedom fighters by compromising with the French was strongly stressed.¹¹¹

This separatist movement was quickly interpreted by Viet Minh propaganda and other pro-Viet Minh foreign newspapers as purely a French maneuver. A "progressive" French journal wrote, for instance:

There is a bit too much of the smell of rubber in the thesis of Cochinchina's independence. . . . [It] has a bit too obviously been manufactured by the banks and it is a bit too fondly supported by the advocates of cheap labor to be defensible by sincere democrats.

Following the same light of reasoning, the Moscow-based *New Times* denounced "the native landed proprietors" and "the native bourgeoisie" who were "attempting to resist the United movement for national liberation."¹¹²

¹⁰⁸SHAT (Vincennes), 10H 141; Sainteny, *Paix manquee*, p. 197.

¹⁰⁹*Tan Viet*, 1 to 18 April 1946.

¹¹⁰*Populaire* (Saigon), 19 April 1946.

¹¹¹*Tan Viet*, 1 and 17 April 1946.

¹¹²*Ibid.*

Undoubtedly, the French played a major role in stimulating this movement. However, Ho's brutality should also be blamed for this. His political terrorism from August 1945 onward not only disrupted the fervor for national independence and territorial unity stimulated under Tran Trong Kim's government, but also forced the southern elite to reevaluate Ho's brand of nationalism.

A close examination of Communist writings in 1945 and 1946 shows that political assassination during and immediately after the August Revolution was not solely attributable to Tran Van Giau (1911-2007), the ICP leader in the South, but was the fundamental policy of the ICP Central Committee. Armed with a superficial knowledge of Marxist-Leninist dialects, the ICP cadres—similar to the cases of the Vietnamese Catholic catechists in the XIX and XX centuries—believed that they had acquired a magic power to cure all illnesses of a colonial backward society. In the Communist view the liquidation of Trotskyites (Ta Thu Thau, Tran Van Thach, Phan Van Hum, etc.) and Francophile collaborators (Bui Quang Chieu, Le Quang Liem, Tran Tan Phat, etc.) was a necessity—a means justified by Marxist-Leninist ends.¹¹³ However, Ho's ruthlessness caused a backlash among the relatives and friends of his victims. While Ho fought so creatively for the survival of his regime, his victims were also entitled to find a way to avoid being terminated, including seeking foreign protection. This was one of the most tragic developments in Viet Nam immediately after the August Revolution, and also an issue that has been neglected or simplistically denied by Vietnamese Communist and foreign writers.¹¹⁴

The French exploited this seed of sectarianism to advance their interests. By mid-April 1946 they had sufficient collaborators to form an autonomous government in Cochinchina. As the delegation of Vietnamese Assembly deputies left Hanoi for a goodwill tour in Paris on April 16, the French Commissioner of Cochinchina, Cedile, also sent to France a four-member delegation—led by Colonel Nguyen Van Xuan, the unofficial Vice Premier of the Provisional Government of Autonomous Cochinchina—aimed at seeking support from French rightist circles.¹¹⁵

In France, although there were some debates or discussions on the future of Indochina, the French authorities averted their eyes, leaving the trio of d'Argenlieu, Cedile

¹¹³Among those who mistakenly assume that the Viet Minh terrorism in the South after the August Revolution was essentially Giau's own policy is Archimedes Patti, the OSS Chief in Hanoi. In his memoirs published in 1980, Patti has gone so far as to state that "Ho and the [ICP] Central Committee in Hanoi had advised Giau to exercise moderation, to open a dialogue with the French, the Trotskyites, and the non-Communist parties;" *Idem., Why Viet-Nam*, p. 359. The basic orders came from the Central Committee in Hanoi and the main executor of political terrorism in the south was Ha Ba Cang (alias Hoang Quoc Viet, a member of the ICP Central Committee since 1941). See, for instance, "Phai triet ngay bon To-rot-kit" [Let Us Immediately Exterminate the Trotskyite Gang]; *Co Giai Phong*, No. 23, 7 Oct 1945. Giau was also influenced by three influential individuals at that time: Le Van "Seventh" Vien, Commander of the Binh Xuyen gangsters, serving as Giau's body guard; Bourov Duong Bach Mai, Chief of the security forces in the Eastern Zone; and, Nguyen Van "Seventh" Tran, Chief of Security forces in Saigon/Cholon. As a matter of fact, Giau had been officially purged from the party leadership by the ICP Overseas Bureau since 1934.

¹¹⁴Ho Chi Minh himself had strictly abided to the Comintern anti-Trotskyites order since 1939. See also Thomas Hodgkin, *Vietnam: The Revolutionary Path* (New York: Sty Martin Press, 1981), pp. 334ff.

¹¹⁵Letter of 22 April 1946, Cedile to Laurentie; CARAN (Paris), 72AJ 539.

and Pignon free to accomplish their mission of reestablishing French authority over Indochina in the spirit of the March 24, 1945 declaration. Minister of Overseas France Moutet seemingly toyed with the idea of an autonomous Cochinchina.¹¹⁶ His Director General of Political Affairs, Laurentie, at first wanted to use the separatist movement to force Ho to accept a coalition government, with the participation of some Francophiles. However, he later tacitly approved all d'Argenlieu's maneuvers, accepting the argument that the men in the field like Pignon and Cedile had better knowledge of the situation than the men in Paris.¹¹⁷

The Da Lat conference, held between April 19 and May 10, was therefore a predictable failure.¹¹⁸ Mutual distrust overwhelmed the meeting. Tensions arose from the very beginning of the parley, after the French arrested Pham Ngoc Thach, the *ICP* representative from the South, and expelled him from Da Lat. Finally, both sides agreed that the major issues should be settled in France.¹¹⁹

A week after the inconclusive end of the Da Lat conference, d'Argenlieu arrived in Hanoi. On the eve of his arrival, the Hanoi newspapers suddenly disclosed that the May 19, would be Ho's 56th birthday anniversary and urged the inhabitants to display flags and banners in his honor, beginning on May 18.¹²⁰ This coincidence promptly led to the allegation that Ho fabricated his birthdate in order to force Hanoi residents to display flags, aimed at greeting d'Argenlieu's arrival as well as demonstrating Ho's popularity.¹²¹ Whatever the true intentions of the Viet Minh in announcing Ho's birthday on May 17, Hanoi was reddened by the Viet Minh flags during d'Argenlieu's stay from May 18 to 22. This festive atmosphere did not impress the priest-turned-Admiral. He reportedly asked Ho to delay his trip to France but the latter refused.¹²² According to d'Argenlieu's account, he told his adversary of the possible separation of Cochinchina from Viet Nam and blamed Ho's "injustice and violence" for such a development. Four days later, recalling his threat to Ho, d'Argenlieu urged Moutet to grant Ho only minimal courtesy during his upcoming

¹¹⁶"Le gouvernement du Viet Nam a protesté contre la déclaration de M. Marius Moutet;" *La République*, No. 24, 24 March 1946.

¹¹⁷Letters of 20 May 1946 and 13 July 1946, Laurentie to Cedile; CARAN (Paris), 72AJ 539.

¹¹⁸At this conference, each delegation included twelve members and twelve counselors. The Vietnamese delegation was led by Foreign Minister Nguyen Tuong Tam, and the French were led by Max Andre. See *Tan Viet* (Saigon), 15 and 18 April 1946; Hoang Xuan Han, *Mot vai ky vang ve Hoi nghi Da Lat* [Several Recollections On the Da-lat Conference] (Saigon: Su Dia, 1971), pp. 16, 30. According to Communist Vietnamese sources, the man behind the Vietnamese delegation was Vo Nguyen Giap. See Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, 2001:222-236; Phung The Tai, *Bac Ho Nhung ky niem khong quen* [Uncle Ho, the Unforgettable Memoirs] (Ha Noi: QDND, 2002), pp. 111-116.

