

EXCURSIONS ALONG A SHADOWED ROUTE: THE UNITED STATES AND
VIETNAMESE NATIONALISM 1943-1956

by

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Map 1. French Indochina 1913. (Found at: <http://www.authentichistory.com/1961-1974/4-vietnam/1-overview/1-culture/index.html>)

I. MEANDERING THROUGH A MONSOON

The chaotic atmosphere in Viet Nam¹ at the close of the Second World War influenced the involvements and interactions between the U.S., French, and Vietnamese Nationalists. 4 September 1945, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Dewey landed in Saigon, with his OSS team, to begin the American role of evacuating American and Allied prisoners. For eight days, the OSS team was the only Allied presence in Saigon. Before the arrivals of the British and French, the team had liberated 214 American prisoners. Dewey, while working “with the Viet Minh arranged the repatriation of 4,549 Allied POWs,” out of Japanese internment camps in Viet Nam. British troops arrived on 12 September along with French paratroopers. Tensions increased over the perception of U.S. support and consent for the Viet Minh. According to George Wickes, a member of the OSS team, the French had put a price on Lt Col Dewey’s head because of his work with the Viet Minh.² The British commander had asked for the removal of Dewey as well. On September 26 1945, Dewey was killed in an ambush, possibly mistaken for a Frenchman, by the Viet Minh. This occurred less than a week after the French had begun the recolonization of Indochina.³ The chaotic atmosphere that pervaded the interactions of the French with the Vietnamese, infected the future U.S. interactions, creating confusion and roadblocks to the goals of all the participants with Vietnamese nationalism.

During the Second World War the growth of optimism and a belief in the

¹ During the preliminary research into this topic I have found that most early Vietnamese documents use the spelling of Viet Nam in the form of two separate words, while most Allied documents blanket fashion refer to Viet Nam as Indochina or Southeast Asia. I will use the Vietnamese spelling when referring directly to the country throughout this paper.

² Clay Clairborne. 2013. *The North Star*. June 15. Accessed April 4, 2014. <http://www.thenorthstar.info/?p=8821>.

³ Geoffrey Gunn, “Origins of the American War in Vietnam: The OSS Role in Saigon in 1945,” *Asian Pacific Journal*. japanfocus.org. May 9, 2009. www.japanfocus.org/-Geoffrey-Gunn/3137 (accessed 09 15, 2013).

proclamations made by the United States about self-determination, which had carried over from the First World War, gave nationalist movements in Viet Nam reason to believe the world was changing and the French would not be returning to subjugate the country again. With the end of the Second World War, however, the United States shifted its focus away from self-determination toward the perceived threat in Europe of Soviet expansion. Western European countries also continued to place an emphasis on events on the European continent. This meant stabilizing a defeated France that had quickly capitulated to German advances early in the war. Part of the push to rebuild and stabilize Western Europe came at the expense of nationalism in colonial territories for all the Western European powers. The ideology of communism played multiple roles in the events surrounding this reclamation of territories. The most prominent role, for the United States and Great Britain, was the need to build up strong blocks to oppose Soviet expansion and maintain the medieval ideal of a “balance of power” to maintain the peace in Europe. A secondary role to this was to maintain the image and prestige of France itself. Maintenance of France’s image and prestige was a reaction to the fear that France might turn to the Soviet Union and communism. The reclamation of past glory and being able to participate on the world stage were significant motivating factors in the French quest to reassert control over and benefit from its colonial possessions. The military and political decisions that culminated in America’s conflict in Viet Nam resulted from the long history of U.S. involvement begun during the Second World War. Political ideology and economic implications, interwoven with questions of the right to self-determination, drove the involvement of U.S. engagement with the Viet Minh and later French re-colonization of Indochina made a chaotic situation even more so.

Options available to the United States after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 were wide open in regards to developing alliances and future relations.⁴ The United States had opportunities to assist as well as gain assistance from small groups struggling for independence in the Asian Theater of Operations during the Second World War. While the United States focused its main military efforts on the Island Hopping Campaigns, it directed other resources to interdict and confront Japanese military expansion on the Asian continent. As the war came to a close, the potential remained for a future independent Viet Nam. Political expediency and the onset of the Cold War continually eroded Vietnamese hopes of support. The United States shifted its focus during the mid-1940s to the potential threats presented by Communism. The Viet Minh, a nationalist movement that had communist leanings, would be shut out of the benefits of self-determination. This, in part, was due to the taint of communism in the eyes of Western nations. The perceived necessity of propping up France was another factor in the events that would deny the Vietnamese a peaceful chance at self-determination.

Over the course of the First Indochinese War, the possibilities for self-determination shifted from independence to re-colonization until the French withdrawal from Viet Nam in 1956. The details of the shifting tides were lost in the archives and buried under memories of what resulted during war. Throughout the war years the

⁴ *Character and Power of the Viet Minh, 1945*, Folder 12, Box 03, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 26 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2410312008>>. "Interview with Archimedes L. A. Patti, 1981," 04/01/1981, WGBH Media Library & Archives, accessed September 10, 2014, <http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/vietnam-bf3262-interview-with-archimedes-l-a-patti-1981>. William J. Duiker. *Ho Chi Minh; A Life*. New York: Hyperion, 2000. Marvin E. Gettleman, Jane Franklin, Marilyn B. Young, and H. Bruce Franklin. *Vietnam and America*. Second. New York, New York: Grove Press, 1995.

British, French, Japanese, Chinese, and Americans all had an impact on the course of events in Viet Nam. The impact was generally one-sided as the countries did not consult or include the wishes or desires of the Vietnamese. The one-sided attitude did not stop the Vietnamese from seeking a part in the decisions made about their future as a nation. The Vietnamese continuously acted to influence the outcome of the foreign interests through nationalist movements and engagement with world organizations and nations, even while having their hopes sublimated to the wishes of the world powers at that time. During the Second World War the Viet Minh found support in the men of the OSS and the FDR administration. With FDR's death, a change took place that alienated the Viet Minh from future U.S. support.⁵ The Vietnamese were able to influence events by gaining the attention of countries such as the United States. The United States did have military personnel operating in Viet Nam during the Second World War and through the French Indochinese War as advisors and trainers to first the Viet Minh and after 1948 to the French. The men of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services worked with the Viet Minh and attempted to influence the decision makers in the United States as to the benefit of developing relations with the nationalist movement. The OSS and representatives of the Allied governments would also play a role in the aftermath of the war's impact within

⁵ Archimedes L. A. Patti, *Why Viet Nam; Prelude to America's Albatross*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). Abbot Moffat on State Department's S.E. Asia Division, 1940s, May 1972, Folder 02, Box 03, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 4 Feb. 2016.
<<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2410302002>>. Conflict in Indochina and International Repercussions, A Documentary History, 1945-1955, 1956, Folder 17, Box 03, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 26 Nov. 2014.
<<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2410317006>>. William J. Duiker. *Sacred War; Nationalism and Revolution in a Divided Vietnam*. New York: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 1994. Fredrik Logevall. *Embers of War: the Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*. New York: Random House, 2012.

Viet Nam, as well as the structure of the Vietnamese future of national independence.

The war aims of both the Viet Minh and the Allied powers played a role in the approaches taken by both sides toward the execution of the war. The United States and the Allied powers' main goal was ending the Second World War as rapidly as possible. They classified post-war decisions as non-essential to the main objective until the Japanese surrendered on 15 August 1945. During the war years and until the French withdrawal, the Viet Minh maintained hopes for a free and independent Viet Nam. The ties between the Viet Minh and the OSS, who had worked closely together during the war, provided the basis for the hopes of the Vietnamese people. The French desired to reclaim the colony of Cochinchina that they had lost to the Japanese, as well as the protectorates of Annam, Tonkin, Cambodia, and Laos. Breaking down of the relationships between the Viet Minh, the United States, France, and Britain provides potential for an analysis of the way the interactions and mutual support of allies played a role in U.S. actions toward the re-establishment of French control over the “self-determination” of the Vietnamese people.

The European desire to retain pre-war colonial possessions influenced the route of Vietnamese independence. The British, Dutch, and French all had colonies in the Far East that they were focusing their efforts on reclaiming after the Japanese took control in the opening year of the war. France's capitulation to Germany in 1940 negated French prestige and influence in the Far East, a point that FDR would use to exclude French support outside Europe and as justification for the removal of French colonial possessions in Indochina. The British worried that the removal of the French from Indochina would be a harbinger of British colonial losses as well. The Dutch followed the British lead in

this aspect to maintain their colonial territories.⁶ As a result of French capitulation to the Germans in 1940 and the permitting of the Japanese to stage military forces in Indochina, the Vietnamese viewed the French as untrustworthy.⁷ Thus, U.S., Chinese, and British forces bore the main brunt of the fighting in Asia. Once the surrender of Germany settled the European front, France began trying to regain its influence in Asia through political means. In the surrender of the Japanese, the French sought an avenue to regain Indochina. Motivation for each of the countries involved varied by factors significant to the future of its colonial states, as well as the home country's status in the world.

The relationship that developed between the Viet Minh and the OSS, through the course of the war, is one-step in the progression of the nationalist movements in Viet Nam. Nationalist movements began with the French colonization of Southeast Asia in the middle of the nineteenth century. A greater comprehension of these past actions shows that the nationalist sentiment in Viet Nam was a continuous struggle. The potential relationship that began in the Second World War did not grow into full support for the nationalists and necessitated Viet Minh moves to seek support from sources in opposition to the United States. The lost opportunities during this time resulted in part from the fear of a Soviet- or Chinese-style Communism and the misunderstanding of the differences between those styles in comparison to the primarily nationalist movement within Viet

⁶ Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: the Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*, (New York: Random House, 2012). Patti, *Why Viet Nam*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). Stein Tonnesson, *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

⁷ The 1930s: Challenge and Frustration, 01 January 1930, Folder 12, Box 02, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 4 Feb. 2016.
<<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2410212011>>. Origins of the Viet Minh (History of Early Period), 1930, Folder 13, Box 02, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 15 Feb. 2016.
<<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2410213009>>.

Nam. Even with a communist leaning in the political nature of Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh, the potential existed for a relationship that would have been beneficial for the United States and an independent Viet Nam.

The shift of the studies into U.S. efforts in Southeast Asia are traced from Pearl Harbor to the Islands of the South Pacific and then into the Korean conflict. Relegating the importance of supporting nationalist movements in Viet Nam to the background of U.S. involvement changed the U.S. approach to Viet Nam's future. The classification of the movements as a communist threat and the perceived need to support any non-communist movement including French recolonization, U.S. interest changed from 1943 to 1956. This left the narrative open to gaps of information and understanding of the impacts that resulted from the worldwide involvement of the United States. In the Asian Theater, the Korean conflict began in 1950, and the historiographical narrative then often picks up with the 1963 escalation of military advisors to the Republic of Viet Nam. This invariably has left gaps in the historical narrative of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia.

An examination of primary source material--documents sent to the United States from the field and other primary sources --highlights the path of events that would lead to both a French defeat and an American retreat from Viet Nam. The secondary source material covers some aspects of this interaction and provides background into some of the key men who played a role during this time as well as during subsequent struggles in the 1960s and 1970s. To determine the support given and received there is a need for an examination of the interactions building on the Vietnamese quest for self-determination. Examining missed opportunities that ended up resulting in a thirty-three-year struggle for an independent and unified Viet Nam clarifies the U.S. role in Viet Nam. The thirty-three

years was only the end of a longer struggle for the people of Viet Nam that had begun in the mid-1800s with the French colonization. The struggle often times mirroring the colonial administration. The background of the early interactions, during the Second World War, between the men of the OSS and the Viet Minh is critical to understanding the expectations of the Viet Minh. The expectations of both groups in relation to governmental objectives as the Second World War ended also helps to define the actions taken during the period of the French colonial repossession in Viet Nam.

The question of why the Vietnamese–American relationship failed to produce a lasting support for a nationalist movement in Viet Nam, and the role outside influences played in that relationship, has not been fully investigated. Examination of the primary – military, diplomatic, and interviews with some of the OSS operatives in Viet Nam – and secondary source material is critical to understanding the situation as it developed in Viet Nam from 1942 through the withdrawal of the last French combat troops in 1956. This study seeks to understand the interactions between Viet Nam and the United States. The interactions that resulted from the confusions of the French colonial administration and that of the nationalist movements themselves, as well as the roles and actions taken by the United States when dealing with the Vietnamese nationalist movements during the 1940s and the 1950s.

Studies of U.S. involvement with Vietnam during the early 1960s into the 1970s are becoming more comprehensive as the documents and archives are opening up to the public. Public interest in the events of this time draws a large amount of research, while the years preceding the direct military involvement of the United States in Viet Nam are

not as extensively researched. The main trends of research focus on the way the conflict played out and the tactics and strategies of the leading military and political figures who had an impact on determining the policies during the conflict, or the individual stories of the men and women involved directly with the conflict. The histories help to build an understanding of what occurred during the 1960s and 1970s, but the marginalization of the interwar years between 1945 and 1956 has left the perception that the Viet Nam conflict was a direct application of military power beginning in the 1960s. This is misleading in that the United States was and remained involved during the Second World War, until the increase in military strength began in 1963.

Historical debate about the Viet Nam Conflict tends to revolve around the conduct of the war, with an emphasis placed on three areas of contention: one a radical interpretation, the second a liberal interpretation, and the third a conservative approach. These debates mainly focus on the question of communism, the approaches between it and Vietnamese nationalist movements. These standpoints open debate for the reasons and methods of U.S. involvement in Viet Nam; however, they overlook the history that existed prior to the collision that occurred, as the Cold War grew more contentious. George W. Hopkins highlights this fact in an article for *Studies in Popular Culture* in 2000, stating that “while Americans often view the war as lasting from 1961-1973 or even from 1945-1975, it is significant that an official Vietnamese history of the war is entitled *The Long Resistance: 1858-1975*.” With the American focus being the 1961-1973 period, a gap has developed that obscures the development of U.S. involvement earlier than 1961. In 2012, Fredrick Logevall published *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam*, which looks at the events during and after

the Second World War and how the United States, France, and Great Britain interacted with the Vietnamese in such a way that eventually led to an escalation of conflict through the 1950s. This escalation resulted in the ending of French colonial control in Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia while the United States made decisions that propelled the Vietnamese and United States on a collision course in the mid-1960s.⁸

Recently, historians have begun to focus more on the Second World War as a starting point for U.S. involvement in Viet Nam. Stein Tonnesson's 2010 monograph *Vietnam 1946* looks at the events of 1946 as being the turning point of the First Indochina War (the Second Indochina War involving the United States) that spelled the end of French colonial authority in Viet Nam. Tonnesson argues that the string of clashes was the breakdown of cooperation and communication between France and Viet Nam's Provisional Government] during November and December 1946, setting off the First Indochinese War. He states that his book seeks to answer two questions: "Why was there no outbreak of war on March 6, 1946, when a serious crisis resolved itself through the signing of a peace agreement? And why did war break out on December 19" in the same year? By focusing on the events of these two dates, Tonnesson traces the decisions that could have developed a peaceful resolution to the question of Vietnamese independence. Tonnesson focuses on the Vietnamese, French and Chinese interactions to lay the foundation of the war that would lead to thirty years of fighting for the Vietnamese people.⁹

Recent works have begun to probe some of the questions of the why and how of

⁸ George W. Hopkins, "Historians and the Vietnam War: The Conflict Over Interpretations Continues," *Studies in Popular Culture*, 2000, 105.

⁹ Tonnesson, *Vietnam 1946*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 4.

the U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia. In *Access to History: The USA and Vietnam 1945-75*, Vivienne Sanders suggests readers make their own decisions about the involvement in Vietnam between the close of the Second World War and America's withdrawal in 1975.¹⁰ Sanders examines the main topics of American involvement in Viet Nam while trying to incorporate both sides, the Vietnamese and the United States. Narrowing the scope helps to highlight the involvement of the United States, however, this approach neglects the U.S. involvement during the Second World War and while the French were attempting to reclaim Viet Nam during the war until they left in 1956. While this book focuses on the political and tactical decisions that drew America into a conflict with the Vietnamese it leaves an analytical gap in those events, namely the years of involvement with the Viet Minh and then the French. In her 2006, book, *The OSS and Ho Chi Minh: Unexpected Allies in the War against Japan*, Dixee R. Bartholomew-Fies argues, "it is the actions and interactions of the OSS men on the ground and of the individuals and groups with whom they worked that point to the importance of time, place, and actor, or in other words, the importance of contingency, in understanding the tortured relationship that did develop between the United States and Vietnam." This approach opens new avenues for examining the origins of America's involvement in Vietnam while explaining the complex interactions with France, China and Vietnam. The interactions between the nations highlight the difficulty for the men on the ground attempting to accomplish the goals of the politicians. The decisions made in places like Washington D.C., London, and Paris without the knowledge of the OSS men in Viet Nam would cause conflicts among the World War Two Allies in Southeast Asia Command.

¹⁰ Vivienne Sanders, *Access to History: The USA and Vietnam 1945-75*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998).

Southeast Asia Command consisting of the United States, Britain, and China. The lower level command staffs were trying to facilitate a peace based on information that had been changed at the higher levels.¹¹ Expanding the perspective to include the various levels of command allows an analysis of the events that brings in the historical actors' voices. The men on the ground in Viet Nam were operating under the premise that FDR's policy of keeping the French from gaining the benefit from U.S. support in Viet Nam would under President Truman's administration. Along similar lines is Spencer C. Tucker's comment in the preface of his book *Vietnam*: "One could not learn the truth about the Vietnam War without first studying the Indo-China War, which in turn could not be understood without probing Vietnamese nationalist attitudes during the period of French rule.... All this reveals the truism that history cannot be understood in isolation."¹² Because Spencer's focus is the period of most direct U.S. involvement, much of the story about how the United States became involved is left unexplained.