¹¹⁹See, for instance, the final report of the Military Council dated May 11, 1946, signed by Vo Nguyen Giap and Raoul Salan; CAOM (Aix), PA 39.

¹²⁰*Cuu Quoc* (Hanoi), 18 May 1946; Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, p. 270 [2001:237-239].

¹²¹For my discussion on Ho's birthdate, see Vu Ngu Chieu and Nguyen The Anh, *Another School for Young Nguyen Tat Thanh* (Paris: Van Hoa, 1983), pp. 96-98.[available on www.minhtrietviet.net]

¹²²Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, pp. 268-273 [2001:242].

visit to France and insisted that by that time the High Commissioner would have enough opportunities [*atouts*] "to liberate the Indochinese from hundred yokes imposed on them by the government born from disturbance."¹²³ Shortly thereafter, on May 31, while Ho was mounting a French plane to leave Hanoi for France, General Valluy, the new Commissioner of North Viet Nam, informed Ho that the Government of the Republic of Autonomous Cochinchina would be formed on the following day. Ho, according to Valluy, was enraged but could do nothing.¹²⁴

On June 3, d'Argenlieu also asked the French Ambassador in Egypt to transmit to Ho a telegram, explaining the reasons resulting in the establishment of the Republic of Cochinchina on June 1, 1946: the Cochinchinese [South Vietnamese] were unified to strike back Ho's terrorism. The French Ministry of Foreign Service, however, decided to inform Ho's of the heart-broken news by a more diplomatic tone. Meanwhile, Moutet promptly approved d'Argenlieu's move, providing the latter with the official line that the creation of the Cochinchinese Autonomous government would not affect the final result of negotiations, and it was simply a reaction of the Cochinchinese people to liberate themselves from terrorism.¹²⁵

C. HO'S RETURN TO FRANCE (JUNE-SEPTEMBER 1946):

On June 6, 1946, Ho arrived in France. He had to wait at Biarritz, a beach resort on the western coast, for over two weeks while France selected a new Premier to replace Felix Gouin. In order to accommodate Ho, the French authorities dispatched Sainteny to Biarritz.

Officially this was Ho's first return to France after two decades of traveling around Asia as a Russian international agent. Probably thanks to the connection previously established by the delegation of Vietnamese Assembly deputies—including Nguyen Manh Ha, son-in-law of Georges Maranne, an FCP leader—the FCP greeted Ho warmly. *L'Humanite*, the FCP organ, immediately raised the question of why the French government was not allowing Ho to stay in Paris. It also violently attacked d'Argenlieu's creation of the autonomous government of Cochinchina and demanded a sincere relationship between France and Ho's Viet Nam.¹²⁶(129) At the same time, some French progressive figures like Emmanuel Mounier, Francois Jourdain and Andree Viollis, formed the Franco-Vietnamese Association, presided over by Justin Godard.¹²⁷(130) On June 22 when the new Premier, Georges Bidault, finally invited Ho to Paris as an official guest, the FCP organized a special reception for Ho at the airport. Although Maurice Thorez, the FCP General Secretary and Vice Premier of Bidault's government, did not appear, he was represented by his lady companion. In the following days, French newspapers gave Ho

¹²³Letter of 25 May 1946, D'Argenlieu to Moutet; CAOM (Aix), PA 28, Carton 8, d. 173.

¹²⁴Jean Valluy, "L'Imbroglia du déclenchement de la guerre;" in Heduy (ed), *Histoire de l'Indochine*, p. 287.

¹²⁵D'Argenlieu, *Chronique*, pp. 284-286.

¹²⁶*L'Humanite* (Paris), 12 & 13 June 1946.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, 14 June 1946.

special attention. Ho successfully courted the media, giving several personal interviews over breakfast, at 7 a.m. at his Parisian hotel suite.¹²⁸(131)

Ho's honeymoon with the French, however, ended as soon as official talks convened at Fontainebleau on July 6. D'Argenlieu did not attend the opening meeting as expected and at the last moment Max Andre, head of the French delegation, stepped up to declare the opening of the conference. Pham Van Dong (the future Premier of Viet Nam) promptly registered a protest. He then went on criticizing the French strategy of a *fait accompli* and insisted that his government will never accept "the mutilation of the Viet Nam Motherland."¹²⁹(132) Thereafter in a replay of the Da Lat conference, both sides became deadlocked on nearly all issues, but particularly the issue of territorial unification. The French goal was quite clear: they would not return Cochinchina to Ho and, in fact, intended to liquidate Ho's regime.¹³⁰(133)

During the Fontainebleau conference, the French press was deeply divided. While "progressive" newspapers and magazines were either neutral or favored Ho, rightist newspapers adopted a violently anti-Ho campaign. Some blamed Ho for violations of the Da Lat agreement and cited the Viet Minh's assassination, kidnapping and rape of Europeans to justify French military actions in Viet Nam. *L'Etoile du Soir* [Evening Star] went so far as to demand Ho's arrest.¹³¹(134) Meanwhile, a group of Vietnamese returned from Moscow, who had allegedly been recruited by Ho in the 1920's, circulated an open letter addressed to "Comrade Nguyen Ai Quoc," denouncing Ho's betrayal by dealing with the French in such unfavorable conditions as those agreed to in the March 6, 1946 Convention.¹³²(135)

Meanwhile, in Indochina, d'Argenlieu intensified his maneuvers aimed at trapping Ho in what Dong had rightly noted as a *fait accompli*. In Trung Bo (Central), French troops occupied the Highlands [Tay Nguyen], preparing for the creation of an autonomous Republic of the Highlands in order to protect them from Vietnamese hegemonism. Then, on July 24, the French press announced another forthcoming Da Lat conference to be held on August 1, 1946, in order to gather indigenous opinion on the future of the Indochinese Federation. Ho's Viet Nam was not invited to send its representatives to this second Da Lat conference (August 1-13, 1946).¹³³

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 24 July 1946.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 7 & 8 July 1946. Tel. of 7 July 1946, Jefferson Caffery (Paris) to Secretary of State; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 73.

¹³⁰Letter of 13 July 1946, Laurentie to Cedile; CARAN (Paris), 72 AJ 539. Also see Jacques Valette, "La conference de Fontainebleau (1946)", pp. 9-13, presented at the Colloque on "Les prodromes de la colonisation de l'Empire francais (1936-1956)," 4-5 Oct 1984.

¹³¹*L'Humanite* (Paris), 31 July 1946.

¹³²This Open Letter was signed by Hoang Quang Giu, Vu Van Tan and Nguyen Van Tu. For a French text, see Sainteny, *Paix manquee*, pp. 253-55. Giu, it should be noted, was very close to Nguyen The Truyen, one of Ho's collaborators in the 1920's. Also see CAOM (Aix), SLOTFOM, Series II, c. 7 and 22.

¹³³This second Da Lat Conference was presided over by General Alessandri. De la Charriere was president of the French delegation. Colonel Nguyen Van Xuan, Vice President of the Republic of Cochinchina, led the Cochinchinese delegation. Also attended were representatives of Cambodia, Laos, Chams and the ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands. All parties agreed in principle on the establishment of an Indochinese Federation within the French Union, with Da Lat as its capital and the French language as its official language. On August 4, the Conference approved the creation of the Alliance of the Mountain-

To protest d'Argenlieu's maneuver, the Vietnamese delegates at Fontainebleau filed an official protest on July 26. Six days later, on August 1, the Vietnamese temporarily suspended the Fontainebleau talks, pending further developments. The breakdown of talks was imminent. Tensions continued to mount because in Viet Nam, French troops occupied Bac Ninh on August 3 after a minor skirmish.

Cornered, Ho had to save the negotiations at all costs. On July 22, he wrote to Moutet proposing they enter into secret talks. Although Moutet accepted Ho's request, he was not very interested. Talks dragged on for over a month without any progress. Perhaps Moutet himself wanted to prolong talks until the dry season of 1946, the best time for French military action in Viet Nam.¹³⁴(137)

In September 1946, the Fontainebleau talks ended without positive result. The Vietnamese delegation left France for Viet Nam. Even prior to their departure the French attitude toward Ho had cooled. In mid-August, Ho was asked to move out of the hotel suite reserved for him by the government. Sainteny had to relocate Ho at the villa of a friend, Raymond Aubriac, (who was entrusted by Henry Kissinger in a secret mission to Hanoi in 1967 known as the *Pennsylvania Project* (July-Oct 1967)).¹³⁵ French officials also occasionally brought up the fact that Ho had been away from Viet Nam for a long time. Frustrated, Ho visited the American embassy in Paris on September 11, asking for aid. Again turned down by the Americans, Ho made a bold move three days later. On September 14, Ho unexpectedly agreed to sign what was to be known as the *modus vivendi* of September 14, 1946. The only important provision of his eleven-point agreement concerned a cessation of hostilities, effective October 30, 1946. It was accompanied by a joint declaration, in which both sides pledged to respect the spirit of the March 6, 1946 Convention and to renew talks in January 1947.¹³⁶(139)

Ho's real motives in signing this *modus vivendi* are obscure. Some believe that he wanted to buy time in order to prepare for war against the French.¹³⁷(140) Others assert that he had to sign the agreement in order to bring something back home, aimed at restraining the Viet Minh "hot-heads" from resorting to force.¹³⁸(141) Still others assume that Ho might act on the personal assurance of Maurice Thorez, that when talks were to

peoples of the Annamese Highlands, or Republic of the Western State. For details, see CAOM (Aix), AP, c. 365; Chinh Dao, *VNNB, vol. I-A: 1939-1946*, pp. 344-345, 346.

¹³⁴Tel. of 2 Aug 1946, Caffery to Secretary of State; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 74; Memorandum of 9 Aug 1946, Moffat to Carter; *Ibid.*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 77

¹³⁵Mai Van Bo, *Tan cong ngoai giao va tiep xuc bi mat* [Diplomatic Offensives and Secret Contacts] (Ha Noi: 1985). For details, see George Herring (ed), *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating Volumes of the Pentagon Papers* (Austin, TX: Univ. of Texas Press, 1983), pp. 737-738;

¹³⁶For a French text, see Notes documentaires et d'Etudes, No. 412: *Modus vivendi Franco-Vietnamien signe a Paris le 14 Sept 1946* (Paris: 1946). For a summary in English, see *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, pp. 80-81.

¹³⁷BNCLSD/TU, *50 nam*, p. 99; Buttinger, *A Dragon Embattled*, vol. I, p. 395.

¹³⁸Donald Lancaster, *The Emancipation of French Indochina* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), p. 162 [henceforth, *Emancipation*]; Sainteny, *Ho Chi Minh*, pp. 87-89; Pham Van Dong *et al.*, *President Ho Chi Minh* (Hanoi: 1964), p. 89.

resume in January 1947, the FCP-led government would have granted Ho territorial unification of Viet Nam.¹³⁹(142) All of these arguments seem insufficient to explain Ho's signature on what was reportedly his "death warrant." To understand Ho's motives, one should realize that Ho had scant expectations from his trip to France. Moutet's pledge to give Cochinchina a constitution eight days after the signing of the March 6, 1946 Preliminary Convention and the French-sponsored separatist movement in South Viet Nam clearly reflected the French duplicity. However, for his own reasons, Ho went to France. First, he wanted to demonstrate his moderation by negotiating with the French. Second, he wanted to carry the Indochina issue to the heartland of France, hoping to open a second political front inside France. In this Ho partly succeeded during the summer of 1946. After months of silence, the French "democrats" and "progressives" began to openly support Ho's slogan of "a free Viet Nam within the French Union" and promoted Ho's regime as the only legitimate representative of Viet Nam.

This support, however, stiffened the attitude toward Ho among the more conservative French. A master of political terrorism, Ho could not fail to take note of the French government's changing attitude (such as Ho's expulsion from the hotel suite reserved for an official guest or Moutet's firmness in dealing with Ho) or violent criticism in the rightist newspapers (including a request for Ho's arrest)—indeed Ho might have feared the French would act in kind. Therefore, he gambled one last time: he agreed to take whatever the French offered, telling himself that something is "better than nothing."¹⁴⁰(143) More importantly, he wanted to secure a safe conduct home. So anxious was he about his security that he refused to board an airplane and personally arranged for passage on board a French warship.

As for the French, although they would have liked to put in writing several paragraphs defining more precisely the relation of Ho's Viet Nam to the Indochinese Federation and the French Union and provisions for disarmament of the Vietnamese forces in the south, they were temporarily satisfied.¹⁴¹ Also, they were eager to send Ho back to Viet Nam, where d'Argenlieu and Valluy's troops knew how to let guns negotiate.

On September 16, the French allowed Ho to leave Paris for Toulon. Three days later, the *Durmont-d'Urville* set sail toward the Far East, bringing Ho back home. No available document sheds light on Ho's reflection on that early morning of September 19, 1946. However, Ho could hardly ignore the fact that along his route from Paris to Toulon, the Vietnamese crowds more than once cursed him as a Viet traitor [Viet Gian].¹⁴² This stigma would endure long after Ho set foot back on Vietnamese soil.

D. THE LAST MEETING BETWEEN HO AND D'ARGENLIEU:

After nearly a month at sea, Ho reentered Vietnamese waters on October 18, 1946. D'Argenlieu invited Ho to see him at Cam Ranh Bay to discuss the application of *modus*

¹³⁹Lancaster, *Emancipation*, p. 162.

¹⁴⁰*New York Herald Tribune*, 10 Sept 1946.

¹⁴¹Tel. of 17 Sept 1946, Caffery (Paris) to Secretary of State; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 81.

¹⁴²Sainteny, *Paix manquee*, pp. 210-211.

vivendi. To display his good will, d'Argenlieu promised to liberate some Viet Minh agents reportedly being tortured or killed in the French prisons. However, he severely criticized the Viet Minh's atrocities in the South and asked Ho to evacuate the Viet Minh forces from Cochinchina. D'Argenlieu also reprimanded Huynh Thuc Khang's illusionary denunciation of the so-called French violations of the September 14, 1946 *modus vivendi*. Ho agreed to appear beside d'Argenlieu at a press conference on board the *Suffren*, to announce the coming cease-fire and denounced terrorism. After "lovely embracing" [*om hon tham thiet*] the Admiral in a display of "fraternity", Ho headed for Hai Phong.

Ho's theatrics, however, could not convince d'Argenlieu of his sincerity. The Admiral reportedly told his close associates:¹⁴³

I am convinced that Ho has attempted, in combining his gentleness and friendly declaration with tricks and intimidation, to obtain the most from our part.

In his report to Paris, d'Argenlieu expressed the same feeling, moving the ball to Ho's court for a new phase of confrontation.¹⁴⁴

As a result, d'Argenlieu and Pignon, with faithful service from Valluy (who had replaced Leclerc as Supreme Commander of French troops in Indochina since July 1946), continued their preparation for a *coup d'Etat*. In late November 1946, Valluy ordered his troops in Hai Phong to teach the Vietnamese "a hard lesson" by bombing, shelling, and burning several quarters of the city. Within three weeks, French troops provoked a series of skirmishes in North Viet Nam, giving Ho and his men no alternative but to fight. Finally, on December 19, 1946, Giap ordered his forces to attack French troops in Hanoi, Hai Phong, Nam Dinh, Vinh, Hai Duong and Hue. The next day, Ho declared a war of national resistance.