Prior to the Second World War, France had occupied Indochina as a colony. While holding a protectorate status over Annam (the Central highlands in Viet Nam), Tonkin (the Northern section bordering China), and the territories of Laos and Cambodia. The question of shifting U.S. involvement from (minor) support of the Vietnamese nationalists to full support of French re-conquest of the region has been to this point given a summary look in the secondary sources, leaving a need to delve into the primary sources for a new analysis of the events in Southeast Asia during the 1940s through 1956.¹³

¹¹ Dixee R. Bartholomew-Feis, *The OSS and Ho Chi Minh: Unexpected Allies in the War against Japan*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 8.

¹² Spencer C. Tucker, *Vietnam*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), vi.

¹³ *Ibid.*, vi.

Source material from the conclusion of the Second World War brings questions of allegiances in relation to Ho Chi Minh and the communist countries of China and Russia. Sources from the U.S. intelligence and foreign affairs offices, along with those from the men of the OSS sent to work with the Viet Minh, downplay the communist leanings of Ho Chi Minh and label him as a nationalist first and foremost. In both military and diplomatic relations, the Allied Powers of the Second World War generally did not consult the Vietnamese. The decision to divide Viet Nam, made at the Potsdam Conference in early 1945, gave the British the task of accepting the Japanese surrender in the south of the 16th parallel and the Chinese the task in the north. The British military sent the 20th India Division an operations order to relocate to Saigon and begin the disarmament of the Japanese after their surrender in August 1945. De Gaulle's Free France government was sending letters and emissaries to the British as well as the United States during the later years of the war, trying to protect their status as a colonial power and reclaim Indochina. These documents give an opening glimpse into what occurred during the last days of the Second World War. Documentation of the U.S. opposition of the re-imposition of French colonial rule in Southeast Asia, coupled with the later military and financial assistance given the French, depicts a clear split from the Vietnamese nationalist to support recolonization by the French. The shifting of policy defines and highlights the context of the events that played out during the fall of the French rule in Viet Nam.

Answering the questions of political influence, communism's impact, and the ambiguous policy toward Viet Nam helps to clarify the difficulties on all sides. The end of the Second World War – like the end of the First World War – promised a new order

and stability to the chaos of the world that focused on recovery from the war's destruction. During the re-organizing of the status of the victorious Allied Powers, nationalist movements in countries like Viet Nam suffered under the quick fix of stabilization.

Colonization and imperial conquest had a major impact on the Vietnamese as a people and nation. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century the French maintained a presence that influenced the growth of nationalist movements within the country. The science of the times and the idea of a hierarchy of races fed into the French perceptions and administrative attitudes in Viet Nam. The French Government did not develop a cohesive organized plan, the administrations approached Indochina in a scatter shot fashion reacting to the situation rather than directing the acquisition, when expanding colonial control in Southeast Asia. This reflected uncertainty in the colonial administrations as well as among the people of France. The people in both countries reacted to the unclear ideals and made the path for the French Government and the colonial administrators disorganized and uncertain. The failures and exploitation of colonial possessions in Indochina began in the 1850s and would come to an end one hundred years later. The method of control and application of colonial rule set the stage for the rise of nationalists and the fall of French control in Indochina.

During the French Third Republic, lobby groups influenced colonial policy: The "Parti Coloniale," external to the government, as well as the formation of the Union Colonial, an internal government lobby group. The combinations of these groups were able to exercise a large amount of power in comparison to their membership size by

utilizing propaganda through the media and influence through industrial interests. The key factors that were involved with the colonial movement stemmed from nationalism, the economic benefit, and the standing of France within the European continent as an influential power. Each of these three factors had an impact on the movement toward colonial development; however, the degree to which these factors played a role fluctuated during the years of 1850-1914. The colonial mission under the Third Republic (1870-1940) mirrored the will and fears of the people of France. The Third Republic played to these factors to justify a scaled-down role in regards to expansion and administration of new possessions as the shifting tide of public sentiment allowed. The colonial lobbies were able to manipulate the government due to an increase or decrease in public support for both the colonial question and the government itself. Exploitation of the colonial resources was a primary goal for the lobby groups and was clothed in nationalistic rhetoric as justification. The French public and other colonial powers knew the “mission to civilize” as French imperial policy. The back and forth maneuvering between the lobbyists and the government over colonial expansion led to diverse and often poorly or inconsistently administered colonial possessions.

Nationalistic goals during the 1870s led to a downscaling of colonial advancement through investment and expansion, as the citizenry, particularly in Paris, was more concerned with the prestige and image of France as a power within Europe. The main rivalry in competition for colonial prestige and power was Great Britain. Prior to the 1880s, the citizens were at best apathetic and at worst violently opposed to the continued expansion of the colonies. After 1883, the internal perceptions of France shifted to external perceptions and desired to attain the glory of empire, manifested

through support of the colonial movement. With other powers' push for expansion into Africa, the attitude of the people and government of France shifted to outright expansionism, when the Under Secretary of Colonies gained large amounts of territory in West Africa. By the summer of 1890, public support for expansion had grown to the point of concern, as the populace worried about perceptions of France's prestige in Europe and the world at large, within the government and the colonies. The most significant reason for the change of attitude was the growing involvement of other European states in colonial expansion. As C.M. Andrew and A.S. Kanya-Forstner argue, the move was motivated by nationalistic patriotism due to the "indignation at the Anglo-French agreement of that year" (1890) "and its apparently deliberate neglect of French interests." In 1893, the Siamese crisis became a struggle to minimize English influence in Siam. The emergence of the Anglo-French rivalry helped to bring many nationalists to the side of the imperialists during the early 1890s. With the combination of nationalistic ideas (focusing on the standing of France as a world power economically and culturally for the benefit of the nation), following along with the colonialist ideas (focusing on achieving a similar status as the national ideas through colonial expansion), the people of France were willing to move forward with expansion of the colonial system. At times such as this the nationalistic goals misaligned from the economic and political goals and the fervor for expansion would diminish and die out, sending the nationalistic, economic, and political ideologies down separate paths.¹⁴

The diverse locations of the French colonial possessions divided the focus of the

¹⁴ The sources used mainly focus on the citizens of Paris in regards to the nationalistic attitudes and opposition or support for the colonial movement during this time. C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, "The French 'Colonial Party': Its Composition, Aims and Influences, 1885-1914," *The Historical Journal*, (1971), 100, 101.

colonial unions as well as the governmental colonial offices. The distraction of the varied colonies influenced the methods of colonial administrations within the colonies. France maintained possessions in the Far East, Near East (the Middle East of today), Africa, and the Caribbean. These possessions located in divergent parts of the world, meaning that the government had to pay four-fifths of the total colonial budget for the maintenance of the military in French colonies. The method of classification of colonies and protectorates allowed varying levels of autonomy on behalf of the indigenous populace. The French administration for colonies maintained a legislative council, while the protectorates were more simplistically organized with more indigenous control overseen by intrusive French administrators. The Algiers colony was categorized more as a part of the French Republic, thus it had representatives within the Chamber. The three classification given to possessions were: extensions of the mainland, colonies, and protectorates. Algiers was considered an extension of France, Cochinchina was considered a colony, and Tonkin and Annam were considered protectorates. The purpose of the different classifications was based on the perceived prestige brought to France by each. The economic benefits to France, and the potential to downplay and limit the influence of other European countries within the regions in which France maintained a possession, were motivating factors for the expansion of colonial missions.¹⁵

The different categories influenced the method of rule within each possession and were based on association or assimilation depending on the development of cultural and economic ties to France. Assimilation was based on giving the citizens of a colony the rights of French citizenship once they demonstrated the acceptance of French standards

¹⁵ Throughout the sources the spelling of Tonkin is used as well as the variant Tongking. Unless quoting a source I will use the Tonkin version.

of society and education. This allowed the native population to be socially mobile within the possessions, opening the door for nationalist movements when colonial administrations were not addressing the interests of those populations. Assimilation would maintain colonial administration by the natives through their own methods of governmental procedure with French oversight of administrative functions. In the case of protectorates such as Tonkin, association applied mainly to the protectorate states, which allowed for local control of the government under supervision by French-appointed administrators. While this system allowed for local native control of governmental functions, it did not allow local native populations a path to become French citizens.

According to Virginia Thompson, the significance of the Indochinese colonization and development, beginning in 1858, placed France on the “balcony of the Pacific,” The process of expanding French influence and the method of administering the colony was an intermittent process such as when France expanded its influence in Annam and Cochinchina, “brought on by a medley of Annamite commercial and missionary persecution, culminated partially by accident in the conquest of Saigon in 1859.”¹⁶ Through the acquisition of resources and the conflict with the indigenous people of Annam, France sent its military to bring stability. Likewise, the instability in Cochinchina resulted in the military forcefully taking Saigon and setting up what would become the only French colony in the Far East as Annam, Tonkin, Laos, and Cambodia would remain protectorates. French Indochinese colonization during the mid-nineteenth century was not a process that flowed evenly from event to event within Indochina or France. Nationalistic, economic and political factors played on the evolution of both the

¹⁶ Virginia Thompson, "Indo-China--France's Great Stake in the Far East," *Far Eastern Survey*, 1937: 15.

administration of the colony itself and governmental support for colonization. The French stance on colonialism during the 1880s rested on public support for internal development over colonial expansion. Public support for colonies in the period leading up to the formation of the Comité de l'Afrique Française in 1891 was generally negative as military debacles abroad turned the citizens against expansion. The formation of the Comité de l'Afrique Française, alongside moves by the other European powers to attain new colonies, reversed the internalized attitude over external expansionism of the mid-1880s.¹⁷

The initial purpose of the French moves in Indochina was the procurement of trade with the interior of China via the Red and Mekong Rivers. The introduction of French exploration of the river deltas resulted in a prolonged effort to colonize Viet Nam. Efforts to colonize the region resulted in a confused progression from one area to the next while not having a clear path of progression in any location. The piecemeal methods used to obtain rights to the resources in the colonial areas and protectorates of Indochina reflected governmental support for colonization overall from 1870 to 1914. There was no overall strategic objective to the collection of territories in Indochina; it was overall a rush to gain access to resources as well as outlets for French goods. The advancement of colonial acquisition was intended in part to curtail expansion by other European powers into the region. The deterrence of the other European powers was a driving force, however, the accumulation of wealth and status were the main driving forces behind French expansion into Indochina. These factors combined with the search for trade routes to China –with its large population and untapped resources –made the region an

¹⁷ John F. Cady, "The Beginnings of French Imperialism in the Pacific Orient," *The Journal of Modern History*, 1942: 71-87.

irresistible target for expansion. The exploitation of the natural resources in Indochina gave the French ample reason to build and maintain a presence in the Far East.¹⁸

The financial and political aspects of colonial administration can be seen in the way the Indochinese Colony was set up and run from 1858 through the early twentieth century. Indochina in 1888 was still maintained outside the Colonial Department of the Third Republic. This kept events in Indochina out of the French public eye for a time. This division also helped defray the costs of colonial administration by placing the burden more on the colony itself while France more heavily financed the other colonies. In 1898, the French government paid 91 million Francs for the colonies, a sum that included the cost of defense and the administrative costs that also accounted for the colonial governor's salary. Maintenance of his offices, and the civil deputies in the colonies as well as civil infrastructure, were drawn from this budget and augmented through local taxation. Seligman compares the 1898 budgetary expenses to the receipt of funds from the various colonies as well. Inasmuch as the government paid the above-mentioned amount, the colonies produced 5,839,000 Francs, of which 4,510,000 Francs came from the Indochina budget.¹⁹

Even with some colonies providing resources and monetary benefits to France, public support for colonialism began to decline by the mid-1890s.²⁰ The "Parti Coloniale" maintained within the Chamber even while public support for colonialism declined. Shifts of support often occurred throughout the French Third Republic. Shifts

¹⁸ Thompson. "Indo-China.": 15

¹⁹ Edwin R.A. Seligman, "The French Colonial Fiscal System," *American Economic Association*, 1900: 24. The revenues that paid these amounts were comprised of four main sources: taxation proper; tariff duties; income from colonial property; and subventions or grants of the home government. For more information on the expenditures and credits of the colonies and government in 1898, see the Appendix.

²⁰ For more details about the colonial and industrial interests, see: Seligman, "The French Colonial Fiscal System," *American Economic Association*, 1900: 21-39.

mainly centered on continental rivalries. As continental powers changed, focus from colonial issues to internal issues so too did the French public. Colonial monopolies followed this trend as well. In response to these shifts, the “Parti Coloniale” established the Union Coloniale Française in August 1893, as a federation of the leading French business houses with interests in the colonies, aided the Parti Coloniale in gaining more access to the inner workings of the government.²¹ The nature of the Chamber allowed small-consolidated blocs to maintain influence, as the government needed the middle ground to support and further the colonial agenda. The middle ground pulled members from either side to block legislation the Union Coloniale deemed inappropriate towards the furtherance of the colonial movement. The Union Coloniale used its influence and financial backing towards any venture in colonial matters that had a chance of success.²²

The Union Coloniale used many different tactics to gain support as well as understanding for the expansion of colonial possessions in Indochina. One such venture, begun in 1898, was a program to help women immigrate to such places as Tonkin “with the object of securing employment for women who emigrate and of ensuring that they receive the necessary assistance and advice.” By having women relocate, the colonial societies were advocating the need for a civilizing influence in the colonies that women could bring and this would also influence more interest in the colonial mission to civilize

²¹ Stuart Michael Persell, “The Role of the Union Coloniale Française and the Federation Intercoloniale in Colonial Tariff Reform, 1893-1925,” *Historical Reflections*, 1981: 77-91. The Union Coloniale Française was made up of business supporters, who donated 1,000 Francs a year for membership and 1,000 francs for subscription to the Union’s bulletin. Correspondents living in the colonies, protectorates, or other countries with French influence also donated 300 Francs a year. Local supporters living in France only donated 50 Francs a year. Memberships within the colonial committees often overlapped within the different colonial committees, such as a member of the African Committee could also be on the Asian Colonial Committee. Political affiliation did not prohibit membership on these committees.

²²Persell, “The Role of the Union Coloniale Française.”: 77-91.

the “less civilized” parts of French dominion. The introduction of women played a double role for the colonial administration, that of providing support for the civilizing mission, and as a morale buster for the French administrators and soldiers attempting to maintain a peace in Indochina. Up to this time, the majority of the people going to the colonies were men. This program was set up to prevent women who emigrated from falling into a life of destitution and relaxed moral virtues once they arrived in the colonies. Most of the women were employed for the education of select local natives and colonial families. The Union also set up a recruiting staff for colonial undertakings to promote a variety of occupational fields, not only taking an interest in colonialism but also supporting the immigration of workers to the colonies. The Union hosted a yearly banquet to gain financial backing for these new ventures as well as the continuance of established undertakings. These ventures were outside the governmental capacity for support but were still encouraged and condoned by the members in the Chamber to further the self-sufficiency of the colonial endeavor.²³

The political structure within the Third Republic was generally weak, a fragmented party structure with fluid affiliations that allowed the pressure group of the “Parti Coloniale” to influence both the high-ranking professional politicians and functionaries who developed policy.²⁴ Interest in colonial expansion influenced the formation of colonial societies in France to drive governmental and public opinion in support of furthered expansion. C.M. Andrews pointed out the growth and the connections between the governmental administration and the private sector interests in

²³ Henri Brunschwig, *French Colonialism 1871-1914: Myths and Realities*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1966), 125.

²⁴ L. Abrams and D.J. Miller. "Who Were the French Colonialists? A reassessment of the Parti Colonial, 1890-1914," *The Historical Journal*, 1976. 686.

his article for the *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*. "Over fifty colonialist societies were founded during the quarter century before the First World War, most with a particular interest in some area or aspect of French expansion." The consolidation of public officials involved with the formulation and implementation of French policy under the "Parti Coloniale" umbrella helped to influence the two types of the ministerial politicians, those who formulated policy and the civil servants involved in the execution of policy. The two groups within the government used a flexibility in the formation and implementation of policy that at times had no coherent method for the advancement of colonial administration or collection of funds to and from the colonies.²⁵

French programs to fund and expand colonialism were not always through the governmental apparatus. The committee utilized the funds it was able to raise for scientific and exploratory ventures as a means to further interest and provide education to the people of France. Of the incoming funds the committee raised approximately 460,000 Francs were paid out between 1891 and 1906 for scientific and exploratory mission. The committee had raised 1,425,858 Francs and the remaining balance was paid out for publishing the bulletin and propaganda to influence public support for the nationalist ideology of expanding France's colonies and protectorates. The trend of raising funds for expeditions and furthering the colonial goals would be continued as new colonial committees were formed. The same men who founded the African committee would found ones for Asia and Morocco. These men would also return to the same sources of funding for their new committees.

²⁵ Andrew, C. M. "The French Colonialist Movement during the Third Republic: The Unofficial Mind of Imperialism." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 1976. 145; Abrams and Miller. "Who Were the French Colonialists?" 686; C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner. "The French 'Colonial Party': Its Composition, Aims and Influences, 1885-1914." *The Historical Journal*, 1971: 99-128. 105.

Comité de l'Asie Française was founded in 1901, with Etienne as chairman, with the intent to manage the partition of China and organize Indochina. The “objective was to establish a vast French Asian empire based in Indo-China.” Direct colonial rule was not the main purpose in Asia, as the Comité intended to utilize spheres of influence to control the area reaching from the South China Sea through what would become Viet Nam into Siam (now Thailand). The Asian Committee’s bulletin was of higher quality and was written by known specialists, which helped to draw in investments from corporate subscribers, some of whom still supported the African Committee. In June 1901, the Government General of Indochina donated 5,000 Francs. Amongst the individual subscribers, the dominant element consisted of officers in the armed services, members of the teaching profession, diplomatists, and colonial officials. Subscriptions raised 136,000 Francs from many of the same donors who supported both the African and Asian Committees.²⁶

During the French Third Republic in the later quarter of the nineteenth century and the first ten years of the twentieth century, nationalism played a part in the colonialization efforts. A large portion of influence stemmed from the government, while a small but influential minority remained outside the government. This group was made of men that had an interest in seeing the French colonial possessions expanded for the benefit of the nation as whole.²⁷ The diversity of the men involved within the “Parti Coloniale” was not limited to the political parties of the Third Republic they, however,

²⁶ Abrams and Miller. “Who Were the French Colonialists?”: 689-695. The cost of subscription for the committee was 12 Francs at a minimum, as opposed to the starting subscription of 2 Francs for the Comité de l'Afrique Française bulletin. In April 1901 there were 136 subscribers totaling 23,370 Francs. By December that amount doubled and in the following year another 27,281.60 Francs came in.