Generally speaking, Ho's diplomatic efforts in 1945 and 1946 were failures. Not only did he fail to secure significant international recognition, Ho also obtained neither national independence nor territorial unity for Viet Nam. Undoubtedly, Ho was only partly responsible for these failures: French imperial ambitions and the brutal realities of world politics significantly contributed to Ho's lack of success.

However, individually and in the view of the survival of his own party, Ho scored remarkable successes. By offering his services to American and Chinese intelligence organizations in China, Ho cultivated a qualified sympathy in certain American circles. The presence of his American "friends of the forest" in Hanoi immediately after the August Revolution helped Ho to survive the Chinese occupation and identified his party's aspirations with Viet Nam's national cause. Meanwhile, although American diplomats and officials in Washington remained neutral, their occasional advice or fleeting concern regarding events in Indochina helped Ho reach temporary agreements with the French—thus, providing Ho with opportunities to consolidate both his military and political power. It was not until the autumn of 1947, as the prospect of a Communist-Guomindang civil war in China became imminent, that the Americans began to see Ho in a different light.

¹⁴³Valluy, "L'Imbroglio," p. 288.

¹⁴⁴D'Argenlieu, *Chronique*, pp. 335-336.

Although both the March 6, 1946 Preliminary Convention and the September 14, 1946 *modus vivendi* were humiliating failures for the cause of Vietnamese independence and territorial unification, they marked Ho's strategic triumph in conserving his power and legitimizing his regime. Even the French—who were simply interested in reestablishing French authority over Viet Nam, by any means and at all costs—had recognized the legitimacy of Ho's government, thus, providing Ho and his men its righteousness [*chinh nghĩa*] in the eyes of the majority of Vietnamese population as a whole and world opinion. Expedient as they were for both the French and Ho's party, the agreements of March and September 1946 transformed a group of "outlawed" revolutionaries into a legitimate government for about ten months. Although this legitimacy would have been meaningless had Ho and his men been incapable of settling the Viet Nam issue with the French by force and surviving the deadly military campaigns in the years to come, it became a ghost haunting all non-Communist Viet governments fighting for survival.

Ho's often neglected success during his trip to France was his renewal of contact with the French Communist Party [FCP], of which Ho was a founding member. From June 1946 onward, whatever its reservations against Ho's dissolution of the ICP in November 1945, the FCP served as a propaganda channel for Ho's regime, assiduously discrediting both Ho's opponents and victims. Meanwhile, although it is unknown whether Ho opened direct contact with the Soviet Union during his trip to France between June and September 1946 or not, it should be noted that Ho brought back with him to France—beside Nguyen Manh Ha, a son-in-law of Georges Marrane, an FCP leader, and Nguyen De, a Catholic, who had connections with French rightist circles—two "returnees from Moscow," Bourov Duong Bach Mai (1904-1965) and Blokov Tran Ngoc Ranh [or Danh, 1909-1952]. Both Mai and Ranh were to stay in France after Ho's return to Viet Nam, in charge of the Permanent Delegation of Ho's government in Paris. Their underground work in France during this period cannot be documented until the day either Soviet or Vietnamese sources, or both, become fully accessible to scholars.¹⁴⁵

Another important aspect of Ho's diplomatic missions in 1945 and 1946 deserves comment. First, Ho left an impression that his color had changed with circumstances. He was quite generous in his praise of great powers and "great men." All ideologies in the world in the 1940's—from American democracy and freedom to Marxist-Leninism, from the Chinese Three People's Principles [*San Min Chu I*] and *gongshan* [Sinicized Marxist-Leninism] to the French Liberty-Fraternity-Equality [*Liberte-Fraternite-Egalite*], and even Truman's twelve-point speech on October 27, 1945 or the unsigned Atlantic Charter of August 1941—were more than once considered as ideological bases for Ho's regime. This practice raised doubts about Ho's sincerity and character. Could he have been a Communist, a freedom-fighter, a democrat, a Chinese Guomindang, a French socialist, a Vietnamese patriot and a Vietnamese traitor all at the same time?¹⁴⁶ Or, was he simply a

¹⁴⁵Ranh reportedly dissolved the Paris office in 1949 and took refuge in Czechoslovakia until his death in 1952. In Feb 1951, Ranh was purged from the newly instituted Workers' Party of Viet Nam for his critics of Ho's policy.

¹⁴⁶According to a French intelligence source, in its Directive of September 1946, the Soviet DALBURO accused "Ho Chi Minh, Bao Dai . . . and others" of being "traitors to Annamese peasants and workers;" France, SDECE, "*Notice technique de contre espionnage: Extreme-Orient, Les services speciaux sovietiques en Extreme-Orient*" (20 Mai 1947); CAOM (Aix), INF, c.138-139, d. 1245.

"realist" and an experienced survivor whose acts and words were means to justify an end—to hold power in the name of a proletarian revolution? These questions should have a higher priority among scholars of Vietnamese history. The need to demythologize and penetrate the thick veil draped around Ho's revolutionary path by both his friends and foes is great.

At any rate, Ho's diplomacy in 1945 and 1946 secured the survival of his regime. He skillfully alternated between tact and firmness, carefully measuring his moves. Ho's strength and international experience annoyed but did not frighten his main adversary, d'Argenlieu, resulting in the French dilemma of failed attempts to liquidate the "intransigent team in Hanoi" by both military operations and political maneuvers in the years to come. To be fair to d'Argenlieu, it was not his alleged "blindness" but his acute perception and religious bias of Ho's mortal threat to French rule in Indochina that led him to take the risk of challenging Ho by force. Unfortunately for him, like Viet Nam, d'Argenlieu's postwar France was also deeply influenced by the new tides reshaping the world. As the world edged toward a new order, from their corner of the Indochinese peninsula d'Argenlieu and his lieutenants could only see Viet Nam as it appeared in the sights of their Catholic cross, their obsolete bombers, and their shining American Lend-Lease rifles, tanks and howitzers. Meanwhile, in Paris, Premier Bidault, Minister Moutet and their colleagues in the National Assembly, to various degrees, supported d'Argenlieu's Indochina policy. Motivated by an outmoded world-view, plus an overestimation of their own military strength, the French plunged Viet Nam in a seemingly endless conflict, holding the material and social progress to a standstill for decades, if not centuries.

Houston, TX 30/1/2024

Chapter XIV: HO CHI MINH—THE DIPLOMAT

1. CAOM (Aix), SLOTFOM, Series II, Carton 6. For details, see Chinh Dao, *Ho Chi Minh: Con nguoi va huyen thoai, 1892-1969* [*Ho Chi Minh: The Man and His Myths, 1892-1969*], 3 vols (Houston: Van Hoa, 1993 [rev. ed., 1997], 1994, 2001), vol I (1997 revised edition). Cited henceforth, *Ho Chi Minh*.

2. Cable of 20 July 1945, Thomas to Wampler; United States Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Causes, Origins, and Lessons of the Vietnam War, Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, Ninety-Second Congress, Second Session on Causes, Origins, and Lessons of the Vietnam War, May 9, 10, and 11, 1972* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1973), p. 249. Cited henceforth, US Senate, *Hearings (1972), Causes, Origins, and Lessons*.