²⁷ Henri Brunschwig, *French Colonialism 1871-1914: Myths and Realities*. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1966), 107-109.

came from a wide cross section of society. The diversity of backgrounds helped to garner diverse influence that was able to be utilized for the furtherance of the colonial expansion goals.

The growth of the “Parti Coloniale” from 1890 to 1914 was in part due to economic incentives of colonial possessions and the potential profits. An underlying factor of nationalism played a significant part in motivating the citizens to move from apathy to active support during those years. The loose political party affiliations of the Third Republic and an eagerness for the expansion of French influence and prestige in a world that was being divided between the internal and external problems of France encouraged the growth of the “Parti Coloniale”. The diverse men forming the “Parti Coloniale” were interested in economic gains but were more motivated by promoting the prestige of France on the world stage in general and improving her standings in Europe more particularly. The language used by the supporters of colonialism revolved around the sciences of the times and the paternalistic attitude towards the colonized. The stated mission for colonization was "civilizing" the territories under French control. The language was geared to garner support at home and with French allies in justifying the exploitation of the colonies. The men pushing for colonization were focused on their own well-being as well as the advancement of French prestige in the world and on the continent.

Economic interests and nationalist goals also hampered efforts in Indochina and caused confusion that played into the methods of Vietnamese nationalists and the U.S. involvement during and after French withdrawal. The pursuit of objectives between economic and nationalist goals created tensions within the administration and civil

populations over accomplishing colonial goals versus civil goals. The combination of economic interest and nationalism played an important role in the expansion of the colonies for the French Third Republic during the years from 1870 to 1914. Due to its fluidity, French Nationalism was not the sole driving force behind expansion. French nationalism within society was more a derivative of sympathy of the French public towards the indigenous peoples of French colonies, which made it susceptible to colonialism during the early colonial expansion movement. "The 'Parti Coloniale' could not make public opinion on colonialist. But at moments of crisis it could nonetheless enlist public support for colonialist expansion by presenting colonial issues as questions of national prestige." During the upswing of the 1890s, public opinion favored nationalistic goals against rival Great Britain. Public opinion later transferred support for colonialism to a new rival in Germany, during the early 1900s.²⁸

The "Parti Coloniale" held sway over some of the decisions being made but the main effort was the attempt to increase popular support for colonialism. There were times when colonialism was widely support by nationalistic efforts, such as with the competition between European states. As Germany and Great Britain increased their influence in Africa, the populace of France came in line with the colonialist idea, not as colonialists, but as nationalists seeking a greater piece of the world under imperial designs. As the support waxed and waned with the interests of the citizens, the government followed suit, making a solidified policy difficult. This back and forth momentum gave the "Parti Coloniale" a reason to develop the individual committees into a block of influence on public opinion as well as governmental influences through

²⁸ Andrew, "The French Colonialist Movement during the Third Republic: The Unofficial Mind of Imperialism.": 150.

education of the citizenry and raising funds for expeditions to help France grow economically and increase its standing on the European Continent. Some of the issues that plagued the government and citizenry were a tendency to look inward as far as rivalries within the continent and less so to the outer lying areas of the territories that France had colonized prior to 1870.

The mass circulation papers were able to influence the citizens, but more importantly were used as a political pressure tool. The lobby groups within and special interest groups or colonial societies without the government were able to utilize the pamphlets and newspapers as a means to promote the colonial ideology, strengthening the ties between nationalistic motivations and prestige in and outside Europe to gain both public and political support while also registering and influencing the mood of the citizenry. The senior leadership of the papers, including the owners, editors, and senior correspondents, in large part were members of or had strong affiliations with the “Parti Coloniale.” In addition to the mass circulatory papers, there also were highly visible, albeit short-lived, periodicals that focused on foreign affairs and politics. The interplay of economic interests, political interests, and lobbyist influences over the period of 1870 to 1914 led to a policy that had no coherent goals or objectives. This piecemeal approach was echoed in the mass media of the time.

The growth of national pride during perceived slights to the national honor of France during the Moroccan incident with Germany waned as the situation cooled and the people lost interest. The “Parti Coloniale” maintained steady pressure for the expansion of the French possessions throughout this time by the use of lobby influence and education through the media. These efforts by the lobbyists would turn away from

education of the citizenry, as the lobbyists were able to place members of the various societies, which came together to form the Union Coloniale and “Parti Coloniale,” into positions of influence and policy making within the Third Republic.

The overall expansion of the French colonial possessions had not been uniform in method or policy prior to the 1870s and remained a stuttering affair afterwards. The conclusions that can be drawn are contradictory, such as the financial and economic benefits to be gained from colonial expansion and the push for nationalistic reasons. Ambiguous policy and lack of clearly defined purpose or intent towards colonial administrations degraded the prestige of France while invigorating growing nationalist movements in Indochina. Resources and monetary returns from colonies or protectorates, such as Indochina, coupled with the prestige of holding other European interests back such as the Moroccan incident in curtailing German expansion made the colonialist expansion profitable for French interests. The initial endeavors into Africa were not as profitable monetarily; however, they did help to increase the prestige of France. This prestige came from an expansion of French territory in an area that was being divided amongst the other European colonial powers.

The overall effect of the colonial movement in France during this time was a mix of forward momentum and stepping back. With no clear direction in the Chamber in regards to expansion or withdrawal from colonial possessions French administrators in the colonies also administered the possessions with a similar uncertainty. To forward the ideals of the Third Republic, the Union Coloniale and the “Parti Coloniale” arguments for expansion based on economic progress, national honor, and the sharing of French civilization were used as justification. As the focus shifted from external prestige towards

internal prestige and security of France within the European continent, the same arguments were used to withdraw from colonial expansion. The disorganized administration of the colonies in Southeast Asia by the French influenced the future of involvement in Viet Nam for the U.S. and how the Vietnamese themselves would interact with the nationalist Vietnamese. Analysis of U.S. involvement in Viet Nam in isolation neglects the contributions and perspectives of the French and Vietnamese. Integral the story of America's involvement is French colonialism and Vietnamese nationalism.



Map 2. French Indochina Military Regions. (Found at: <http://vnwarstories.com/Maps/map.IndoChinaMilitaryRegions.jpg>)

II. WANDERING NATIONALISM

Movements for independence from external control have occurred in Viet Nam for centuries. The Chinese were the main historical antagonists that these movements briefly consolidated to expel. In the mid-nineteenth century, the French began moving into Viet Nam with designs of imperial control. Nationalist movements in Viet Nam were disorganized and mainly remained local affairs. Although these movements at times would consolidate into concerted efforts that were effective in the expulsion of foreign powers, no long-term unity was able to hold sway in Viet Nam. Movements rose and fell in Viet Nam during the early years of French control and in the midst of the First World War; some forging of solidarity and unity between the nationalist groups, mainly the revolutionary communists and non-communists with smaller groups from the reformist movements, would last beyond the immediate events of the early twentieth century. In Viet Nam during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, nationalist movements worked to dislodge the French colonial regime that had conquered Laos, Cambodia (Kampuchea), and Viet Nam. The French divided Viet Nam into three sections, Tonkin in the north, Cochinchina in the south and Annam in the center; only Cochinchina was designated a colony and the other two—along with Laos and Cambodia—were designated as protectorate states.

Civilizing missions, paternalism, and scientific racism played a role in the expansion of colonial possessions in Indo China. This language and justification of the French presence in Indochina had begun during the 1880s as France had consolidated colonial control. During the build up to the First World War, France used the same language to justify the possessions of to the people of Indochina, France, and the rest of

the world. The Pentagon Papers encompassed not just the early years of the conflict but the history of the Vietnamese under French colonial rule and the rise of nationalist movements in Viet Nam. The authors of the Pentagon Papers in “Origins of the Viet Minh (History of Early Period)” state that “in the eighty years of French domination of Vietnam there had been no increase in per-acre yield of rice, so that the comparative fertility of Vietnam’s fields were, in 1940, the lowest in the world.”²⁹ The French self-imposed mission of civilizing the Indochinese was –by deed and evidence –a pretty proclamation that failed to produce results except in the form of the enrichment of French colonialists. The French lack of concern for the indigenous population of Indochina refuted the colonial mission. To the world outside the French possessions—as long as nationalists and outsiders did not see the conditions of the people in Indochina –the proclaimed “civilizing mission” seemed productive. Thus, the nationalist movements with connections outside of French-controlled Viet Nam took the initiative of informing the other nations of the world about conditions within Indochina in general and Viet Nam in particular. Nguyen Ai Quoc,³⁰ also known as Ho Chi Minh, in 1919 presented a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing in the hopes that it would be presented to President Wilson. The letter detailed the plight of the people of Viet Nam and their hopes of being included in the discussions on Wilson’s Fourteen Points.³¹

²⁹ *Origins of the Viet Minh (History of Early Period)*, 1930, Folder 13, Box 02, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 15 Feb. 2016.
<<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2410213009>>. Pg. B9-B10.

³⁰ Nguyen Ai Quoc, with various spellings such as Nguyen ai Quac, was an alias used by Ho Chi Minh during the 1910s through the early 1940s, for ease of reference the alias Ho Chi Minh will be used throughout this work.

³¹ Letter from Nguyen ai Quac [Ho Chi Minh] to Secretary of State Robert Lansing (with enclosure), 6/18/1919 Record Group 256: Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, 1914 - 1931, Series: General Records, 1918 - 1931 File Unit: 851G.00 Declassification Project Number: NND 760060 Accessed 15 Dec. 2015. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5049414>.

During the early stages of colonial rule, especially the 1870s, Vietnamese nationalist movements remained disconnected and ineffective in advancing any type of resistance to France. Effective colonial control and the French ability to integrate the educated elite of Vietnamese society helped to destabilize such movements. In Tonkin and Annam, the elite were coopted into the colonial administrations to help run the local and regional governments, while in the south the colonial administration took all the functions of governance from the Vietnamese and allowed the business interests to retain some autonomy within the administration. In essence, this divided loyalties that had traditionally been the basis for nationalist movements in Viet Nam. Change was coming, slowly at first and more rapidly as the world felt the rising tensions that built into the First World War. French methods of control in Viet Nam changed as reactions to the building tensions increased. Educated Vietnamese began, in the late 1890s, to recognize the growing tensions as well as the faults of the French colonial administrations, leading to new paths to promote independence and nationalism.

The rise of nationalist movements was re-invigorated by the building tensions and the economic conditions that the people of Viet Nam faced as a result. France exported the natural and agricultural resources while forcing the importation of finished goods at a cost that exceeded the range that most of the populace could afford. In addition to the price imbalance, the increased repression of suspected nationalists and supporters who spoke out against French policy influenced the educated and the elite to search for new avenues that would remove the French.

In 1923, Ho Chi Minh testified at a trial in Marseilles about French colonialism and the treatment of the Vietnamese people, even as the League of Nations was

investigating French colonial rule for scandals in all French possessions. Simultaneously but not connected the League of Nations' investigation and the tribunal took place. The trial transcripts from Marseilles would later be compiled into a book that detailed the actions of the civilizing missions in the overseas French territories. Ho Chi Minh's testimony was a representative collection of the Vietnamese experience under French rule.³² The selection of Ho Chi Minh as the voice of the Indochinese is curious as he had not lived in Viet Nam since 1911; however, he did maintain many contacts inside Viet Nam and within the Vietnamese communities in Paris after his rise to notoriety for his failed presentation of a petition to U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing at the Versailles Peace conference in 1918.

Ho Chi Minh acknowledged the limited benefits Viet Nam had received from the French contribution to Viet Nam of the "railroad, electric trolley, and radio..." asking: "the question is, who forks over the pay for these marvels? Who sweats to build these machines? And later, who then profits from the well-being they bring?"³³ The bringing of technology, on the surface, would follow the civilizing mission the French Administration promoted to justify its possessions; however, as Ho Chi Minh questioned, who really obtained the benefits? In the eyes of the Vietnamese, the benefits fall singularly to the French colonists at the expense of the native Annamites. Throughout the First World War 700,000 Vietnamese were conscripted into the French Army and sent to

³² William J. Duiker *Sacred War; Nationalism and Revolution in a Divided Vietnam* (New York: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 1994), 25; Joshua Leinsdorf. *Institute of Election Analysis; the Voters Voice*. 09 1997. <http://www.leinsdorf.com/The%20Case%20Against%20French%20Colonialism.htm> (accessed 03 01, 2016). Preface; The trial transcripts were put into book form titled *The Case Against French Colonialism* in 1925. The book contains twelve chapters of testimony by Ho Chi Minh in which he details the case against the French colonization of Viet Nam during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

³³ Leinsdorf. *Institute of Election Analysis; the Voters Voice*. 09 1997, (accessed 03 01, 2016), Preface.

fight in Europe; some 80,000 never returned to Viet Nam. In his testimony, Ho Chi Minh stated that the Vietnamese “are always squeezed under all forms of taxes, loans, forced labor of every kind, mandatory purchases of alcohol and opium, and submit since 1915-16, to the punishment of being enlisted.”³⁴ The colonial administration used taxation and forced conscription to fill the treasury, along with their pockets, and to show the Indochinese loyalty to the French Union.

French Colonial administrators conscripted the Vietnamese in addition to the other methods of exploiting the country and people. Ho Chi Minh recounts details of how some Vietnamese avoiding the forced conscription into the French military during World War One. Some of the methods include the self-infliction of diseases such as “purulent conjunctivitis resulting from rubbing the eyes with varying ingredients, from quick-lime to gonorrheal pus.”³⁵ While these acts were being undertaken, the administration was playing up the “volunteer” system to show how the colonial possessions supported the French in their endeavors in Europe. Some of the enlisted were taken to the major port cities in chains and placed in barracks under guard to prevent desertions. The French police hunted down deserters whenever possible.

The administration utilized the census information to determine the number of “enlistees” each village had to provide for service in the military as well as the amount of taxes to be paid. The taking of census information began after 1873 as a measure to determine taxes to be paid by the villages and the amount of labor that could be drawn on to support French exploitation of natural resources. Villagers were required to buy and

³⁴ Joshua Leinsdorf. *Institute of Election Analysis; the Voters Voice*. 09 1997, (accessed 03 01, 2016), Chapter 1 Blood Tax, section 1 War and the Natives.

³⁵ Ibid., Chapter 1 Blood Tax, section 2 The Enlisted.

consume a set quantity of alcohol and opium from the concessioners that held the monopoly on those products. Each province would be compared to the others and based on the populations would have to purchase a set amount per person regardless of age or health. The tax equated to approximately 12 million persons being told to consume 23-24 million liters annually. The resident administrators would at times inflate the population numbers to increase the required amounts of purchase, thus increasing the amount of profit for the concessioners and themselves. In a village in Tonkin, the villagers questioned the administrator when they did not have enough food but still had to purchase the alcohol and opium allotments. The administrator's response was "You are accustomed to eating three meals of rice every day; You only have to leave out one meal, or, if necessary, a meal and a half in order to be able to consume government alcohol."³⁶ The concessioners' monopoly and direct ties to the administration guaranteed profits at the expense of the populace of the villages in Viet Nam.

The administration of colonial affairs in Viet Nam during the early twentieth century had two distinct personalities. On the one hand, the Governors of the provinces would praise the civilizing mission and the support of the people towards that end, and on the other, would obtain as much personal wealth as possible from the resources of the province they were sent to administer. Ho Chi Minh compared the administration of Indochina with that of the British administration in India and found that the French administration is bloated with functionaries who sometimes never set foot in Indochina. Ho Chi Minh cited a journal from Geneva, which stated that the purpose of the French colonial empire was in essence to restore the lost glory that resulted within Europe during

³⁶ Joshua Leinsdorf. *Institute of Election Analysis; the Voters Voice*. 09 1997, (accessed 03 01, 2016), Chapter 2 Poisoning of the Natives.

the opening years of the twentieth century, by the conquest of foreign lands. The mentality of restoring national honor through feats of military prowess led to the continuation of brutal tactics even after the military victory had occurred. Ho Chi Minh gives one instance from the area around Hunghoa being razed during the early 1900s. “When one can not get rid of a rebel, the whole village is burned.” The restoration of past glory and the brutalization of the populace directly influenced the growth of rebellions that resisted the imposition of foreign control not benefitting the local people. The influence of power and control did not only infect the colonists and administrators but it infected the clergy as well.³⁷

By the end of the nineteenth century, while suffering under harsh rule from the French colonial administration and sympathetic indigenous elites, the nationalist movements took heart from the demonstration of power emanating from Japan, as a much smaller Japan defeated not only China but also a white European power. Russia had suffered setbacks and defeats in Europe but to this point in history, an Eastern Asian country had not defeated a European power. The Japanese were able to defeat the Chinese in 1894 and the Russians in 1905. China had been a colonial power in East Asia and, although on the decline, retained great influence in East and Southeast Asia. Russia had begun expansion into East Asian territories and had been victorious until their defeat to the Japanese in 1905. The anonymous author of “The Nationalist Movement in Indochina” in a 1947 U.S. publication accredited the rise of nationalism in the early twentieth century to the “many Annamite students [that] went to Japan to study Japanese

³⁷ Joshua Leinsdorf. *Institute of Election Analysis; the Voters Voice*. 09 1997, (accessed 03 01, 2016), Chapter Civilizers 5.

methods.”³⁸ According to this analysis, burgeoning nationalists in Viet Nam took notice of these Japanese victories and began to look to Japan for the strategic and tactical methods of obtaining independence from European influence.

Nationalists within Viet Nam during the mid-1920s started to sublimate their differences –mainly in Tonkin –to varying degrees after Japan’s 1905 defeat of Russia. While the French authorities actively hunted non-communist groups, the communists were able to utilize the structures that they had gained from the Comintern and the education received from its members in Japan and Southern China. The communist movements began to absorb other nationalist groups and modify the stated objectives to influence the decimated nationalists into joining for protection and sustainment of nationalistic goals. This also helped the growth of the cells that moved south into Annam and Cochinchina. The failures of the colonial government, coupled with the modernization and progress of Japan into a power in the Pacific and Asian world, influenced the growth of nationalism within Viet Nam.³⁹

Phan Thien Chau points to the early twentieth century as a turning point for the extension of nationalism. Revolutionary thought and ideologies revolved around the

³⁸ *Vietnamese Nationalism, 1919-1940*, 06 April 1966, Folder 14, Box 08, John Donnell Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 26 Nov. 2014. <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0720814010>; *Viet-Nam: The Fruition of Nationalism*, No Date, Folder 14, Box 08, John Donnell Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, (Accessed 4 Feb. 2016). <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0720814009>; S. H.. 1947. “The Nationalist Movement in Indo-china”. *The World Today* 3 (6). Royal Institute of International Affairs: 268–77. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40392028>. 268-270.

³⁹ *Political Alignments of Vietnamese Nationalists*, 01 October 1949, Folder 01, Box 02, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, (Accessed 13 Feb. 2016). <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2410201001>>.Page B9-B10; *Vietnamese Nationalism, 1919-1940*, 06 April 1966, Folder 14, Box 08, John Donnell Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, (Accessed 26 Nov. 2014), <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0720814010>>.

events leading up to the First World War. Wilson's promises at the war's conclusion further fueled ideas of nationalism in conjunction with the Russian Revolution that began in 1917. Even with the divisional difficulties of the nationalist movements, each of these events influenced the Vietnamese. The varied nationalist movements were able to inject their own ideas into the conversation and the quest for autonomy and self-determination. The main dividing lines revolved around reform, revolution, and religious and cultural revival. Nationalist movements used World War I as a call to build cohesive movements throughout Viet Nam. Nguyen Van Vinh, in Hanoi, began using the press to promote nationalist goals within Viet Nam and the French press began to pick up and disseminate the articles to the southern regions of Viet Nam. Chau points out that "By the mid-1920's hundreds of inflammatory articles [had] been written on 'autonomy,' dominion status, and even independence in both the legal and clandestine presses."⁴⁰ The broadcasting of information beyond localized regions allowed for the increased access to support in more vast areas of Viet Nam. By the mid-1920s, the formation of several groups helped to push the nationalist agenda further than any had done for the previous seventy years. Reformist parties that formed during this time were the Constitutional Party (1923), Vietnam People's Progressive Party (1923), Democratic Party (1937), and Socialist Party (1936). Each of these parties was willing to work within the French colonial system. The two most prominent Theocratic parties were Cao Daism (1920) and Hoa Hao-ism (1939).⁴¹

The idea of restoring Viet Nam to the traditional and religious mindset of the "simpler" times of the past was enticing to the rural villagers being forced from their family villages to the cities to survive, but did not address the complex issues being faced

⁴⁰ *Political Alignments of Vietnamese Nationalists*, (Accessed 13 Feb. 2016), B9-B10.

⁴¹ *Vietnamese Nationalism, 1919-1940*, 06 April 1966, (Accessed 26 Nov. 2014).

by the people of the Mekong Delta. The least influential yet longest lived movements were the Theocratic and cultural groupings mainly centered in Cochinchina and the Mekong River Delta. This was partly due to the method of colonial administration and partly to cultural assimilation by the Vietnamese business interests in the southern Mekong River Delta. A nostalgic disconnect therefore existed that did not induce the general populace of the delta to unite into a cohesive block. These groupings would survive beyond the 1960s but would not hold enough sway over the people to become more than regional players in the progress of the nation. In Tonkin, however, the mood was more antagonistic toward French control, as the revolutionary parties' goals were expulsion of all colonial control—not necessarily a complete break with France, but Vietnamese control over internal social, economic and political aspects of Viet Nam.⁴²

The revolutionary parties mainly centered in Tonkin –with the exception of the Trotskyist movement that was centered in Saigon and some of the surrounding villages – held influence in Annam as well as in Cochinchina. The revolutionary parties were comprised of the Vietnam Nationalist Party (1927), the Vietnam Revolutionary Party (1927), the New Vietnam Revolutionary Party (1928), the Indochinese Communist Party (1930), Trotskyist Movement (1931), and Vietnam Restoration League (1931). Each group remained close to the region that was home to its seat of influence. The groups did maintain cells and or operatives in areas away from their center but held little sway in those areas. The operatives and cells working in the regions away from the central power

⁴² The Theocratic and cultural movements did not have formalized movements as seen with the other nationalist groups but. They would play a larger role after the French withdrawal and when the increase of American troops arrived in the 1960s. *Political Alignments of Vietnamese Nationalists*, (Accessed 13 Feb. 2016), B9-B10; *Vietnamese Nationalism, 1919-1940*, 06 April 1966, (Accessed 26 Nov. 2014).

base remained vulnerable to attacks by French intelligence and police raids, however, were never completely eradicated by those raids.⁴³

The letter to Robert Lansing witnesses cooperation between some of the revolutionary movements beginning in 1918. Ho Chi Minh's letter to Robert Lansing laid out eight points that paralleled Wilson's Fourteen Points plan. The eight points focused on the equalization of the treatment of the Vietnamese. Ho Chi Minh requested in the letter the "reform of the Indochinese Justice System with the rights for the Indigenes to the same legal warrants given to the Europeans, and for the complete and total abolition of the Exceptional Courts, which are an instrument of terror and oppression." The divide between the stated colonial mission and the reality is further displayed in points seven and eight as "The removal of the Decree Regime and the establishment of a System of Law ... The Permanent Representation of an indigenous elected corpus with the French Parliament, which role would be to inform of the desiderata of the Indigenous people."⁴⁴ These demands not only portray the inequalities faced by the people of Viet Nam but show their desire to work within the system of the French Parliament for the betterment of both countries. Ho Chi Minh used the French Colonial Mission to gain sympathetic support by pointing out that France has an obligation to the people of France as well as to all humanity by promoting more equity through her colonies.

During the interwar years, 1920 to 1939, the nationalist movements realized that the hoped-for support from the United States and League of Nations members would not

⁴³ *Political Alignments of Vietnamese Nationalists*, (Accessed 13 Feb. 2016), B9-B10. The Vietnam and New Vietnam Revolutionary Parties were both disbanded in 1930. The other parties survived in some form or merged with ideologically similar groups to survive the repressions of the times.

⁴⁴ Letter from Nguyen ai Quac [Ho Chi Minh] to Secretary of State Robert Lansing (with enclosure), 6/18/1919 Record Group 256: Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, 1914 - 1931, Series: General Records, 1918 - 1931 File Unit: 851G.00 Declassification Project Number: NND 760060 Accessed 15 Dec. 2015. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/5049414>.

be coming. The United States at this time remained internally focused on domestic and social issues as the approach of the signs of the Great Depression became clearer throughout the late 1920s. The League of Nations had an inability to enforce any of the sanctions the body imposed. The Japanese withdrew from the body after they had been condemned for the invasion of Manchuria, early in 1931. With the aforementioned trial in Marseilles, occurring at the same time as investigations into the humanitarian treatment of colonial subjects by the French, the League of Nations' inability to enforce or undertake actions within its mandate, was put on display as the tribunal felt that the League of Nations was impotent to make changes to the colonial workings of the time.⁴⁵

In the early 1920s, Nationalist movements faced devastating reprisals, both within and without Indochina, from French colonial troops and police. French allied foreign offices outside Indochina aided in the arrest and suppression of Vietnamese nationalists. For example, the British in Hong Kong arrested Ho Chi Minh, and upon release, the Chinese in Canton arrested him again for nearly two years. During the nearly twenty inter-war years, many Vietnamese movements within Viet Nam rose and fell under the French repressions. In part, the failures of most movements were due to a lack of security and organization as well as the movements' inability to develop a broad base of support. Playing into the lack of security was the internal fighting for positions of influence over the different groups, the external ideological fighting, and the inexperience of the groups in preventing detection by the French forces. This left the groups exposed to the raids by

⁴⁵ *Origins of the Viet Minh* (History of Early Period), 1930, Folder 13, Box 02, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, (Accessed 15 Feb. 2016), <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2410213009>>. Pg. B10. Joshua Leinsdorf. *Institute of Election Analysis; the Voters Voice*. 09 1997, (accessed 03 01, 2016). Preface.

police and intelligence-gathering operations were able to uncover the leaderships of most groups easily. The only group that had some success countering the police and intelligence forces was the Indochinese Communist Party. The movements that succumbed to the French police and military intelligence agencies were unable to provide secure communications as well as secure locations for meetings and for their own personnel to reside within the cities close to their bases of support. In Indochina, the difficulty of building support bases was a result of internal fighting amongst the members as well as between the various groups that caused the most problems for forming one national movement. The reform groups and religious groups remained regional in influence while the revolutionary groups divided their efforts in attacking each other as well as French colonial establishments. This back and forth between the revolutionary groups fed into the French intelligence services and helped undermine the growth of a cohesive revolutionary front.⁴⁶

The reformists were unable to build their movements into larger bases due to the farmers and small villagers' suspicion of the movements and their leaders as being part of the French system that took advantage for personal gain. By the early 1930s, had any of the leaders of the moderate or reform-minded movements taken into account the villagers' and small farmers' needs, they may have been able to expand their movements beyond the regions they occupied. Their lack of consideration to the needs for the villagers and farmers retarded the reformist movements' ability to garner support from a demographic that was looking for active improvement of their livelihood. Their lack of focus beyond the city did not allow the rural populations to benefit from helping the

⁴⁶ *Origins of the Viet Minh* (History of Early Period), (Accessed 15 Feb. 2016), B10.

reformists. Along with the reformist ties to a colonial administration that took advantage of the villagers gave the villagers no reason to work with the reformists, as seen in the testimony of Ho Chi Minh in 1923. Only one group was willing to address the problems faced by the farmers and villagers: the communist organizations in Tonkin. The communist groups were able to directly involve themselves with the villagers in the north and south by utilizing cell structures that lived and worked in the villages.⁴⁷

Author Phan Thien Chau discussed the success of the communist movements in his 1966 paper entitled “Vietnamese Nationalism, 1919-1940.” Phan Thien Chau describes facets of the three motivating factors that built nationalist sentiments within Indochina. He stated that the “revolutionary ideas, were emboldened by the faithless promises of the wartime Governor General of Indochina, Albert Sarraut.” The use of the press to help spread Wilsonian ideals also had a hand in the propagation of nationalist themes through the publication of local newspapers in all regions of Indochina. The pace of publication picked up as the First World War was drawing to a close. Phan Thien Chau further points out that “By the mid-1920’s, hundreds of inflammatory articles have been written on ‘autonomy,’ dominion status, and even independence in both legal and clandestine presses.” As the promises from the colonial government and Wilsonian ideals failed to come about, the fervor of nationalism rose while colonial repressions increased at an even higher rate. Nguyen Van Vinh, Pham Quynh, Boi Quang Chien, Nguyen Phan Long, and Huynh Thuc Khang were five of the primary spokesmen for reforming the relationship with France to develop greater emancipation through cultural, economic, and political collaboration. Nguyen Van Vinh and Pham Quynh were from the Tonkin, Boi

⁴⁷ *Origins of the Viet Minh* (History of Early Period), (Accessed 15 Feb. 2016), B10.

Quang Chien from Annam, and Nguyen Phan Long and Huynh Thuc Khang were from Cochinchina. All were part of the intelligentsia and active in their respective regional presses that sought to promote the reformist agenda.⁴⁸

Phan Thien Chau's explanation of the "miscellaneous movements" is a look at the theocratic and societal movements that mainly originated in and around the Mekong Delta region and remained more of a local force for resistance to French colonialism. Phan Thien Chau explains their significance as "forces of religious and cultural revival which occurred in Viet-Nam from the mid-1920's onwards and which had indirect, but influential bearing upon Vietnamese nationalism in general." Le Van Trung formed the Cao-Dai movement in 1926. This religious movement was completely native in its make-up but held eclectic outlooks on the events within Southern Indochina. In 1934 when Le Van Trung was arrested, he was succeeded by Phan Cong Tac; by 1938, the movement claimed over 300,000 faithful followers. The Hoa Hao movement began in 1939. Both movements were religious in nature with political agendas. Cultural writers of history and literature influenced these movements as well. Historiographers such as Tran Trong Kim and Dao Duy Anh were well known for their criticism of the colonial system and were strongly nationalistic in their writings. Literary leaders Nhat-Linh, Khai-Hung, The-Luc and Tu-Luc Van-Doan influenced their contemporaries then and held influence up to writing of Phan Thien Chau's paper in 1966.⁴⁹

The revolutionary groups included both communists and non-communist factions. Phan Thien Chau says that the revolutionary movement of the period was "more tangled and confused, as they were no longer purely nationalists, but more or less connected with

⁴⁸ *Vietnamese Nationalism, 1919-1940*, 06 April 1966, (Accessed 26 Nov. 2014), 1-2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

the 3rd and 4th Internationals, the Chinese Kuomintang, and even with the Japanese militarists, with some individuals and groups shifting position from side to side.” The flexibility and movement between groups as events allowed, during this period helped, the movements to survive harsh reprisals from French administrations. The “Viet Nam Quoc-Dan Dang” or Viet Nam National People’s Party (VNQDD) was the only revolutionary movement that was natively Vietnamese. The VNQDD began as a publishing expedition called *Nam-Dong Thu-Xa* in 1926. The press borrowed ideology from Sun Yat-sen –the founder of the Chinese Kuomintang –and was dedicated to the popularization of nationalism and democracy. When the Colonial Administration closed the press the leader Nguyen Thai Hoc formed a secret society in December 1927, Nguyen Thai Hoc’s appeals for freedom of the press, speech and assembly were denied by the Colonial Governor. By 1929 the group had amassed a membership of 15,000 according to the French Police in Hanoi. In early 1930, as the French uncovered the organization, the leaders decided to begin a general insurrection that ultimately failed, leading to most of its leaders either in jail or hiding in Southern China.⁵⁰

The fact that the VNQDD had to disperse out of Viet Nam and was hunted down benefitted the communist movements. Ho Chi Minh established himself as the leader of the communist movement in Tonkin and with his connection to the French Communist Party (FCP) and the Soviet Union; he was able to bring in outside support. Phan Chau Trinh introduced Ho Chi Minh to the FCP by while Ho Chi Minh was living in exile in Paris. Ho Chi Minh was trained in Moscow and in 1924 was sent to Canton, China, to help build the beginnings of a communist movement for the Vietnamese people. In 1925,

⁵⁰ *Vietnamese Nationalism, 1919-1940*, 06 April 1966, (Accessed 26 Nov. 2014), 3-4.

Ho Chi Minh founded the Viet-Nam Thanh-Nien Cach-Mang Dong-Chi Hoi. By 1930, Ho Chi Minh pulled other communist movements into his orbit and became the leader of a unified group consisting of the Phuc-Viet, Thanh-Viet, Cach-Mang Dang, and the Tan-Viet Cach-Mang Dang. This grouping was renamed Dong-Duong Cong-San Dang in Hong Kong in 1930, with ties to the Comintern.⁵¹

While the organizational processes were being undertaken in Canton and Hong Kong, the communist movement had begun to insert agents into the northern provinces of Viet Nam to begin establishing cells that would be ready when the time came for insurrection against the French colonial government. French Police did not completely pacify the uprisings that began in May 1930, until 1932. The British police, at the behest of the French in Indochina, arrested Ho Chi Minh in June of 1931. In 1933 in Cochinchina, Tran Van Giau formed the Trotskyist group, known as the Struggle Group, from the fragmentations that occurred during the repressions of 1930 to 1931. In 1935, the Trotskyists were able to win positions on the Saigon Municipal Council. In both the North and South, the communists formed legal groups that attempted to bring together all nationalist groups under one leadership with the goal of removing imperialists from Viet Nam. In the South, nationalists formed the Dong-Duong Dai-Hoi, or the Indochinese Congress, while in the North the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) formed the Indochinese Democratic Front. Renewed repressive actions by French police and intelligence agents began in 1936 and lasted until 1939, driving the movement underground. In 1940, the ICP re-emerged in southern China under the new name of Viet-Nam Doc-Lap Dong-Minh Hoi (the Viet Minh). In 1937, the Trotskyists broke with

⁵¹ *Vietnamese Nationalism, 1919-1940*, 06 April 1966, (Accessed 26 Nov. 2014), 4.

the ICP and other communist groups over the decision to collaborate with the bourgeois elements within Saigon's municipal structure.⁵²

The rise of nationalistic fervor did not occur rapidly, according to Vu Van Thai, Vietnamese Ambassador to the United States from 1965 through 1967. In his study of the evolution of nationalism, Vu states, "It was not until the Great World Depression of 1929-1931, which sent violent tremors into the infrastructure of the Vietnamese Society and exposed the inhuman design of colonial economies that nationalism became accessible to the popular masses." It was through the hardships of the Depression years that nationalists were able to join with and encourage the rural farmers to participate in the movements for independence and self-determination. As the colonialists changed the structure of Vietnamese society away from the small, self-sufficient farmer to a more proletariat system of large agro-business or mining "unprecedented misery of the masses and selfishness of the colonial policy prompted a new style of nationalism." This new growth of nationalism revolved around the VNQDD and the ICP. Immigration and emigration added to the tensions created by the imposition of colonial control while feeding nationalism against colonialism. Small farmers and villagers moved to the cities because of the colonial ambitions and occupations of the farming lands by French business ventures. The influx of colonists to the cities from France further distanced the Vietnamese people from the life and culture they had known. Adding more fuel to the nationalist fervor that grew out of the early 1930s.⁵³

⁵² *Vietnamese Nationalism, 1919-1940*, 06 April 1966, (Accessed 26 Nov. 2014), 4-5.

⁵³ *Viet-Nam: The Fruition of Nationalism*, No Date, Folder 14, Box 08, John Donnell Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, (Accessed 4 Feb. 2016). <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0720814009>, 1-3.