3. See, for instance, Robert Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution* (New York: 1965), pp. 28-30.

4. See, Memorandum of 22 Aug. 1945, William J. Donovan to Secretary of State; Department of Defense, *U.S.-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967* (Washington: GPO, 1971), Bk 1, C-68; Letter of 16 Feb 1946, Ho Chi Minh to Truman; *Ibid.*, Bk 1, C-96. Cited henceforth, *US-Vietnam Relations*.

5. *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-80 (*italics mine*).

6. Tel. [undated], Ho Chi Minh to Secretary of State; Enclosure 3, Despatch No. 890, 26 Nov 1945, Chungking to Washington; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, p. C-92.

7. Democratic Republic of Vietnam, "Note to the Governments of China, United States of America, Union of Socialist Sovietic Republics and Great Britain (18 Feb 1946);" *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, p. C-99. The three points mentioned by Ho were as follows: (2) "We believe in the eventual return of sovereign rights and self-government to all peoples who have been deprived of them by force;" (4) "We believe that all peoples who are prepared for self-government should be permitted to choose their own form of government by their own freely expressed choice, without interference from any foreign source. That is true in Europe, in Asia, in Africa as well as in the Western hemisphere;" and (6) "We shall refuse to recognize any government imposed upon any nation by the force of any foreign power. In some cases it may be impossible to prevent forceful imposition of such government;" *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Harry S. Truman, April-December 1945* (Washington: GPO, 1965), pp. 433-4.

8. Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution*, p. 31.

9. Fenn, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 83. It was circulated in South Viet Nam prior to 1975 that Ho's main motive to leave the country in 1911 was his heart-broken love with a pretty food-hawker in the Da Kao market; see Vu Ngu Chieu, "Social and Cultural Change in Viet-Nam Between 1940 and 1946," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1984.

10. Fenn, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 83.

11. See, for instance, Report No. 1, 17 July 1945, Deer to Chow; US Senate, *Hearings (1972), Causes, Origins, and Lessons*, p. 244 (beer and beefsteak at Kim Lung, Tuyen Quang); Report of 17 Sept 1945, Thomas to OSS Chief; *Ibid.*, p. 263 ("housed in the former Provincial Governor's headquarters," "well-fed and cared for," "time to getting fat, getting a sun-tan, visiting the city," "key to the villages").

12. Patti, *Why Viet-Nam*, pp. 196-7. Also see "Cuoc bieu tinh vi dai, gan 30 van nguoi de nhenh tiep mot so uy vien trong chinh phu lam thoi va phai bo dieu tra My" [Massive Demonstration, Nearly Three Hundred Thousand People Welcomed A Number of the Provisional Government's Commissars and the American Inquiry Delegates], *Cuu Quoc [National Salvation]* (Hanoi), No. 33, 29 Aug. 1945. Vo Nguyen Giap, in his 1974 memoirs, did not mention the presence of "the American Inquiry Delegates"; *Idem.*, *Khong*

the nao quen, p. 25. This omission is understandable: During the second phase of the Vietnam War (1955-1975), all American-affiliated Vietnamese were accused of being American puppets or lackeys, or national traitors.

13. Patti, *Why Viet-Nam*, pp. 199-203.

14. Philippe Devillers, in his *Histoire du Viet-Nam* (Paris: Seuil, 1952, p. 202), alleges that Patti was given a portion of money or gold produced from Ho's "Gold Week" (Sept 18-25, 1945). In his memoirs, Patti did not discuss this allegation and in his bibliography, labels Devillers' book as "the most accurate French account of the period" and "by far one of the most reliable histories;" Patti, *Why Viet-Nam*, p. 572. Devillers' work, however, is no more than a journalistic account or a popular history at best.

(*) The advance element of the Embankment, a prisoner of war evacuation team under First Lt Emile R. Connasse, was parachuted into Saigon on Sept 1. Connasse considered the Vietnamese revolutionary government as "a drugstore revolution," but acknowledged that "for the present [its] control is complete." Report of 8 Sept 1945, OSS records; cited by Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 66. Dewey replaced Connasse on Sept 4. Shortly after the British arrival, Dewey was under pressure to break off all contacts with the Viet Minh; Int. with Frank White, 18 Feb 1972; Memorandum on Investigation of the Death of Major Peter Dewey, 25 Oct 1945, by Maj. F.M. Small, and Meg. Dewey to HQ, 404, 14 Sept 1945, both in records of the OSS; quoted by Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 67. On 24 Sept, Captain Joseph Coolidge was ambushed along with a British officer on a trip to Da Lat. Coolidge was seriously wounded and had to be evacuated to Ceylon. Two days later, Dewey and Captain Herbert J. Bluechel were fired upon while riding a jeep. Dewey was killed instantly, but Bluechel managed to withdraw to a nearby villa where the OSS headquartered. The Vietnamese attacked this villa but Captain Frank White and Sgt George Wickes held them off until help arrived from a nearby British post; Affidavits by Bluechel and Wickes, both in records of the OSS; and Int. with White on 26 Feb 1972, quoted by Spector, *Advice and Support*, p. 67. Dewey was promoted posthumously to Lt-Colonel. In 1981, a Vietnamese refugee in France told the US officials that Dewey had been ambushed by Muoi Cuong, a leader of the Avant Guard Youth, and Bay Tay. Both were later killed in a battle against the French; *Ibid*.

15. Letter of 20 Sept 1945, Gallagher (Hanoi) to McClure (Kunming), Gallagher Papers, Center for Military History, US Army, Washington, DC; reprinted in Porter, *Documentation*, vol. I, p. 78.

16. *Ibid*.

17. Leon B. Blum, *The United States and Vietnam, 1944-1947* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1972), pp. 4-5. According to a Vietnamese source, in October 1945 this Association had 500 Vietnamese members and about 20 Americans; *Viet Nam Thoi Bao [Viet-Nam Times]* (Hanoi), Nos. 3 and 4 (24 and 25 October 1945).

18. Letter of 20 Sept 1945, Gallagher to McClure, cited in note 15 *supra*. Gallagher's advisory staff was closed down on December 12, 1945; Spector, *Advice and Support*, 72.

19. See, for instance, *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-63-104. Another messenger between Ho and the outside world was Colonel Stephen Nordlinger, Commander of the M-5 Team responsible for prisoner-of-war rescue work in Hanoi; *Ibid.*, C-76. Nordlinger was somehow more sympathisant to the French, proposing to release French military prisoners of war from the concentration camps but both Patti and Gallagher refused for fear of violent disturbance as in the case of South Vietnam.

20. Memorandum of 22 Aug. 1945, William J. Donovan to Secretary of State; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-68.

21. *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-95-6.

22. *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-96-7.

23. *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-103-4.

24. Letter from Moffat to State Department (December 1945); in Blum, *United States and Vietnam*, Appendix II, pp. 40-42. It should be noted that a quarter of century later, in securing the Soviet aid, Le Duan, Secretary General of the Vietnamese Communist Party, used the same courteous and generous wording to praise the Soviet victory over the German and Japanese fascism "created exceptionally favourable situation for the victory of [the ICP] August revolution;" *Pravda*, 7 April 1977; cited in R. A. Ulyanovsky (ed), *The Comintern and the East* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979), p. 226. The Cam Ranh Bay might be bait for the Soviet assistance.