The VNQDD were unable to sustain themselves under the active repressions by the French police and intelligence agents due to VNQDD's lack of experience in revolutionary techniques inappropriate security measures against the well-trained police and intelligence apparatus of the colonial system. The Kuomintang gave the VNQDD no concrete support, while the Comintern and the 3rd and 4th Internationals provided instructional and moral support to the ICP. The ICP, on the other hand, was able to sustain themselves due to the cooperation with the FCP, Soviet support for the revolution, and a more decentralized cell structure in Viet Nam. The Pentagon Papers address the resourcefulness of the communist movements as they "endured the purges of 1930-1932 and 1939-1940,"⁵⁴ the testimony to their organizational skill and strength established them as the capable motivators for the people of Indochina during that time. The ability to go underground while the VNQDD did not have the support of the populace outside the cities played havoc with their structure and survivability.

In mid-1940, France fell to the Germans and shortly thereafter the collaborationist Vichy Government was established. The Japanese played down the ties from Germany to the Vichy in their bid for greater influence and control in East Asia. In June, the Vichy Government and Japan signed the *Franco-Japanese Protocol Concerning Joint Defense of Indo-China* on 29 June 1940. This protocol declared, "in case the security of French Indo-China is menaced, Japan will have reason to consider that the general tranquility in East Asia and her own security are in danger."⁵⁵ In essence, this was justification to

⁵⁴ *Origins of the Viet Minh* (History of Early Period), (Accessed 15 Feb. 2016), B17.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, B18; *Franco-Japanese Protocol Concerning Joint Defense of Indochina, July 29, 1941, 29 July 1941*, Folder 04, Box 03, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, (Accessed 4 Feb. 2016), <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2410304008>>.

conduct military operations in Mainland China while closing Indochina off to Allied routes into China as well as supplies out of Indochina.

Vice Admiral Jean Decouz –the Vichy colonial administrator in Indochina –put a positive face on the client status of the French in Indochina. Stating, “A country is not occupied if it keeps its own army free in its movements ... if its general services and particularly its police and security forces remain firmly in the hands of the sovereign authority and outside of all foreign interference.”⁵⁶ French troops and police in Indochina were not strong enough to fight against Japanese wishes and it was a convenience for the Japanese to allow the administration to remain while focusing the bulk of its military to other ventures in East Asia and the Pacific Ocean. Commercial treaties, signed between Japan and France, diverted economic assets away from France towards Japanese war efforts and Japan’s home front in mid-1941. This diversion of resources only deepened the economic issues for the Indochinese peoples as the trade benefit received from sending the goods to France –as small as it was –completely vanished when Japan did not reciprocate trade goods into Indochina. The resentment many Vietnamese felt during the early years of the Second World War grew out of this and the further display of French impotence. This helped fuel nationalistic attitudes as the image of the French became that of incompetence, lack of concern and the proof of the inaccuracies of the “civilizing mission”—the French justification for being in Indochina since the mid-nineteenth century.

In 1942, Ho Chi Minh was arrested in China as he was working on building up his organization to resist the Japanese and the French occupations of Viet Nam. By 1943 he

⁵⁶ *Origins of the Viet Minh* (History of Early Period), (Accessed 15 Feb. 2016), B17-20.

was released –on whose authority is unclear. Some speculate Chang Kai-Shek and others Chang Fa-kuei as the facilitator of his freedom. It was at this time that Nguyen assumed the name he would hold until his death in 1969: Ho Chi Minh. Upon his release, Ho Chi Minh revived his nationalist movement and consolidated it with other groups in hiding in southern China. This new grouping became the foundation for the Viet Minh, which would lead the fight against both the Japanese and the French for independence. During the war years, the nationalist movements continued their push for independence. The revolutionary and theocratic movements suffered during the war while the reformers were able to gain some ground by working within the system. The short term looked bright for the reformers, while in reality the fact that they cozied up to the French and Japanese spelled their demise as the war came to a close with an Allied victory. With the internment of the French in Viet Nam, on March 9, 1945, the Viet Minh were able to transfer more focus to the Japanese and set the stage for the post-war eventualities that appeared on the not too distant horizon. By August 1945, the fall of the Japanese was evident and the Viet Minh strategically, tactically and effectively filled the power vacuum of the collapsing occupation.⁵⁷

According to the authors of the Pentagon Papers: “Whatever may be said for the distortions of the historical record by the communist historians to magnify the importance of the Viet Minh, it is fact that the American O.S.S. during World War II dealt with the Viet Minh as the sole efficient apparatus within Vietnam.”⁵⁸ Both sides played down the significance of the activities and interactions between the OSS and the Viet Minh during the war, as the willingness to vilify Cold War adversaries became the pattern of action.

⁵⁷ *Origins of the Viet Minh* (History of Early Period), (Accessed 15 Feb. 2016), B22-B27.

⁵⁸ *Origins of the Viet Minh* (History of Early Period), (Accessed 15 Feb. 2016), B27.

Both sides avoided direct connections based on the differences of ideologies. The Viet Minh provided intelligence to the Allied powers and physical assistance in P.O.W. recovery capabilities did not exist outside the Viet Minh structure. As the nationalists' capabilities had diminished because of the depth of French repressions over the years. Another often-overlooked factor in the value of the Viet Minh is that the French administrations both in and outside Viet Nam were withholding information in an attempt to influence U.S. acceptance of re-establishing French Dominion in Indochina after the war's end. On September 2, 1945 in Ba Dinh Square Ho Chi Minh presented a speech to the people of Viet Nam. In his speech, Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnamese independence based on the *French Declaration of the Rights of Man*, the *U.S. Declaration of Independence*, the *Atlantic Charter*, and the *United Nations Charter*. By invoking parts of these documents, he hoped for the inclusion of the intent as well as meaning of these documents in the recognition of the nation of Viet Nam and its ties to the Allied efforts to halt Fascism and Imperialism in Southeast Asia. At the time Ho Chi Minh gave the speech, several OSS officers were present, such as Archimedes Patti, and during the speech a U.S. marked aircraft flew over the assembly. Vietnamese of all political leanings took this as a sign of support that the United States was willing to follow through with the ideals of freedom and the spread of democracy to all corners of the earth.⁵⁹

The Provisional Government declared the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRV) as an independent nation, established provisional control to aid in the

⁵⁹ "Interview with Archimedes L. A. Patti, 1981," (accessed September 10, 2014). *Constitution and Administration of Indo China. Comparison of Pre-War Position with Reforms Now Promised*, 28 March 1946, Folder 11, Box 01, Peter Dunn Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. (Accessed 26 Nov. 2014), <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0800111017>>.

disarmament of the Japanese, and maintain a stable civil control throughout the country. The Provisional Government of the DRV maintained order in Tonkin and Annam and began officially taking the surrender of the Japanese troops in those areas. On September 2, 1945, the Viet Minh declared Vietnamese Independence, the leading group within the Provisional Government. The declaration addressed the entirety of Viet Nam as one unified country. The reach of the Provisional government extended to Cochinchina as well, however in Saigon the Provisional Government was a cooperative effort amongst the leading independence groups in the region. This cooperative effort overall divided the attentions of the participants but they were able to maintain order in the area.

In late August 1945, the commander General Douglas Gracey of the 20th Indian Division received orders, from Lord Louis Mountbatten the senior British commander in the South East Asia Command, to proceed to Saigon and begin the process of accepting the Japanese surrender in the southern half of Viet Nam. When General Gracey with his lead elements of the division landed in Saigon in September of 1945, he found the city running smoothly. While General Gracey disarmed the Japanese and released the prisoners they had interned earlier in the year, he also began arming the French. When the French released internees began skirmishes with the Provisional Government General Gracey turned a blind eye. On September 19, 1945, the skirmishes escalated into a coups d'état against the Provisional Government. The escalation of attacks into the chaos of a coups d'état destroyed that the Provisional Government had established. This coups d'état in essence marked the beginning of the First Indochina war.

American service members in their roles for the OSS were present as the fighting broke out between the French and Viet Minh. On September 22 1945, America's first

military fatality occurred. Colonel Peter Dewey was traveling between his OSS headquarter and the Tan Son Nhut Airfield outside Saigon where he was ambushed and killed. Colonel Dewey was in the process of returning to the OSS headquarters when he was killed. General Gracey had asked for his removal from Viet Nam because of the OSS stance against French reassertion of colonial control and his perceived overly supportive attitude towards the Viet Minh.

Various cease-fires were declared and broken by one side or the other between 1946 and the signing of the Geneva Accords in 1954.⁶⁰ The years between September 1945 and May 1954 were a struggle for independence and nationalism that involved the Viet Minh and French-supported puppet governments. The focus of the struggle was the French re-imposition of colonial control until roughly 1948. The focus had shifted to an anti-communist movement by supporting nationalists who opposed Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh. The Viet Minh had established themselves as the leading nationalist movement by the conclusion of the Second World War. Competing nationalist movements did not just vanish from the scene. Some merged with the Provisional Government and others merged with the Viet Minh directly. A few, such as the Trotskyist in Saigon, directly –although ineffectually –challenged the Viet Minh. The ability of the Viet Minh to directly address the issues of the peasantry while including the non-communist nationalist groups aided their ascension to the pinnacle of influence over the route of Vietnamese nationalism.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *Constitution and Administration of Indo China. Comparison of Pre-War Position with Reforms Now Promised*, (Accessed 26 Nov. 2014).
Gunn, Geoffrey. "Asian Pacific Journal." japanfocus.org. May 9, 2009. www.japanfocus.org/-Geoffrey-Gunn/3137 (accessed 09 15, 2013).

⁶¹ M. E. Dening. "Review of Political Events in South-East Asia 1945 to March 1946." *Intelligence Assessment of South-East Asia, 1946*; David W.P. Elliott. *The Vietnamese War; Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta 1930-1975*. Vol. 1. New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2003; Mark Atwood Lawrence. *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam*. (Berkeley University of California Press, 2005).

By the opening of 1946, the French were pressing for the reassertion of their colonial dominion and the integrated nationalist movements under the Viet Minh were openly fighting to hold onto the autonomy they had established with the fall of the Japanese. Ho Chi Minh had held out hope for support from the United States and through his influence over the burgeoning Vietnamese government in Hanoi was actively writing and seeking aid from that quarter to halt French incursions. With the FCP, the Soviet Union not actively supporting the goals of independence and autonomy the DRV had little outside help in thwarting French ambitions. French colonialism and Vietnamese nationalism remain the building blocks of future entanglements in Viet Nam. The United States followed similar patterns of action that both the French and Vietnamese had begun.



Map 3. French Indochina Colonies and Protectorates. (Found at: http://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/source_images/CP-Vietnam2015-F1.PNG)

III. THE LOST TRAILS

In January 1918, President Woodrow Wilson laid out his plan for the world after the conclusion of what was to become the First World War. In his plan, Wilson declared “the day of conquest and aggrandizement is gone by.”⁶² The fifth point called for the “adjustment of colonial claims” that would allow self-rule and self-determination for the colonized peoples, allowing for colonized peoples to direct their own nations and establish themselves within the world. In order for this to come about, point fourteen called for the League of Nations to be established to monitor and mediate questions and concerns of the nations of the world. The League of Nations was to facilitate Wilson’s Fourteen Points on a global scale; in reality, it directly benefited a Eurocentric view of world events. In Wilson’s view the World had descended into war as a result of imperial conquest and, to ensure the safety and future of nations, the civilized nations would have to stand together to prevent recurrences of this in the future. In June of the same year Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh) wrote a letter to United States Secretary of State Robert Lansing. The intent of this letter was not to break with the French but to create a more equitable relationship between the French and Vietnamese. The idea of self-determination was not only about gaining full independence but also for the allowance of the colonial people to grow and become a part of the larger world.⁶³

⁶² *Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points*, Lillian Golman Law Library. The Avalon Project. 2008. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp Points 5 and 14.

⁶³ Nguyen Ai Quoc is an alias of Ho Chi Minh. Copy of letter found on 15/10/2015 at the following website. Letter to Robert Lansing from Nguyen Ai Quoc, <http://vietnamwar.lib.umb.edu/origins/docs/Lansing.html> <https://research.archives.gov/search?q=letter%20from%20ho%20chi%20minh&rows=20&offset=0&tabType=all&facet=true&facet.fields=oldScope,level,materialsType,fileFormat,locationIds,dateRangeFacet&highlight=true&f.dateRangeFacet=%221940%20-%201949%22> Ho Chi Minh was born Nguyen Sinh Cung on May 19 1890, and also went under the alias of Nguyen Tat Thanh at times. This information was found at

One side of the question of support revolved around the ideological conflicts of nationalism and self-determination, the other side centered on the support of allies against the perceived expansion of communist control. This conflict ultimately defined the methods of interaction in Viet Nam. From the initial attempts by Ho Chi Minh to gain support for his nationalist movement in Viet Nam to the French re-imposition of colonial control the United States acted in favor of both countries at different points through the Second World War and continuing through the prosecution of the Franco-Viet Minh War, also called the French-Indochina War (1945-1954). During the Versailles Peace Conference in 1918, Ho Chi Minh began attracting U.S. attentions. He would continue working to gain support throughout the Franco-Viet Minh War. The United States had to navigate between stated national ideologies and alliances to European powers that contradicted the ideals of self-determination.

During the Second World War the state of affairs in Southeast Asia was confusing to say the least. The situation was made even more complicated by the actions of the United States, France, Britain, China, or the nationalist movements in Viet Nam. With the war's end, the situation appears to have grown worse with the push to turn back the clock to reclaim the territories and status that had existed prior to 1939. During and after the Second World War, U.S. policy shifted in regards to allies in Southeast Asia. How and why did communism, other allied political perceptions, and the Cold War influence the situation in Viet Nam and factor into the change of direction for U.S. policy in Southeast Asia? The exploration of these questions will help foster an understanding of U.S. involvement with Viet Nam. This chapter examines the events that built towards the

<http://www.chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/English/TheSocialistRepublicOfVietnam/AboutVietnam/AboutVietnamDetail?categoryId=10000103&articleId=10000509> and accessed on 20/10/2015.

military and political decisions that culminated in America's conflict in Viet Nam. The analysis of the information from the U.S. and Vietnamese sides details the path that was taken and allow for an understanding of the complexities that built into a thirty-year war.

Primary source material from the conclusion of the Second World War brings into question the allegiances between the relations of Ho Chi Minh and the communist countries of China and Russia. Both countries questioned Ho Chi Minh's dedication to communist doctrine and feared that they would not be able to control the path of Vietnamese independence. Some sources from the United States and the men sent to work with the Viet Minh downplay the communist leanings of Ho Chi Minh by labeling him as a nationalist first and foremost. While the British military in India received an operations order to relocate to Saigon and begin the disarmament of the Japanese after their surrender in August 1945, the French were sending letters and emissaries to the British as well as the United States. During this stage of the war, French intentions were to protect their status as a colonial power and reclaim Indochina. Documentation of U.S. opposition of the re-imposition of French Colonial Rule in Southeast Asia, coupled with the later military and financial assistance given to the French, depicts a divergent line of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. This line of demarcation should be examined in the context of the events that would play out during the fall of French rule in Viet Nam. The United States was involved with Viet Nam shortly after the Second World War began and that commitment grew with the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ The Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech holds a large collection of primary source information available online and was used to for this paper *Vietnamese Nationalism, 1919-1940*, (Accessed 26 Nov. 2014), <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0720814010>; S. H. "The Nationalist Movement in Indo-China." *The World Today* (Royal Institute of International Affairs) 3, no. 6 (June 1947): 268-277.

The ideals expressed by Wilson did not remain with him in the past. Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) carried those ideals into the Second World War. FDR utilized the concept of self-determination as well as trusteeship to promote the idea of ending colonial rule in the world. The writers of the Pentagon Papers expressed the attitude FDR held towards colonial rule and the Colonial Vichy Government in Indochina as his being “especially distressed at the Vichy ‘sell-out’ to Japan in Indochina, often cited French rule there as a flagrant example of onerous and exploitative colonialism, and talked of his determination to turn Indochina over to an international trusteeship after the war.”⁶⁵ The fervor of FDR’s prevailing attitude towards the French was not just raised by the colonial aspect of the Vichy capitulation to Japan but the way in which France had succumbed to the German assault. The Second World War brought many other challenges and confusing directions for the future of colonial powers in the world. Adding to the frustrations FDR felt towards the French was the fact that they were selling rice to further Japan’s war aims while neglecting the Vietnamese peoples’ need for food. The economic ties between France and Indochina played a significant role in the opinions and thoughts of Roosevelt. These opinions were formed from some of the reports of the OSS operatives in Southern China and Viet Nam during the Second World War.⁶⁶ The resources that came out of Indochina during French control were agricultural, such as rice and other foodstuffs along with natural resources such as tin and rubber.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Pentagon Papers Volume 1: Vietnam and the U.S., 1940-1950*. National Archive Identifier 5890485[Online version, www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/, National Archives and Records Administration, October 25, 2015]. A3-A4.

⁶⁶ "Interview with Archimedes L. A. Patti, 1981," (accessed September 10, 2014); Patti, *Why Viet Nam; Prelude to America's Albatross*, (1980), 61-71.

⁶⁷ *Vietnamese Nationalism, 1919-1940*, (Accessed 26 Nov. 2014); S. H. "The Nationalist Movement in Indo-China", 268-277; Patti, *Why Viet Nam; Prelude to America's Albatross*, (1980).

The nationalist movements continued to press U.S. and French officials for reforms allowing economic and political autonomy within Viet Nam. The basis for Vietnamese nationalism during the Second World War was the words and ideas put forth by FDR. In mid-December 1943, upon returning from the Tehran Conference, FDR intimated that although the people of Indochina were not adequately prepared for complete independence due to the lack of effort or concern by the French: "This was no reason to allow the French to wander in and reclaim colonial control."⁶⁸ This was a tangible ideal that men such as Ho Chi Minh took to heart in the push for independence. Throughout the political maneuverings of the war, FDR proposed ideas of trusteeship for colonial peoples that would allow for a building of self-sufficiency and eventual complete independence. Archimedes L. Patti, an OSS officer in contact with Ho Chi Minh, stated that in 1945 "We had him [Ho Chi Minh]. He was willing to, to be a democratic republic, if nothing else. Socialist yes, but a democratic republican. He was leaning not towards the Soviet Union, which at the time he told me that the USSR could not assist him, could not help him."⁶⁹ Patti and the commanders in China during the war were surprised when Ho asked for neither money nor weapons. Ho Chi Minh had only asked that communications between the Viet Minh and the Allies be opened to help facilitate the mission of defeating the Japanese. Ho Chi Minh's main objective was maintaining an eye toward future relations to help maintain an independent Viet Nam, free of French colonial control.

The U.S. Allies were not universally accepting of Roosevelt's ideas and propositions, of full independence or trusteeship of colonial peoples. Significant

⁶⁸ Logevall, *Embers of War: the Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*. (2012).(Ebook version on Nook) P. 73.

⁶⁹ "Interview with Archimedes L. A. Patti, 1981," (accessed September 10, 2014).

resistance resulted from the potential degradation of European influence throughout European-controlled colonial possessions. The French capitulation to Germany in 1940 allowed for FDR to shift the focus away from British colonial interests. Not only did France capitulate to the Germans, but also the colonial Governor in Indochina agreed to a treaty with Japan allowing for Japanese expansion into Southeast Asia. The Vichy Government's capitulation and lack of communication with the Allies added to Roosevelt's frustrations about the situation in Southeast Asia. While the means to resist were still available to the French government, Roosevelt felt that it was dishonorable to cooperate with the enemy. Those feelings of frustration would only highlight the ideas FDR expressed to the White House Correspondents' Association in March 1941. FDR told the correspondents: "There has never been, there isn't now, and there never will be, any race of people on earth fit to serve as masters over their fellow men"⁷⁰ FDR pushed his ideology for self-determination and nationhood no matter the size of the nation. These ideas were not popular with Winston Churchill, as the concerns of maintaining Britain's colonial empire throughout and after the Second World War remained the focus of British overseas policy. To forestall British criticism of FDR's belief that colonialism was a large factor in the outbreak of the war, FDR directed his attack of colonialism towards the French neglect of Indochina. FDR laid the blame for Japanese abilities to attack the Philippines and other Pacific Islands on the French Indochina colonial

⁷⁰ *Pentagon Papers Volume 1: Vietnam and the U.S., 1940-1950*. National Archive Identifier 5890485[Online version, www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/, National Archives and Records Administration, October 25, 2015]. A3-A4

government. The consistent failure of the Vichy authorities to communicate to the United States played into Tokyo's advancement in the Far East.⁷¹

The efforts of the OSS men and the Viet Minh on the ground in Southern China and Northern Viet Nam helped strengthen the nationalistic goals of the Viet Minh, allowing for the rise of hope and the development of a strong ally to back the Vietnamese push for independence. Another measure that increased hope for an independent Viet Nam was the Atlantic Charter, which was signed by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill on August 14, 1941. The first three points of the Atlantic Charter were

1. Their countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other.
2. They desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned.
3. They respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of Government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.

These were the key points that drew the attention of not only the Viet Minh and other nationalist groups in Viet Nam but the entirety of nationalist groups around the world. The fact that two of the more powerful countries were engaging in efforts to stop the aggressive expansion of Germany and Japan without seeking territorial gain was uplifting to these movements. The second point was viewed by the colonized peoples as a mandate to be able to determine the future by allowing them to freely exercise their desire in regards to self-determination. The third point reinforced the second by explicitly stating the ideals of "Self-Determination." These points provided a sense of security to the

⁷¹ Logevall, *Embers of War: the Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*, (2012), (Ebook version on Nook), 63, 68.

nationalist movements. The Viet Minh continued the relationship with the OSS with the intent of garnering greater support and resources to realize the goals of independence.⁷²

From 1944, the French began petitioning the British and Americans for a greater role in the Asian Theater. The request was routed through the British Foreign Office. The perception that the war was coming to an end had emboldened the French to begin seeking participation in the area, not as a measure to end the war faster, but in order to be strategically placed to reenter Indochina. These moves were through political channels as well as military. In *Why Viet Nam: Prelude to America's Albatross*, published by the University of California Press in 1980, Archimedes L.A. Patti describes the French subterfuge in trying to gain access to the command structure in Southeast Asia to facilitate the reinsertion of French Control in Indochina. The French wanted to attach a military mission to the established South East Asia Command (S.E.A.C.) that was jointly operated by the United States and Britain. The mission the French wanted to attach to was the Blaizot mission. This would allow French military planners to be included in the planning and conduct of operations along with bringing French military forces to the region to be poised to reenter Indochina. This portion of the French request was forwarded to the United States Chiefs of Staff because Indochina fell under the China Command section based in Kunming, in Southern China. The British Foreign Office worked the political aspects of the request within the British governmental departments. The major concerns the French had were the reclamation of economic assets and their

⁷² The Atlantic Charter of 1941 <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp>. The Atlantic Charter was also used by the signatories to help establish the goals of setting up organizations that would, after the war, help promote peace in the world and reduce the need for armaments by nations. The charter can be viewed as setting the foundation for the United Nations. It was also used by people that were being oppressed under the colonial systems as a means of gaining and maintaining freedoms that the colonial system suppressed.

own citizenry. The language used in the Atlantic Charter gave the French concerns about the possibility of being able to maintain their colonial interests in Indochina. Without the French being directly involved in the liberation of the colonial possessions in Southeast Asia, it was unlikely that French control could be reasserted in Viet Nam. To achieve this, France needed to maintain a presence in SEAC. The condition of command at SEAC was such that the French were able to insert themselves into the picture. Patti described what he found there: "When I undertook the Indochina mission in the fall of 1944 I was thoroughly baffled by the interlocking interests and unrelated operations in SEAC and the China Theater. The overlapping command structures, conflicting national objectives, inter-Allied and interagency jealousies, and intraagency power struggles militated against effective operations and resulted in enormous waste of human effort and national funds."⁷³

The wording and connotations of the Atlantic Charter caused concern among the British as well because of their interests and desire to maintain colonial territories. From August to October 1944, the Dumbarton Oaks Conference held at Georgetown in Washington D.C. The purpose of the conference was to establish the blueprint of the post-war international system to provide security and stability. During the conference, the British skirted the question of colonial issues to avoid making a commitment to withdraw from their colonies. The United Nations was the result of agreements between the Allied powers, in which Viet Nam was given parallel status with Burma, Malaya, and the Dutch East Indies as free territories to be reconquered by the colonial powers. In February 1944, Winston Churchill wrote about his fears of what would happen to the colonial

⁷³ Patti, *Why Viet Nam; Prelude to America's Albatross*, (1980), 19, 23.

possessions if the United States were able to force a withdrawal by the Japanese. Churchill stated, “the United States Government would after victory feel greatly strengthened in its view that all possessions in the East Indian Archipelago should be placed under some international body upon which the United States would exercise a decisive concern.” The British hesitancy to withdraw from colonial possessions worked to the benefit of the French in this case.⁷⁴

Winston Churchill worried that the position of the U.S. president would influence anti-colonial sentiments, not only in the French empire, but also in all European empires and specifically the British possessions. “I can’t believe,” FDR reportedly said, “that we fight a war against fascist slavery, and at the same time not work to free people all over the world from backward colonial policy.”⁷⁵ Churchill did not protest this stance by FDR very loudly at the time due to his concern about continental European events. During the war the tensions between FDR and Churchill over the colonial question continued to rise as the French pushed for inclusion in the process of developing the post-war strategies and allocation of military sources to bring about the end to the war.⁷⁶

Patti details one instance when France attempted to bypass U.S. opposition to French involvement in Asia when “De Gaulle sent a large military mission, headed by Lieutenant General Roger C. Blaizot, to Ceylon.”⁷⁷ To facilitate their inclusion in the

⁷⁴ *Pentagon Papers Volume 1: U.S. Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954*. National Archive Identifier 5890485 [Online version, www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/, National Archives and Records Administration, October 25, 2015].

⁷⁵ *Pentagon Papers Volume 1: Vietnam and the U.S., 1940-1950*. National Archive Identifier 5890485 [Online version, www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/, National Archives and Records Administration, October 25, 2015]; Logevall. *Embers of War: the Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*, (2012), (Ebook version on Nook).

⁷⁶ Logevall. *Embers of War: the Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*, (2012), (Ebook version on Nook), 65.

⁷⁷ Patti, *Why Viet Nam; Prelude to America's Albatross*, (1980), 19.

South East Asian Command, the French falsely claimed to have official support from the United States. As the conflict dragged on towards final victory for the Allies, concerns of the future of colonial and subjugated peoples began to come to the front of political maneuverings. Interpretations of the conferences that were held during the war began to influence the outlook of the post-war situation for the concerned countries as well as the re-imposition of colonial power.

Concerns began to arise from the conference and the intentions of the leading powers in regards to the status of colonies and the self-determination of the inhabitants. The Soviet Union's view of the situation was that the colonial powers had misused and mistreated the indigenous peoples of the colonies prior to the war and that this mistreatment would not change after the war. A Soviet Policy Letter that does not list an author dated November 1, 1945 dealt specifically with the situation in Indochina, stating that "[o]n August 28, 1945, after the collapse of Japan, the League [Viet Minh] formed a Provisional Government of Indochina... Actually, the whole of Annam, from the Chinese frontier to Saigon, was under the control of this government." In the view of the Soviet Union the establishment of the Provisional Government of Viet Nam would meet the interpretation of the Atlantic Charter. The document went on to classify the British policy in Indochina, once the allies had landed in Saigon Harbor: "the British representatives of the Allied command began at the start to support the forcible restoration of... French rule... which many official and unofficial spokesmen are fond of stressing, as Britain's own colonial interests."⁷⁸ In essence, according to the Soviet Union, the British facilitated a coup d'etat of the Vietnamese Provisional Government to protect its own

⁷⁸ I.A. *Soviet View of Trends in Indochina*, 01 November 1945. 51.

chances of reconquering the colonies that fell to the Japanese during the war. Since the nationalist movements had come of age and developed into a proficient, if under-armed, fighting force against the Japanese the leadership of the movements would not sit idly by while the French returned to subjugate them again.

The operation that brought the British to Saigon, Operation Masterdom, landed the 20th Indian Division on September 12, 1945. Major General D.B. Gracey was in command with orders to restore order and liberate all Allied prisoners of war, detainees, and property. Gracey was also to take command of all French forces in the area as well as all clandestine activities to support his mission. When the first echelon of British troops landed they met no resistance, as the Viet Minh had already stabilized the situation in and around Saigon and Hanoi. Initially the Viet Minh provisional government kept order within Saigon while the British disarmed the Japanese. As the French detainees and prisoners were released, they were given the Japanese weapons, which the French then turned against the Viet Minh and the provisional government. This resulted in a breakdown of order and escalated into armed conflict as the Viet Minh attempted to retain the control they had established. With the explicit knowledge of the British commander, the French began the process of reconquering Viet Nam. The operations order for Operation Masterdom given to General Gracey directed him to take command of all “French forces in your area... until the French can set up an independent command.” Gracey was also directed to “give such directives to the French Indo China Government...” and “consult the senior French Land Forces Commander.” The intent of these orders was to build up and allow for the French to reclaim the colony and protectorates they had in 1939. The tensions would be escalated in fewer than two weeks

as the British command would allow the French to begin a coup d'état against the provisional Vietnamese government in Saigon.⁷⁹

With the ambiguity of U.S. policy concerning Viet Nam in 1941, a definite stand for an independent Viet Nam or a restoration of French control was the least of the governmental policy makers' concerns. This ambiguity began at President Roosevelt's desk and trickled down through all aspects of the governmental communiqués. On one side the policy makers' expressed opinion was to restore French independence and honor their territorial claims as they had been established in 1939. The other side of this debate was the language of the Atlantic Charter advocating for consent of the people and self-determination. This ambiguity did not dissipate with the conclusion of the Second World War. If anything, it became more prevalent. A part of Roosevelt's vision of the future for Viet Nam was that it should fall under an international trusteeship. An international trusteeship program would have removed the French from the equation. Roosevelt's view of the French colonial administration as detailed in the Pentagon Papers was that he "often cited French rule there as a flagrant example of onerous and exploitative colonialism, and talked of his determination to turn Indochina over to an international trusteeship after the war." President Roosevelt, in January 1944, confirmed his views to Secretary of State Cordell Hull that the Vietnamese people had been under French rule for nearly one hundred years and that they were worse off than they had been before the French, and that the Vietnamese people deserved better. When the Dutch and French asked for aid in expelling the Japanese from their colonies, the U.S. government informed

⁷⁹ *Allied Land Forces South East Asia Operational Directive No. 12*, 28 August 1945, Folder 19, Box 01, Peter Dunn Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 26 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0800119006>>.

each country that all available combatant forces were elsewhere occupied with planning and operations directed against the Japanese in an effort to bring the war to a conclusion. At the end of January 1945, Roosevelt permitted “such U.S. military operations in Indochina as avoided ‘alignment with the French,’ and detraction from the U.S. military campaign against Japan.”⁸⁰ The U.S. avoidance of direct support for the French influenced the growth of hope within the Viet Minh that their struggle against imperial power reclaiming the country had American support. The trusteeship plan Roosevelt fostered was eventually taken off the table as the British balked at efforts to plan and implement it due to the impact it may have had on their own possessions. On April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died. It seems that with him died the plan to foster the independence of nations seeking it.

The French asked President Truman, within a month of taking office, what his administration intended for Indochina. The intent was to follow the United Nations Charter of June 26, 1945 Article 73. The article outlines the stance the United Nations would take in regards to colonial possessions. The United Nations would “assume responsibilities for the administration of territories whose peoples have not yet attained a full measure of self-government.”⁸¹ This U.S. policy was in conjunction with the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, which split Viet Nam at the Latitude 16⁰. The Chinese would have the responsibility of disarming the Japanese and maintaining order, while the British south of the line would do the same. By October of 1945, the United States had no

⁸⁰ *Pentagon Papers Volume 1: U.S. Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954*. National Archive Identifier 5890485 [Online version, www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/, National Archives and Records Administration, October 25, 2015] *U.S. Policy & Indochina in World War II, Roosevelt and Trusteeship Concept, Truman & Reoccupation of Indochina*, 1945. A-13, A-16.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, A-21.

interest in opposing the French re-conquest of Viet Nam. From that point until 1946, Ho Chi Minh sent several letters to Truman seeking support for Vietnamese Independence and unity from French colonial control.⁸²

On September 2, 1945, the Democratic Republic declared its independence in a document and statement that borrowed language from the United States' Declaration of Independence (1776), the Atlantic Charter (1941), the Charter of the United Nations (1945), as well as the Preamble to the Constitution of the French Republic (1791). In reply the French promised reforms that would allow for more autonomous control with French supervision with full membership into the French Union or commonwealth. The declaration, on its surface, would have afforded the independence that the reformist movements had been seeking since the early-twentieth century. However, under a popularly elected Vietnamese government the liberties of the individual encompassed full suffrage for all citizens within the borders of Viet Nam. Under the framework of the Vietnamese Declaration, the elected government had state autonomy to conduct its affairs in accordance with the wishes of its citizenry. Self-governance would also remove a productive economic benefit out of the French coffers. When not suffering the ravages of the exploitation that occurred during the war, Viet Nam held significant economic benefits through agricultural and natural resources that the French Colonial governments had exploited since the mid-nineteenth century. The French were suffering through a

⁸² *Pentagon Papers Volume 1: U.S. Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954*. National Archive Identifier 5890485 [Online version, www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/, National Archives and Records Administration, October 25, 2015]. *I.A. Soviet View of Trends in Indochina*, (01 November 1945), Pg. 51.

⁸² Patti *Why Viet Nam; Prelude to America's Albatross*, (1980), 19,100.

stage of rebuilding at home and would need the potential profits that could be earned from further control of Viet Nam.⁸³

The re-imposition of French control in Viet Nam would cost France over one hundred forty billion francs for the time span of 1946-1951. The United States, in 1948, began to give financial aid and military equipment support to France for use in Europe to rebuild its destroyed infrastructure and economy while enabling the prosecution of the French reconquest of Viet Nam. The amount was in excess of nine billion dollars in a six-year span. The First Indochina War began in 1945, when the British released and armed the French detainees and prisoners of war, and would end with the defeat of the French in a little mountain valley called Dien Bien Phu. The amount of money would not dampen the will of the Vietnamese people for an independent state. Before the final battle of the First Indochina War, the United States had shifted the focus onto the defeat of, not a nationalist movement, but a Communist uprising. The change in aligning the Viet Minh with communism came during the time France was receiving financial and military aid from the country that the Viet Minh leadership had looked to during the Second World War. This new alignment began after the Chinese had sent political and military advisors to Viet Nam, this coupled with the indecisive conclusion of the Korean War helped the United States move in favor of the French in Southeast Asia.⁸⁴

With limited options remaining to achieve the goal of an independent nation, the Viet Minh turned to China and the Soviet Union for assistance. The turn to China and the

⁸³ *Pentagon Papers Volume 1: U.S. Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954*. National Archive Identifier 5890485 [Online version, www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/, National Archives and Records Administration, October 25, 2015].

⁸⁴ Andrew J. Rotter "The Triangular Route to Vietnam: The United States, Great Britain, and Southeast Asia, 1945-1950." *The International History Review* (Taylor and Francis, Ltd.) 6, no. 3 (August 1984): 404.

Soviet Union came after recognition of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam in the early 1950s. The fact that the leadership had communist leanings during the Second World War had been established through reports from the men sent to Viet Nam to work with the Viet Minh at that time. Those same men serving in the OSS whose jobs were to collect and analyze information for the United States and its military operations stressed the fact that first and foremost Ho Chi Minh was a nationalist. Communism by definition is intended to encompass the world, while a nationalist movement is detrimental to this concept. A nationalist movement by nature is concerned with independence of a specific country not over-reaching into a world-wide conflict. This definition is what influenced the formation of the House on Un-American Activities and the “Red Scare” in the United States during the 1950s. The simplistic answer of “The Domino Theory,” or stopping the spread of Communism, would have made sense had the Viet Minh leadership been focused on the expansion outside Viet Nam as opposed to gaining independence and self-determination. Once the United States pulled away from the Viet Minh and began funneling funds and equipment to France to the detriment of Vietnamese independence, the Viet Minh turned to those powers that professed a doctrine of stopping imperialism. In the eyes of the Viet Minh, the United States began supporting imperialistic goals by backing the French in the late 1940s. The shift to support France was also came about by the world outlook on the situation in Viet Nam.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Logevall, *Embers of War: the Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*, (2012). (EBook version on Nook) P.645; *Pentagon Papers Volume 1: U.S. Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954*. National Archive Identifier 5890485 [Online version, www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/, National Archives and Records Administration, October 25, 2015] A5.