25. Letter of 1 Nov 1945, Ho Chi Minh to James Byrnes; Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch No. 890, 26 Nov 1945, Embassy Chungking to State; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-90. According to French sources, in 1933, there were 33 Vietnamese youth being sent to Moscow for training; CAOM (Aix), SLOTFOM, Series II, Carton 22; Chinh Dao, *Ho Chi Minh*, vol II. A Russian scholar reports that the *Comintern* archives show that there were 52 Viet students in the USSR, including Ho. For their biographical sketches, see Anatoli

A. Solokov, *Quoc te Cong San va Viet-Nam [International Communism and Viet-Nam]*, trans. from Russian into Vietnamese by Dao Tan (Hanoi: NXB Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 1999), pp. 227-83, and Chinh Dao, *Viet Nam Nien Bieu, 1939-1975 [Viet Nam Chronicle, 1939-1975]*, vol. III: *Nhan vat chi [Biographies]*, rev. ed. (Houston, TX: Van Hoa, 1997). Cited henceforth, *VNNB*, III: *Nhan Vat chi* (1997).

26. Memorandum of 29 Sept 1945 by General Gallagher, Gallagher Papers; reprinted in Porter, *Documentation*, vol I, pp. 80-1.

27. Letter from Abbot L. Moffat to State Department (December 1945); in Blum, *United States and Vietnam*, Appendix II, pp. 40-2.

28. Tel of 5 Dec 1945, Acheson to Moffat (Saigon); *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, pp. 85-6.

29. Cable of 17 Oct 1945, Ho Chi Minh to Truman; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-73-4. The Far Eastern Advisory Committee included nine nations: The United States, Great Britain, France, China, New Zealand, Holland, the Philippines, Australia and India.

30. *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-80-1.

31. *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-92. Also see “Phai co dai bieu Dong Duong trong nhung cuoc hoi ban ve van de Dong Duong” [There Must Be An Indochinese Delegation In the Conferences Regarding the Indochinese Issues]; *Cuu Quoc*, No. 39, 10 Sept 1945.

32. Office Memorandum of 15 Nov 1945, Moffat to Vincent; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-71.

33. This cable was forwarded to the US Embassy in Chungking, via the Army channel, by Gallagher in early Sept 1945; Incoming Tel No. 2026, 23 Nov 1945, Embassy Chungking to State; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-87-8.

34. Letter of 16 Feb 1946, Ho to Truman; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-96. [*Italics mine*]

35. *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-100.

36. US Senate, *Hearings (1972), Causes, Origins and Lessons*, p. 266.

37. Porter, *Documentation*, vol I, p. 78.

38. *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-66.

39. Tel of 5 Dec 1945, Acheson to Moffat (Saigon); *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, pp. 85-6.

40. Letter from Moffat to State Department (December 1945); in Blum, *United States and Vietnam*, Appendix II, pp. 40-2.

41. Memorandum of 30 Jan 1946, by Richard L. Sharp; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, pp. 53-7. Also see Dispatch of 28 Aug 1924, Am Consul (Saigon) [Leland L. Smith] to Dept of State, Record Group [RG] 59, National Archives, Washington, DC; Dispatches of 20 Oct 1927 & 5 June 1928, Am Consul (Saigon) [Harris M. Cookingham] to Dept of State, RG 84; *Ibid.* (no evidence that the Vietnamese had either desire or the capacity for self-government, . . . “the natives” were too backward to be entrusted with Western-style political rights and civil liberties); quoted in Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, US Army, 1983), p. 11n27.

42. Patti, *Why Viet-Nam*, pp. 202; Sainteny, *Paix manquee*, pp. 86-7.

43. DGER, *Bulletin de Renseignements*, No. EO/63-2158/SD (10 Sept 1945), p. 9; CAOM (Aix), INF, Carton 121, d. 1102. For Than’s vita, see Chinh Dao, *VNNB*, III: *Nhan Vat Chi* (1997), pp. 319-20. For more details, see chapter XII.

44. Tran Huy Lieu *et al.*, *Cach mang thang tam: Tong khoi nghia o Ha Noi va cac dia phuong [The August Revolution: General Uprisings in Hanoi and Other Regions]*, 2 vols, compiled by the Group for the History of the August Revolution, edited by Tran Huy Lieu (Hanoi: NXB Su hoc, 1960), vol. I, p. 111. Cited henceforth, *CMTT*.

45. Le Tung Son, *Nhat ky mot chang duong [Diaries of A Journey]* (Hanoi: 1978), tr. 180. Cited henceforth, Son, *Nhat ky*. For an American account during this period, see “Report by Arthur Hale of the U.S.I.S. Based on A Thirteen Day Stay In Hanoi in October 1945;” Blum, *United States and Vietnam*, Appendix I, pp. 23-36. Cited henceforth, Hale (1945).

46. For details, see Chapter IX, section dealing with the Viet Minh’s national unity, *supra*.

47. Chen, *China*, pp. 126-7.

48. Letter of 22 Oct 1945, Hu Chih-ming and Yuan Yung-Jui to Chiang Kai-shek, c/o Minister Ch’en Cheng; *US-Vietnam Relations*, vol I, p. C-83.

49. Tel of 28 Oct 1945, Ho Chi Minh to Chiang Kai-shek; *Ibid.*, vol. I, C-91.

50. Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, p. 63.

51. Le Tung Son, Ho’s representative at the Chinese Headquarters was also detained as the main suspect; *Ibid.*, pp. 107-8; Son, *Nhat ky*, pp. 200 and *passim*.

52. Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, p. 64.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
55. As a matter of fact, Ho's regime was allegedly "based on and [drew] her strength from the first of Yun Yat-sen's Three Principles;" "Note" of Feb 18, 1946; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-99. Also see Chen, *China*, pp. 84-5.
56. Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, p. 98.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
58. Chen, *China*, p. 127; Devillers, *Histoire*, p. 193.
59. Department of State, Interim Research and Intelligence Service, Research and Analysis Branch, RAA No. 3336, "Biographical Information on Prominent Nationalist Leaders in French Indochina (25 Oct 1945)" (entries Ho Chi Minh and Nguyen Hai Than).
60. *Viet Nam Thoi Bao [Viet Nam Times]* was often mentioned by its abbreviated title *Viet Nam*. In 1983, there were 20 issues of this newspaper at CAOM (Aix), Library Section. According to an American official, the seven major newspapers were *Cuu Quoc [National Salvation]*, *Dan Quoc [Nationalist]*, *Viet Nam Thoi Bao*, *Co Giai Phong [Liberation Flag]*, *Quoc Gia [Nation]*, *Thanh Nien [Youth]* and *Dan Thanh [People's Voice]*. The government also published a newspaper in French, the *La Republique [The Republic]*. *Cuu Quoc* had the highest circulation, estimated at 75,000 per day; *Co Giai Phong* had the circulation of about 25,000; Hale (1945), p. 25 [reference in note 45 *supra*].
61. See *Doc Lap [Independence]*, the organ of the *Democratic Party*, which assembled the best educated *ICP* members and leftist intellectuals. A series of this title is preserved at the CAOM (Aix), Library section.
62. *Co Giai Phong*, No. 33, 18 Nov. 1945.
63. See Communique between Ho, Nguyen Hai Than, and Vu Hong Khanh of December 24, 1945 in *Cuu Quoc*, 26 Dec. 1945, and subsequent events in *Ibid.*, 28 Dec 1945; Chinh Dao, *VNNB*, vol. I-A: 1939-1946, pp. 293, 294-5. French political police's source reports that both sides reached the agreement on December 23, 1945; see "Rapport mensuel, Decembre 1945," CAOM (Aix), CP, Carton 125.
64. For details, see Chapter XI.
65. *Co Giai Phong* (Hanoi), No. 17, 17 Sept 1945.
66. *Ibid.*, No. 18, 20 Sept 1945.
67. *Ibid.*, No. 20, 27 Sept 1945.
68. *Ibid.*, No. 22, 4 Oct 1945.
69. *Ibid.*, No. 23, 7 Oct 1945.
70. Truong Chinh, "At-ly ten day to trung thanh cua chu nghia de quoc Anh;" *Ibid.*, No. 24, 11 Oct 1945. It should be noted that this was not the sole article written by Truong Chinh in the fall of 1945. In fact, he wrote quite frequently in *Co Giai Phong*. See, for instance, "Cach mang hay dao chinh?" [Revolution or Coup de force?]; *Ibid.*, No. 16, 12 Sept 1945.
71. *Ibid.*, No. 32, 11 Nov 1945.
72. Great Britain, House of Commons, 1945-1946, *Cmnd* 2834, p. 53.
73. Great Britain, House of Commons, *Debates*, 16 Oct 1945 (p. 1864) and 28 Jan 1946 (p. 257). The total casualties of the Anglo-French alliance were listed as 126 killed and 424 wounded; *Ibid.* According to Leclerc, from Oct 20, 1945 to March 25, 1946, the French lost 620 men and 1,600 others were seriously wounded; Leclerc's report of 27 March 1946; reprinted in Sainteny, *Paix manquee*, p. 244.
74. The unsurmountable barrier of this issue is that South Viet Nam (Cochinchina or Nam Bo), according to the French, was a French colony (or, overseas territory) and it would be unconstitutional to cede it to Ho's demand.
75. It should be noted that not until August 3, 1945 could Henri de Laurentie and Saller come up with the five principles of "economic autonomy" for Indochina: autonomy of customs tariff, liberty of the Indochinese currency (the *piaster*) concerning the metropolitan *franc*; autonomy of the Indochinese Exchange Office, non-application of French laws on nationalization and economic regulations and structures and, equal economic opportunities for foreign nationals; CAOM (Aix), Affaires economique [AE], Carton 576. These principles were approved by the French government on August 20, 1945, two days before de Gaulle's official tour of the United States; *Ibid.*, INF, Carton 128, d. 1152.
76. A Chinese source indicates that on August 18, 1945, Ho sent to the French another message in which he demanded an "internal autonomy" for Viet Nam for five to ten years under French rule; Chen, *Vietnam and China*, p. 107. The authenticity of this message, however, is speculative. Although Chen quotes the 10 Oct 1945 report of Hsing Shen-chow, the Chinese intelligence chief in North Viet Nam, this was