As world opinion gained influence on the conclusion of the war in Viet Nam, France began looking for an out. On February 19, 1954, General Henri-Eugene Navarre announced the Viet Minh had reached their limit and within the coming months the French would be able to end the conflict. General Navarre was the Commander in Chief of the French Expeditionary Force in Indochina. At about the same time in the United States the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Arthur Radford, made a similar proclamation to the House Foreign Relations Committee. Both the French and American governments were looking to go to peace talks with the Viet Minh from a position of military strength. Within fifteen weeks the situation changed and France was bargaining, from the weaker position in Geneva, having been militarily humiliated by the Viet Minh. The Viet Minh had forestalled the conference until the outcome of Dien Bien Phu was certain to be a Viet Minh victory. The gamble that was the Navarre Plan paid out big dividends to the Viet Minh; however, the Geneva Peace Conference would not give the Viet Minh the independent and unified country it had been fighting for. The Peace accords split Viet Nam and called for free and open elections two years down the road. The fact was that the Viet Minh had defeated the French militarily, but would have to settle for a division of their country now and potential elections later. This acceptance was due to pressures from their allies to bring the conflict to an end.⁸⁶

The ambiguity of the policies and opinions of the Second World War did not end with the war. They continued to influence the strategies and tactics that resulted in the First Indochina War and the Second, which saw direct military action by the United

⁸⁶ *Pentagon Papers Volume 2: U.S. Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954*. National Archive Identifier 5890486 [Online version, www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/, National Archives and Records Administration, October 25, 2015].

States. During the Second World War, a political and economic relationship had begun to develop between the United States, the Viet Minh, and other nationalist groups in Viet Nam. Men from the OSS provided the main contact and context for the development of relationships between Viet Nam and the United States. The OSS and representatives of the Allied governments played a role in the aftermath of the Second World War's impact within Viet Nam. The structure of the Vietnamese future and its independence as a nation were influenced by the United States and the Allied powers. The United States and its Allies maintained an interest in developing the situation in terms of ending of the war and moving forward. However, the final decisions were not made until the Japanese surrendered on 15 August 1945. The Viet Minh held great hope for a free and independent Viet Nam with the support of the United States, with whom they worked closely during the war. The French desired to reclaim the colony of Indochina, which they lost to the Japanese, along with the protectorates of Annam, Tonkin, Cambodia, and Laos. The breakdown of this relationship provides potential for an analysis of how the re-establishment of French control overcame the "Self Determination" of the Vietnamese people in the minds of policymakers in the United States. This, along with the interactions of the Allies, needs deeper analysis and study.⁸⁷

The struggle for Vietnamese independence was butting up against the British, French, and Dutch desires to re-impose the colonial structures they had prior to the Japanese advance in Asia. The British worried that the removal of the French from Indochina would be a harbinger of the loss of its own colonial possessions. The Dutch followed the British lead to maintain its colonial territories. The main brunt of the

⁸⁷ Sebrega, John J. "The Anticolonial Policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Reappraisal." *Political Science Quarterly* (Academy of Political Science) 101, no. 1 (1986): 78-81.

fighting in the Asian Theater, on the whole, was by American, Chinese, and British forces. Once the European front had been settled with the surrender of Germany, France began trying to regain influence in Asia through political means prior to the Japanese surrender on 15 August 1945. Each of the European countries involved was motivated by factors significant to the future of colonial states as well as the home countries' status in the world. The potential for a free and independent Viet Nam was there during the Second World War. The Vietnamese Declaration of Independence on 2 September 1945 resulted in a contentious birth of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. The failure of the U.S. government to solidify policies or objectives in regards to Indochina only facilitated increased tensions. The British influence on the United States during and after the Second World War, and the attempted balancing of power within Europe, pulled the United States in multiple directions at once, not allowing for a concentrated focus on the issues in either location.⁸⁸

During the eight-year (1946-1954) Franco-Viet Minh conflict, the Viet Minh would push for outside assistance as they had done during the Second World War. The French in turn would also pursue outside assistance that, due to economic and military shortfalls within Europe, would ultimately come from the United States. Ho Chi Minh would continue to utilize contacts that developed during the war years to try to gain French support for independence. The problem facing the U.S. at this time was a misunderstanding of the intent of the Viet Minh and the French. The Viet Minh were

⁸⁸ "Interview with Archimedes L. A. Patti, 1981," (accessed September 10, 2014); Report Excerpt, Pentagon Papers Book 1 Part II.B - *U.S. Government Policy and Indochina (1950-54)*, No Date, Folder 18, Box 03, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, (Accessed 26 Nov. 2014).
<<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2410318005>>.

labeled “communists” with the onset of the Cold War between the U.S. and the USSR. Fueled by the fears of a collapse of Europe if France were to side with the Soviets played into the hands of French reclamation and consolidation of its Indochina colonies. The internal factors that plagued U.S. Foreign Policy during this time were influential as well.⁸⁹

The United States had just seen the rise of Chinese Communism in 1949 and placed itself in the supporting role of military and financial advisor/provider during the conflict between the North and South Koreans. The fear of communism expanding beyond China and North Korea in Asia made the politicians and bureaucrats in the U.S. shy away from anything remotely connected to communism. Once the Chinese Communist Party won the mainland from the Chinese Nationalists, in October 1949, political and bureaucratic infighting within the U.S. State Department and the Military Command began to center on communism as the only problem to be resolved. The main question then became how to stop or reverse the spread of Communism in Asia? This ultimately would lead to the United States ignoring Ho Chi Minh’s pleas for aid. Logevall points out some of the difficulties plaguing Ho Chi Minh and the DRV from communist officials in France and even Stalin himself: “Maurice Thorez, vice president in de Gaulle’s government, said he did not intend ‘to liquidate the French position in Indochina.’ Stalin raised no objection. He moreover continued to suspect Ho of being too independent, too much a nationalist, and too desirous of American support. (Stalin had been told of the Viet Minh-OSS cooperation in 1945.)”⁹⁰ The combination of a

⁸⁹ Report Excerpt, Pentagon Papers Book 1 Part II.B - *U.S. Government Policy and Indochina (1950-54)*, (Accessed 26 Nov. 2014).

⁹⁰ Logevall, *Embers of War: the Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*, (2012), (EBook version on Nook), 146.

communist rise in Southeast Asia, a lack of support from communist groups within France and the Soviets, and the U.S. search for halting or reversing the communist influences results in a puzzling fact that Ho Chi Minh did not gain support from communist leaders until after 1950.

The political objectives faced by the Americans, French and Vietnamese at the conclusion of the Second World War would dictate a shift in allegiances and create rising tensions. The French unwillingness to follow through with any promises or plans made since 1946 would develop into a conflict that would only end with the defeat of the French in a remote mountain valley named Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Logevall brings the cycle of Ho Chi Minh's struggles from Paris in 1919 to the Declaration of Vietnamese independence in 1945 by stating, "[i]t was thirty-five years since he [Ho] had made his appeal to the great powers at the Versailles Peace Conference, and nine years since that glorious day in September 1945 when he declared Vietnamese independence before the cheering throngs in Ba Dinh Square."⁹¹ This defeat would ultimately lead to the withdrawal of French Troops in the early summer of 1956 in accords with the Geneva Peace Conference of 1954. Not all the accords from the conference would be followed, as the United States would encourage the South Vietnamese not to hold elections and to continue to build and consolidate power against the ho Chi Minh's popularity in totality in Viet Nam.

⁹¹ Logevall, *Embers of War: the Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*, (2012), (EBook version on Nook) P.645; *Pentagon Papers Volume 1: U.S. Involvement in the Franco-Viet Minh War, 1950-1954*. National Archive Identifier 5890485 [Online version, www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/, National Archives and Records Administration, October 25, 2015] P. A5.

The seeds had been sown for the escalation of American involvement in Viet Nam as early as 1941 and the entry of the United States into the Second World War. Ambiguous policy and a need to build relations with European powers to stop the spread of fascism would ultimately lead to the conflict of the 1960s and early 1970s for the U.S. The men of the OSS and Viet Minh were able to look beyond political ideology and forge cooperation that should have continued beyond the Second World War. There is evidence that the United States Foreign Affairs effort afforded support to Josip Broz Tito in Yugoslavia in 1948. The support for Tito's regime begs the questions of why the same courtesy was not afforded to Ho Chi Minh. It would be an oversimplification to state communism or Europeanism dictated the events of 1944 to 1956. A closer look into the people, cultures and actions of those fourteen years may not illuminate all the specifics that played out but will help build an understanding of the complexities of war and diplomacy.⁹²

⁹² Alvin Z. Rubinstein. *Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War II; Imperial and Global*. (Cambridge: Winthrop Publishers Inc, 1981), 57.



Map 4. Geneva Demarcation July 22 1954. (Found at: <http://www.authentichistory.com/1961-1974/4-vietnam/1-overview/2-1945-1955/>)

IV. CONCLUSION: PLODDING ALONG

The history of American involvement in Viet Nam did not begin in the 1950s with the expansion of the military advisory group assisting the South Vietnamese government in stopping the communist aggressions of North Viet Nam. A study of the connections between Vietnamese Nationalists and the United States adds understanding to the rise of the nationalist movements during the late nineteenth century, when Viet Nam was under French colonial control. In the early years, roughly from 1900 to 1917, the nationalist movements sought an avenue to independence that did not demand the outright expulsion of France from Viet Nam. The results of the rhetoric of World War One, speaking to the new order of the world and imperialism as a thing of the past, fed the hopes of the Vietnamese people. Vietnamese hopes were able to become independent and grow industrially, economically, and politically while maintaining a connection with France. President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, announced prior to the ending of hostilities in that war, further raised the hopes of the Vietnamese, along with other colonized nations around the world.

During the 1919-1920 Versailles Peace Conference, representing the many colonized nations their leaders –some self-proclaimed others appointed or elected – clamored for the attention of the United States. They hoped to gain some support for the nations under colonial rule. The talks did not allow for the inclusion of nations outside the main Allied powers. The exclusion of many nations such as Viet Nam dimmed but did not end hopes for a better future. The inter-war years following the peace conference would witness the strengthening of nationalist movements in Viet Nam.

The colonial French at this time were unwilling to relinquish any control over their perceived rights and to justify this they revived the “mission civilisatrice” or the civilizing mission. This mission, in theory, would bring political, industrial, and economic benefit to the less developed countries in which France had interests. On the surface, the mission seemed to benefit the Vietnamese and other colonial possessions; however, the mission actually resulted in the rise of nationalist movements. The conditions resulting from French attempts to “civilize” Viet Nam centered on colonial greed, paternalism, and scientific racism, which the French utilized to retain control. The civilizing mission cloaked the true aspects of the French Colonial purposes in Viet Nam. Even with outsiders looking at the French record of colonialism in Viet Nam during the inter-war years, there was no call to oust the French except by the Vietnamese themselves. The United States had begun to focus on economic issues at home and in Europe, leaving the colonial question to the “colonial powers.” Conditions within Viet Nam worsened for the Vietnamese as the world began to fall into the Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s. The Great Depression distracted what little attention the situation in Viet Nam had received through the tribunal and the League of Nations’ investigation, during the early 1920s. The results only brought attention to the plight of the colonized people but brought no relief or solution to the issues they faced. The French Colonial Government brutally put down any opposition to its rule.

Opposition to French rule had begun as soon as the French began the conquest of Indochina. During the nineteenth century, opposition remained local and did not expand far beyond the village or city until around the turn of the century when the Japanese had proven that the adoption of western ideology could turn back first the Chinese and then

the Russian militaries. With the Japanese victories, many nationalists went to Japan to study as well as escape the French purges of the early twentieth century. The relationship between the nationalists of Viet Nam and Japan came to an end with the opening of the Second World War and the Japanese occupation, under the Vichy Colonial Government of Viet Nam. The added weight of another occupation and demands for resources to supply a Japanese military further stressed the relationship with France to the point that nationalists would no longer call for cooperative relations with either France or Japan, but for the complete expulsion of both powers.

Vietnamese nationalists began to look for support from other countries as the Second World War continued to ravage Viet Nam's people and resources. One power to which nationalists turned was the United States. The basis of the attraction was the ideological views expressed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt as a carryover from Woodrow Wilson. The nationalists actively sought to aid the Allied efforts during World War Two by providing intelligence regarding Japanese troop and ship movements in Viet Nam and by recovering downed Allied pilots from Japanese troops in Viet Nam. Ho Chi Minh made contact with the 14th Air Force in southern China to elicit support for a future independent Viet Nam. In return, Ho Chi Minh only asked that lines of communication remain open to facilitate the removal of first the Japanese and then the French from Viet Nam.

Vietnamese information was helpful and in return, the OSS sent operatives to train the Viet Minh and begin interdiction operations against the Japanese as the war was coming to a close. The OSS operatives never did get to employ the newly trained Viet Minh, as the Japanese surrendered before the teams were operational. The men assigned

to the mission were present on September 2, 1945, when Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnamese Independence in Ba Dinh Square. The presence of American military personnel, as well as the fly over of an American marked airplane, gave the people assembled in the square the belief that they had a strong U.S. ally for their movement for the independence of Viet Nam. The perception of American support would not last beyond the following year.

While the Viet Minh had begun, taking the surrender of the Japanese prior to the fulfillment of the Allied plans laid out at the Potsdam Conference in early 1945. By Early September, British troops landed in Southern Viet Nam, while the Chinese entered the north. In Saigon, the British commander General Gracey found very little chaos under the provisional government, but provided arms to the released French internees as his troops disarmed the Japanese. On September 19th, the rearmed French began a coup d'état against the provisional government. In the escalation of fighting that resulted, the first U.S. military member died in Viet Nam. The destabilization of Viet Nam had begun with the French attempt to reclaim the glories of the past colonial empire. The inconsistency of policy and unclear objectives that plagued French colonial rule would continue as the world searched for stability during the burgeoning Cold War.

The increased tensions of the Cold War changed the classification of the Vietnamese nationalist movement and forced it to seek aid from ideological enemies of the United States. Until 1950, neither the Soviet Union nor the Chinese Communist governments recognized the declared Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. The international tensions over U.S. involvement in Korea and U.S. language of stopping the spread of communist aggressions in Southeast Asia played into the hands of the bankrupt

and failing French colonial administration. The French had induced support for their colonial holdings in Southeast Asia on the basis that they were stopping the expansion of communist agendas.

During the Second World War and early on in what would become known as the First Indochina War, French efforts to obtain aid rested on U.S. material and financial support. France was walking a fine line between obtaining the support from the United States and losing control of the progress of the conflict to reclaim Viet Nam. Keeping the flow of U.S. funding while directing the economic resources of Viet Nam flowing to France became the objective of the time. To forestall the further decline of French influence the Viet Minh and other nationalist movements were classified by the French as communist. The longer this situation drew funds and French blood the French populace beginning to ask questions about the worth of maintaining a colony half a world away, the French Government sought an end to the conflict that had raged in Viet Nam since 1945. In 1954 at Geneva, the French and North Vietnamese representatives agreed to end hostilities and set up for elections of a unified country. By 1956, when the elections were scheduled, the French were pulling the last of their combat troops out of Viet Nam. The elections did not occur, as the South Vietnamese government felt that it would not be able to win any election in collusion with the United States; it avoided the elections, setting the stage for the Second Indochina War.

The progression of events spanned from the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor to the withdrawal of the last French ground combat troops in 1956. During the Second World War the United States maintained interests in the Vietnamese pursuit of independence. U.S. support of Vietnamese Nationalist objectives would not survive

beyond 1948. The tensions of the Cold War had begun to increase, thus, shifting the support from the nationalists to the French. There is a need for a better understanding of the events leading to the conflict between the United States and the Vietnamese that ended with the withdrawal of the United States in 1975. This understanding can come from the bringing of the Vietnamese perspective in the historical narrative of the U.S. involvement in Viet Nam.

With the addition of new sources from formerly closed archives, new aspects can be added that help explain the confusing shifts that occurred prior to the 1963 escalation of U.S. advisors to Viet Nam. As more information becomes available, an understanding of the initial reasoning and perceptions of the commitments to the French and Vietnamese should be expanded to develop a more thorough understanding of why the conflicts that took place in Viet Nam occurred. Failing to give complete or concise answers to that, the historiography should grow to encompass more questions and stimulate a growing debate that has been questing for a solution to fill the gaps in the current understanding about the involvements in Viet Nam. As available material increases, the arguments over interpretation can expand to be more comprehensive and give a more comprehensive understanding of what the Viet Nam Conflict was.

APPENDIX SECTION

Analytical chart of contributions made to the four colonialist comités

Comité	Individuals					Organizations					Economic interests					Totals*	
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O		P
Military	Civil servants	Middle class	Other	Total	Government	Libraries, schools, museums	Geographical societies	Military	Other	Total	Major	Other	Chambers of commerce	Individuals	Total		
Comité de l'Afrique française 1891-1914	11.5	2.0	4.9	43.8	62.2	7.6	0.7	0.4	2.7	0.7	12.2	3.8	1.8	1.6	18.4	25.6	1,078,878
Comité du Maroc 1904-14	995	151	351	2813	4310	46	45	16	212	33	353	32	72	28	117	249	4,913
Comité de l'Asie française 1901-14	1.7	0.2	0.8	18.6	21.3	3.5	0.17	0.3	0.03	1.0	5.0	67.3	0.9	1.1	4.4	73.7	292,700
Beirut Hospital subscription 1911-12†	138	12	39	504	693	8	5	5	4	3	25	50	28	4	37	119	837
Comité France-Amérique 1910-14	7.8	5.7	3.8	18.2	35.5	6.6	0.6	0.2	3.6	0.5	11.5	20.7	1.1	3.8	27.4	53.0	455,231
	351	175	210	457	1193	5	24	7	181	40	257	38	53	28	155	274	1,724
	0.05	1.15	0.22	35.72	37.1	None	9.27	0.09	0.07	6.67	16.1	39.53	1.2	1.89	4.19	46.8	217,012
	4	2	10	106	122		4	1	1	12	18	40	11	4	24	79	219
	2.37	6.54	12.7	10.33	31.94	2.75	1.02	0.07	0.07	2.75	6.66	38.5	2.98	4.1	15.8	61.4	171,353
	45	130	277	406	858	11	28	3	3	15	60	35	57	29	121	242	1,360

Key:

The top figure in each lateral column is the percentage of total contributions made to each comité.
The bottom figure in each lateral column is the number of different contributors in each category.

* The top figure in this column is the amount contributed (in francs) to each comité.

† This subscription was organized by the Comité de l'Asie française and by the Syndicat de la Presse.

Analytical Chart of contributions to the Four Colonialist Comités 1891-1914

⁹³ Abrams and Miller. "Who Were the French Colonialists?" (1976), 696.

TABLE A.

Expenditures of France for the Colonies in 1898.

I.—EXPENSES OF SOVEREIGNTY AND SUBVENTIONS.

I. DÉPENSES COMMUNES.		FRANCS.
Traitement du ministre et personnel de l'administration centrale		695,000
Matériel de l'administration centrale		137,000
Frais d'impression, publication de documents et abonnements		108,000
Frais de dépêches télégraphiques		102,000
Service central des marchés		120,000
Service administratif des colonies dans les ports de commerce de la métropole		162,500
Inspection des colonies		311,000
Secours et subventions		44,500
Subventions à diverses compagnies pour les câbles sous-marins		707,500
2. DÉPENSES CIVILES.		
Personnel des services civils		489,561
Personnel de la justice		1,470,000
Personnel des cultes		602,000
Service des travaux publics		53,000
Matériel des services civils		17,100
Frais de voyage par terre et par mer et dépenses accessoires		325,000
Exposition permanente des colonies et renseignements commerciaux. Service géographique		43,400
Participation à l'Exposition universelle de 1900		2,000
Missions dans les colonies		210,000
Bourses coloniales		28,000
Études coloniales		10,000
Émigration de travailleurs aux colonies		75,000
Quatrième des quatorze annuités à payer à des exploitations agricoles pour la mise en valeur d'établissements français		360,000
Subvention au budget local du Congo français		2,353,000
Subvention au budget local de Madagascar		1,800,000
Subvention au service local de certaines colonies		765,307
Subvention au budget annexe du chemin de fer et du port de la Réunion		2,508,500
Subvention au budget annexe du chemin de fer du Soudan français		768,000
Chemin de fer de Dakar à St.-Louis		1,270,000

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⁹⁴ Seligman, *"The French Colonial Fiscal System."* (1900), 35.

3. DÉPENSES MILITAIRES.

Troupes aux colonies et comité technique	5,799,372
Gendarmerie coloniale	1,630,000
Commissariat colonial	871,500
Inscription maritime	60,000
Comptables coloniaux	346,000
Service de santé (personelle)	1,092,000
Service de santé (matériel)	1,474,000
Vivres et fourrages	3,310,000
Frais de voyage par terre et par mer et dépenses accessoires	1,400,000
Matériel de casernement, de campement et de couchage	274,000
Matériel des services militaires	1,444,000
Défense des colonies	1,200,000
Frais d'occupation du Soudan français	6,180,000
Route de Konakry au Niger	100,000
Dépenses des services militaires et maritimes en Annam et au Tonkin	23,250,000
Dépenses militaires à Madagascar	18,276,000

4. SERVICE PÉNITENTIAIRE.

Administration pénitentiaire (personelle)	2,649,500
Administration pénitentiaire (hôpitaux, vivres, habillement et couchage)	4,129,900
Administration pénitentiaire (frais de transport)	1,170,000
Administration pénitentiaire (matériel)	1,439,900
Dépenses des exercices périmés non frappés de déchéance,	Mémoire
Dépenses des exercices clos	Mémoire
Rappels de dépenses payables sur revues antérieures à 1898,	Mémoire
Total	91,633,530

II.—SHIPPING AND CABLE SUBSIDIES.

	FRANCS.
Subvention au service maritime de New-York et des Antilles, primes de vitesse	11,258,000
Subvention au service maritime de l'Indo-Chine et du Japon	6,083,688
Subvention au service maritime de l'Australie et de la Nouvelle-Calédonie	3,108,936
Subvention au service maritime de la côte orientale d'Afrique	1,925,640
Subvention au service maritime de la côte occidentale d'Afrique	500,000
Subvention à la campagne concessionnaire du câble reliant à St.-Louis du Sénégal les possessions de Rio-Nunez, Grand Bassam, Porto-Novo et le Gabon	300,000
Subvention à la campagne concessionnaire du câble reliant la France à l'Amérique et aux Antilles	400,000
Total	23,576,264

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French Colonial Defense Spending 1898

⁹⁵ Seligman, "The French Colonial Fiscal System." (1900), 36.

TABLE B.

THE COLONIAL CONTRIBUTION IN 1898.

	FRANCS.
Cochin-Chine	4,442
Annam-Tonkin	109,000
Martinique	65,032
Guadeloupe	71,060
Réunion	67,076
Guyane	32,435
Sénégal	16,805
Soudan	3,000
Guinée	3,600
Côte d'Ivoire	3,600
Dahomey	3,600
Congo	4,530
Madagascar	9,570
St.-Pierre et Miquelon	7,992
Mayotte	2,410
Comores	2,410
Taïti	11,821
Nouvelle Calédonie	33,619
Inde	25,780
Côte de Somalis	300
Cambodge	2,000
Total	469,472

TABLE C.

COLONIAL RECEIPTS.

(Forming a part of the French Budget in 1898.)

	FRANCS.
Contingents et contributions	5,838,972
Rente de l'Inde	668,800
Retenues pour pensions civiles	859,400
Recettes diverses	966,400
Total	8,333,572

Contributions from the Colonies with Colonial Receipts in 1898

⁹⁶ Seligman, *"The French Colonial Fiscal System."* (1900), 37.

HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM NATIONALIST PARTY

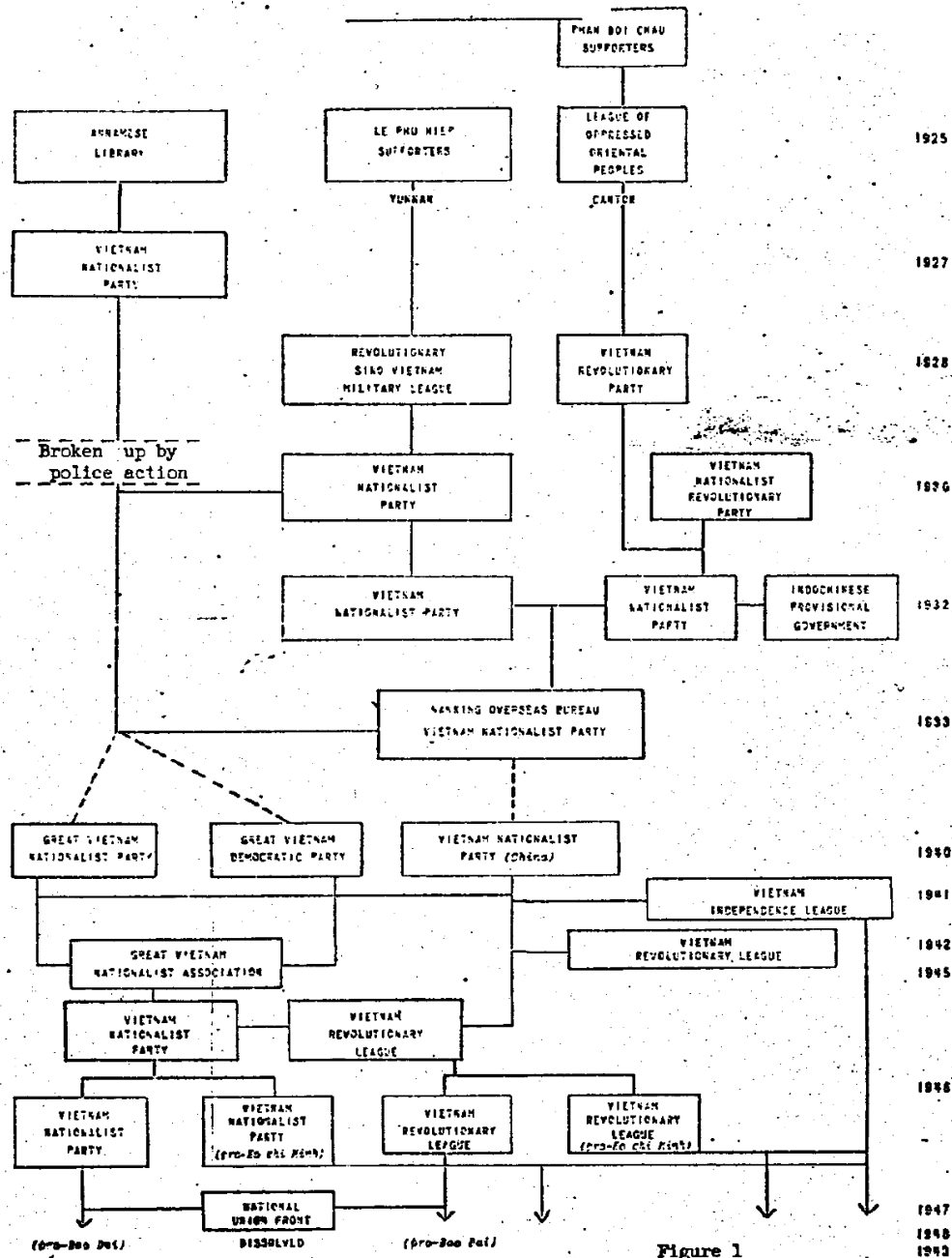


Figure 1

B-12

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Vietnamese Nationalist Party History 1923-1943

⁹⁷ *Pentagon Papers Volume 1: Vietnam and the U.S., 1940-1950*. National Archive Identifier 5890485[Online version, www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/, National Archives and Records Administration, October 25, 2015], B-12.

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNIST ORGANIZATIONS IN INDOCHINA, 1921-51

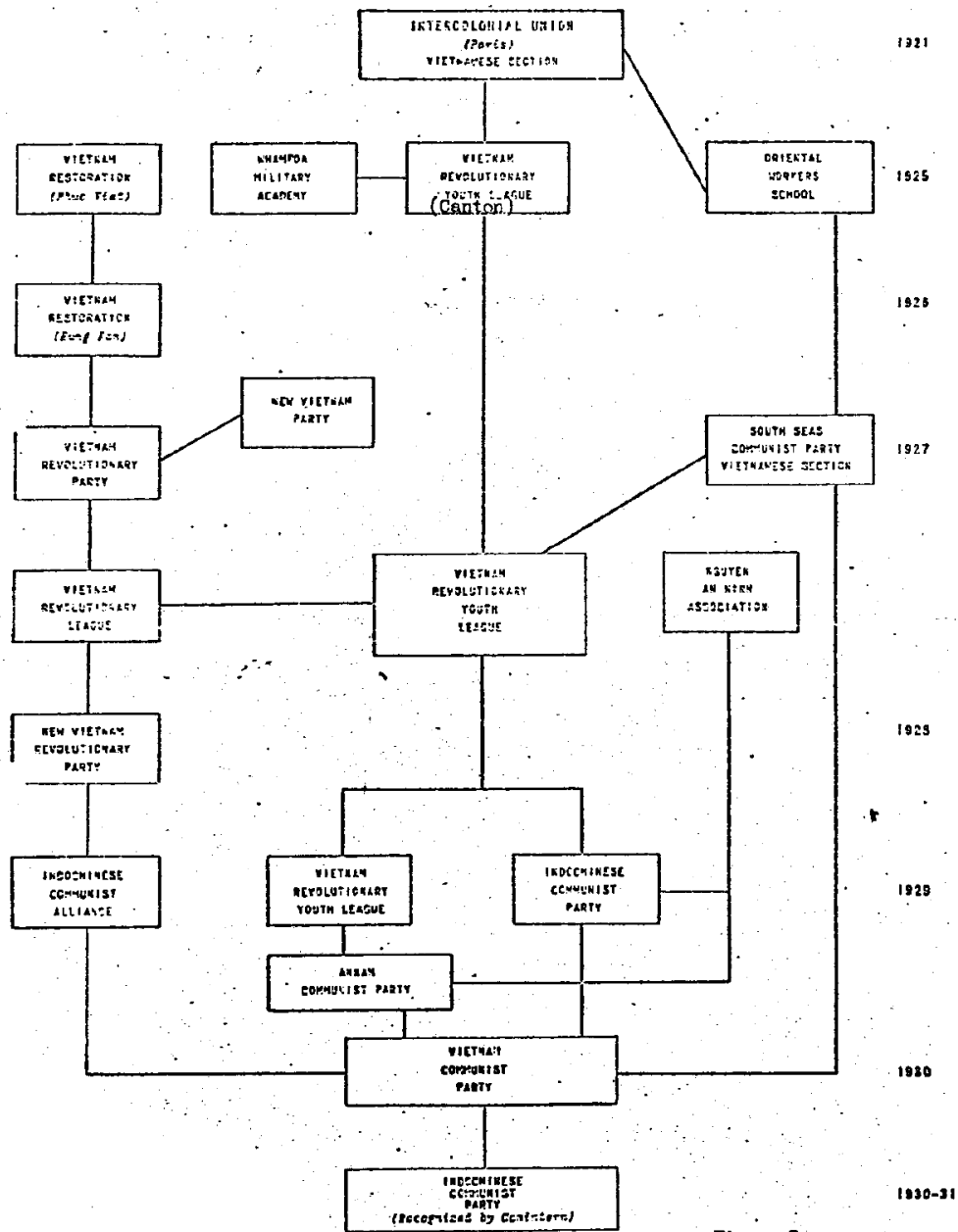


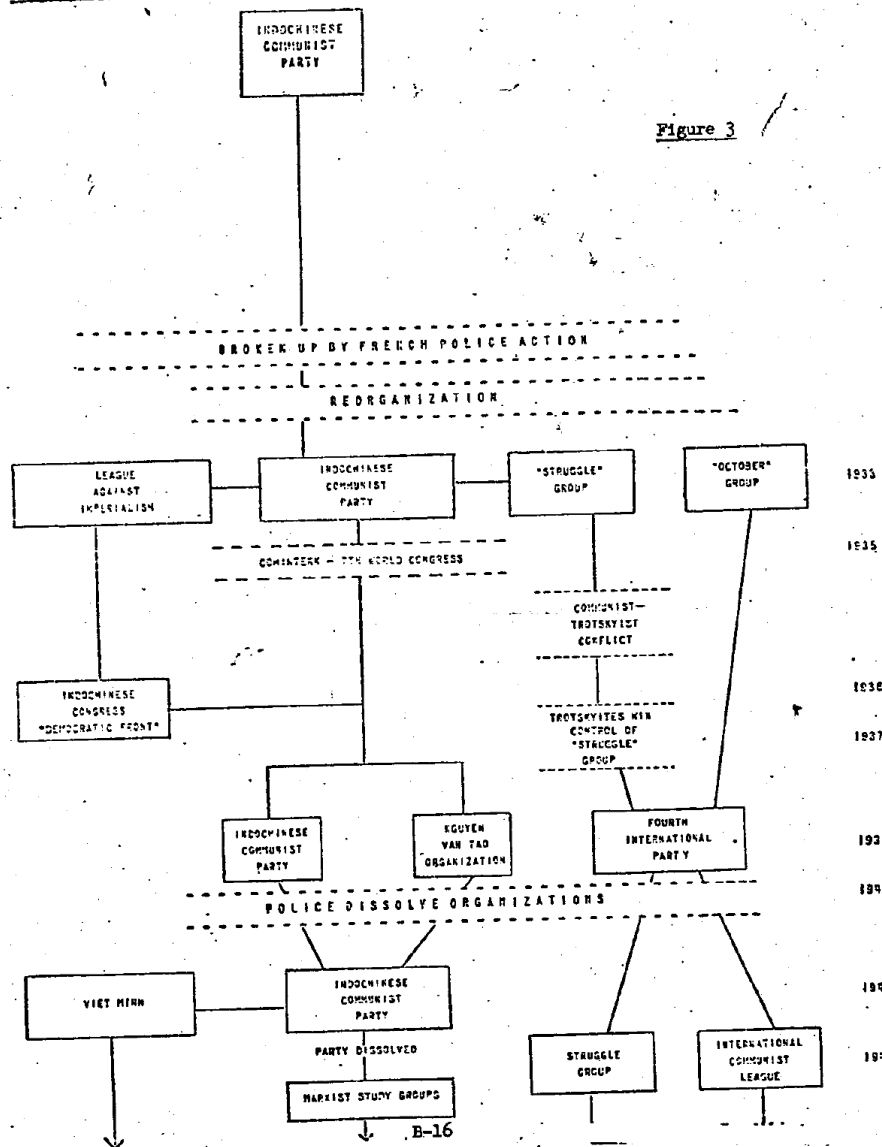
Figure 2

B-14

⁹⁸ *Pentagon Papers Volume 1: Vietnam and the U.S., 1940-1950*. National Archive Identifier 5890485[Online version, www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/, National Archives and Records Administration, October 25, 2015], B-14.

Development of Communist Organization in Indochina 1921-1931

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNIST ORGANIZATIONS IN INDOCHINA, 1931-45



99

Development of Communist Organization in Indochina 1931-1945

⁹⁹ *Pentagon Papers Volume 1: Vietnam and the U.S., 1940-1950*. National Archive Identifier 5890485[Online version, www.archives.gov/research/pentagon-papers/, National Archives and Records Administration, October 25, 2015], B-16

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