probably the same message sent by Ho on July 25, 1945. Also see the French debate on this message in ICG, *General de Gaulle*, pp. 205-206.

77. *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk I, C-67. [For reference, see note 3 *supra*].

78. See, for instance, “Giong luoi cua bon thuc dan Phap” [The French Bandits’ Voice and Tongue]; *Cuu Quoc*, No. 59, 24 Sept 1945; “Luoi giac Phap” [The French Bandits’ Tongue]; *Co Giai Phong*, No. 19, 23 Sept 1945; “Dap tan luan dieu cua giac Phap” [Smashing the French Bandits’ Arguments]; *Ibid.*, No. 21, 30 Sept 1945.

79. *Doc Lap* (Hanoi), No. 5, 18 Sept 1945.

80. See, for instance, “Vu khong: Mot thu doan hen nhat cua Do Gon” [Libeling: A Coward Act of de Gaulle]; *Co Giai Phong*, No. 17, 17 Sept 1945. Also see *Co Giai Phong* and *Cuu Quoc* in September and October 1945.

81. Tel of 17 Oct 1945, Ho to Truman; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 1, C-74.

82. *Ibid.*, Bk 1, C 80, 85, and 93.

83. *Ibid.*, Bk 1, C 87-8.

84. Ho’s note of 18 Feb 1946; *Ibid.*, Bk 1, C 99.

85. Sainteny, *Paix manquée*, p. 163.

86. Tel No. 501/4, 14 Feb 1946, and No. 515/Cabinet, 17 Feb 1946, Leclerc (Saigon) to EMGDN; CAOM (Aix), AP, Carton 3441, d. 2.

87. Sainteny, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 61.

88. *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 61. According to American sources, d’Argenlieu wanted to grant Viet-Nam a status similar to that of the Philippines, but Leclerc opposed such idea and insisted on a military conquest of North Viet-Nam; Tel. of 5 Feb. 1946, Landon to Byrnes; *Ibid.*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 58. Also see Tel of 6 Feb 1946, Caffery to Byrnes; *Ibid.*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 59.

89. This Consultative Council included four French and eight Viets, presided over by Cedile himself. Seven out of eight Viet counselors were naturalized French citizens.

90. Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, pp. 141-142.

91. Bao Dai, *Le Dragon*, pp. 150-151.

92. *La Republique* (Hanoi), No. 21, 3 March 1946. The Joint Communiqué, dated February 25, 1946, was signed by Ho Chi Minh and Nguyen Cong Truyen (Viet Minh), Do Duc Duc and Hoang Van Duc (Democratic Party), Nguyen Hai Than and Nguyen Thuc (Viet Cach), and Nguyen Tuong Tam and Vu Hong Khanh (Viet Quoc).

93. See “Les négociations vietnam-français;” *Ibid.*

94. *Ibid.*, No. 22, 10 March 1946; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk I, B 52.

95. This Commissariat included: Vo Nguyen Giap (Commissar), Vu Hong Khanh (Vice Commissar), Tran Huy Lieu, Hoang Dao Thuy, Nguyen Manh Ha, Hoang Tich Tri, Nguyen Phuc An and Doan Xuan Tin; *La Republique* (Hanoi), No. 22, 10 March 1946.

96. This committee included: Nguyen Van To (President), Le Thi Xuyen (Ms. Phan Thanh), Nguyen Tan Gi Trong, Nguyen Tri, Nguyen Van Chi, Bui Bang Doan, Hoang Minh Giam, Duong Duc Hien, Hoang Van Duc, Pham Van Dong, Nguyen Trong Nham, Duong Van Du, Dam Quang Thien, Cung Dinh Quy and Trinh Quoc Quang. Pham Ba Truc, Nguyen Van Luyen and Y Ngong (E-de [Rhade] representative) were alternate members.

97. This committee consisted of eleven members: Ms. Nguyen Thi Thuc Vien, Ton Quang Phiet, Nguyen Dinh Thi, Tran Duy Hung, Do Duc Duc, Cu Huy Can, Huynh Ba Nhung, Tran Tan Tho, Nguyen Huu Hach, Dao Huu Duong and Pham Gia Do.

98. In his 1974 memoirs, Giap arrogantly reports that the “Chinese masters” forced Khanh to sign this Convention; Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, p. 186. Ironically, however, a few years later, Ho and his associates were to experience the same frustrating situations more than once: In 1954, Zhou En-lai forced Ho to accept the division of Viet Nam at the 1954 Geneva conference, and in 1958, Pham Van Dong had to recognize the Chinese claim of sea territory extending to 12 miles from the Chinese shore in order to obtain the Chinese approval and assistance in conquering South Viet Nam. For details, see Chinh Dao, *VNNB, I-B: 1947-1954*, pp. 403-404, 406-407, 409; *I-C: 1955-1963*, p. 120; Jian (1993), pp. 109, *STVQHVNTQ* (1979), p. 32.

99. For a French text, see *La Republique*, No. 22, 10 March 1946; SHAT (Vincennes), 10H 143; D’Argenlieu, *Chronique*, pp. 188-189.

100. Tel No. 984-AS, 25 March 1946, Rene Massigli (London) to Georges Bidault (Paris); CAOM (Aix), AP, Carton 3441, d. 2.

101. Tel of 27 April 1946, Charles S. Reed (Saigon) to Byrnes; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 66.
102. *New York Times*, 9 March 1946.
103. Lacking knowledge of this unpublished note, all existing accounts of the French return to North Viet Nam consider the Sino-French staff accord on March 13 as a new agreement. For my discussion on the Chungking agreement of February 28, 1946, see Chapter XII.
104. For a French text, see SHAT (Vincennes), 10H 141.
105. Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, p. 197.
106. Also see Ho's appeals on March 11 and March 16, 1946; reprinted in Porter, *Documentation*, vol I, pp. 97-98.
107. Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, pp. 192-208; *La Republique*, No. 22, 10 March 1946.
108. *Tan Viet [New Viet]* (Saigon), 13 March 1946.
109. *La Republique*, No. 24, 24 March 1946.
110. SHAT (Vincennes), 10H 141; Sainteny, *Paix manquée*, p. 197.
111. *Tan Viet*, 1 to 18 April 1946.
112. *Populaire* (Saigon), 19 April 1946.
113. *Tan Viet*, 1 and 17 April 1946.
114. *Cite-Soir*, cited in *New Times* (Moscow), No. 24, 15 July 1946, p. 26.
115. *Ibid.*
116. Among those who mistakenly assume that the Viet Minh terrorism in the South after the August Revolution was essentially Giau's own policy is Archimedes Patti, the OSS Chief in Hanoi. In his memoirs published in 1980, Patti has gone so far as to state that "Ho and the [ICP] Central Committee in Hanoi had advised Giau to exercise moderation, to open a dialogue with the French, the Trotskyites, and the non-Communist parties;" *Idem.*, *Why Viet-Nam*, p. 359. The basic orders came from the Central Committee in Hanoi and the main executor of political terrorism in the south was Ha Ba Cang (alias Hoang Quoc Viet, a member of the ICP Central Committee since 1941). See, for instance, "Phai triet ngay bon To-rot-kit" [Let Us Immediately Exterminate the Trotskyite Gang]; *Co Giai Phong*, No. 23, 7 Oct 1945. Giau was also influenced by three influential individuals at that time: Le Van Vien, Commander of the Binh Xuyen gangsters, serving as Giau's body guard; Duong Bach Mai, Chief of the security forces in the Eastern Zone; and, Nguyen Van "Seventh" Tran, Chief of Security forces in Saigon/Cho-lon.
117. See, for instance, Thomas Hodgkin, *Vietnam: The Revolutionary Path* (New York: Sty Martin Press, 1981), pp. 334ff.
118. Letter of 22 April 1946, Cedile to Laurentie; CARAN (Paris), 72AJ 539.
119. "Le gouvernement du Viet Nam a proteste contre la declaration de M. Marius Moutet;" *La Republique*, No. 24, 24 March 1946.
120. Letters of 20 May 1946 and 13 July 1946, Laurentie to Cedile; CARAN (Paris), 72AJ 539.
121. At this conference, each delegation included twelve members and twelve counselors. The Vietnamese delegation was led by Foreign Minister Nguyen Tuong Tam, and the French were led by Max Andre. See *Tan Viet* (Saigon), 15 and 18 April 1946; Hoang Xuan Han, *Mot vai ky vang ve Hoi nghi Da Lat [Several Recollections On the Da-lat Conference]* (Saigon: Su Dia, 1971), pp. 16, 30.
122. See, for instance, the final report of the Military Council dated May 11, 1946, signed by Vo Nguyen Giap and Raoul Salan; CAOM (Aix), PA 39.
123. *Cuu Quoc* (Hanoi), 18 May 1946; Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, p. 270.
124. For my discussion on Ho's birthdate, see Vu Ngu Chieu and Nguyen The Anh, *Another School for Young Nguyen Tat Thanh* (Paris: Van Hoa, 1983), pp. 96-98.
125. Giap, *Khong the nao quen*, p. 268-73.
126. Letter of 25 May 1946, D'Argenlieu to Moutet; CAOM (Aix), PA 28, Carton 8, d. 173.
127. Jean Valluy, "L'Imbroglia du declenchement de la guerre;" in Heduy (ed), *Histoire de l'Indochine*, p. 287.
128. D'Argenlieu, *Chronique*, pp. 284-6.
129. *L'Humanite* (Paris), 12 & 13 June 1946.
130. *Ibid.*, 14 June 1946.
131. *Ibid.*, 24 July 1946.
132. *Ibid.*, 7 & 8 July 1946. Tel. of 7 July 1946, Jefferson Caffery (Paris) to Secretary of State; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 73.

133. Letter of 13 July 1946, Laurentie to Cedile; CARAN (Paris), 72 AJ 539. Also see Jacques Valette, "La conference de Fontainebleau (1946)", pp. 9-13, presented at the Colloque on "Les prodromes de la colonisation de l'Empire francais (1936-1956)," 4-5 Octobre 1984.

134. *L'Humanite* (Paris), 31 July 1946.

135. This Open Letter was signed by Hoang Quang Giu, Vu Van Tan and Nguyen Van Tu. For a French text, see Sainteny, *Paix manquee*, pp. 253-55. Giu, it should be noted, was very close to Nguyen The Truyen, allegedly one of Ho's collaborators in the 1920's. Truyen was probably present in France in 1946. Also see CAOM (Aix), SLOTFOM, Series II, Cartons 7 and 22.

136. This second Da Lat Conference (August 1-13, 1946) was presided over by General Alessandri. De la Charriere was president of the French delegation. Colonel Nguyen Van Xuan, Vice President of the Republic of Cochinchina, led the Cochinchinese delegation. Also attended were representatives of Cambodia, Laos, Chams and the ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands. All parties agreed in principle on the establishment of an Indochinese Federation within the French Union, with Da Lat as its capital and the French language as its official language. On August 4, the Conference approved the creation of the Alliance of the Mountain-peoples of the Annamese Highlands, or Republic of the Western State. For details, see CAOM (Aix), AP, Carton 365; Chinh Dao, *VNNB*, vol. I-A: 1939-1946, pp. 344-5, 346.

137. Tel. of 2 Aug 1946, Caffery to Secretary of State; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 74; Memorandum of 9 Aug 1946, Moffat to Carter; *Ibid.*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 77.

138. In 1967, Sainteny's friend, Raymond Aubriac, was entrusted by Henry Kissinger in a secret mission to Hanoi known as the *Pennsylvania Project*.

139. For a French text, see Notes documentaires et d'Etudes, No. 412: *Modus vivendi Franco-Vietnamien signe a Paris le 14 Sept 1946* (Paris: 1946). For a summary in English, see *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, pp. 80-81.

140. BNCLSD/TU, *50 nam*, p. 99; Buttinger, *A Dragon Embattled*, vol. I, p. 395.

141. Donald Lancaster, *The Emancipation of French Indochina* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), p. 162 [henceforth, *Emancipation*]; Sainteny, *Ho Chi Minh*, pp. 87-89; Pham Van Dong *et al.*, *President Ho Chi Minh* (Hanoi: 1964), p. 89.

142. Lancaster, *Emancipation*, p. 162.

143. *New York Herald Tribune*, 10 Sept 1946.

144. Tel. of 17 Sept 1946, Caffery (Paris) to Secretary of State; *US-Vietnam Relations*, Bk 8, VB 2, p. 81.

145. Sainteny, *Paix manquee*, pp. 210-211.

146. Valluy, "L'Imbroglia," p. 288.

147. D'Argenlieu, *Chronique*, pp. 335-336.

148. According to a French intelligence source, in its Directive of September 1946, the Soviet DALBURO accused "Ho Chi Minh, Bao Dai . . . and others" of being "traitors to Annamese peasants and workers;" France, SDECE, *Notice technique de contre espionnage: Extreme-Orient, Les services speciaux sovietiques en Extreme-Orient* (20 Mai 1947); CAOM (Aix), INF, Cartons 138-139, d. 1245.