

# **Vietnamese United States Negotiations during the Vietnam War (1965-1968)**

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To my parents Dang Dinh Son and Nguyen Thi Tuyet, my sister Dang Thi Trang and  
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Whose love and support sustain me

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## **ABSTRACT**

Before the Paris Peace Talks, Hanoi and Washington had tried for several years to achieve a peaceful settlement through a number of different channels, but all efforts had not achieved any results. This dissertation describes secret negotiations and explains why these negotiating initiatives failed. This will not only contribute to scholarship on the Vietnam War, but also try to draw lesson from the past.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

During the Vietnam War, all belligerent parties made the utmost efforts to win, by using not only military force but also diplomatic activities. Many people still remember the picture of Xuan Thuy and Henry Kissinger shaking hands in Paris on January 23<sup>th</sup> 1973 with Le Duc Tho standing at their side, smiling happily.<sup>1</sup> Le Duc Tho and Kissinger were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973.<sup>2</sup> The text of the “Paris Agreements on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam” was warmly welcomed all over the world. Today, some people wonder whether agreements ending the war and restoring peace in Vietnam could have been signed sooner. As the former American Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara wrote, “I hypothesized, opportunities either to have avoided the war before it started or to have terminated it long before it had run its course. Were there such opportunities? If so, why were they missed? What lessons can we draw to avoid such tragedies in the twenty-first century?”<sup>3</sup> Before the Paris Peace Talks officially began on May 13<sup>th</sup> 1968, Vietnam and the United States had tried for years to achieve a peaceful settlement through a number of different channels, but those efforts had not achieved any results. Why didn’t the negotiation initiatives between 1965 and 1968 lead towards an early peace? Did Washington and Hanoi miss opportunities to achieve their geopolitical objectives without the terrible loss of life suffered by each? Why was the small country of Vietnam able to defeat the aggressive will of the western superpower and consequentially begin opening the peace talks in Paris to end the Vietnam War?

The Vietnam War was an extremely bloody war that generated great controversy and indignation all over the world. It was also the longest war in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Xuan Thuy was the Foreign Minister of North Vietnam from 1963 to 1965 and then chief negotiator of the North Vietnamese at the Paris Peace talks. Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State of the United States from 1973 to 1977. Le Duc Tho’s real name was Phan Dinh Khai (1911-1990). He was a special advisor to the North Vietnamese delegation to the Paris Peace Conference and a member of the Politburo of the Vietnam Workers’ Party (the Communist Party of Vietnam after 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Le Duc Tho refused to receive the Nobel Prize because peace in Vietnam was the result of a hard struggle of the Vietnamese people, not himself alone, he said.

<sup>3</sup> Robert S. McNamara. James Blight, Robert Brigham, Thomas Biersteker and Col. Herbert Schandler, “Preface,” *Argument without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999), xi.

<sup>4</sup> The Vietnam War (1954-1975) is sometimes called “the American War” or “the Second Indochina War.” I prefer to use “the Vietnam War” because the term “Vietnam War” describes the geographic location of the fighting (on Vietnamese territory), and it focuses on only a single country. In addition, although the U.S. was a major belligerent of this war, other foreign powers such as China and the Soviet Union were involved as well.

Marilyn Young calls her book *The Vietnam Wars*. The title is accurate but mildly misleading. To most historians these days, there were three wars, referred to as the first, second, and third Indochina Wars, or the French, American, and Chinese Wars, respectively. Young’s history is concerned mostly with the first two of these

Therefore, there are thousands of books and articles with different approaches to understanding the causes, phases, strategies, and meanings of the Vietnam War.

First, the predominant interpretation pointed out that the American involvement in Vietnam with disregard for Vietnamese politics and culture was the tragedy, the main historical error. Those books argue that the U.S. exacerbated the danger of Communism leading to a tragic military intervention. The most prominent examples are: *The Making a Quagmire* (David Halberstam, 1965, New York: Random House); *The Arrogance of Power* (Senator J. William Fulbright, 1966, New York: Random House); *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy 1941-1968* (Arthur Meier Schlesinger, 1968, Fawcett Publications); *The Lost Crusade: The United States in Vietnam* (Chester L. Cooper, Fawcett CT, 1970); *Washington Plans an Aggressive War* (Ralph L. Stavins, Richard J. Barnet, Marcus G. Raskin, 1971, New York: Random House); *The Best and the Brightest* (David Halberstam, 1972, New York: Random House); *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (Frances FitzGerald, 1972, Brown Little). The second trend is the revisionist interpretation. It points out that although the United States could not win the war for many reasons, the American involvement in Vietnam was a noble cause. After the New York Time began publication of the Pentagon Papers on the Vietnam War on June 13, 1971, the books with revisionist interpretation were quickly published: *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* by Leslie Gelb, Richard Betts, 1979, Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution; *Summons of Trumpet: U.S.-Vietnam in Perspective* by Dave Richard Palmer, 1978, San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press; *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Restrospect* by U.S. Grant Sharp, 1978, San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press; *America in Vietnam* by Guenter Lewy, 1978, New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Studying about the Vietnam War, we also have to remember the authors Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars: 1945-1990*, 1991, Harper Collins; Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam A history*, 1997, New York: Penguin Books and Marc Frey, *Geschichte des Vietnamkriegs: Die Tragödie in Asien und das Ende des amerikanischen Traums*, 2000, Verlag: C.H. Beck Verlag with their strong anti-war rhetoric.

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wars, and their relationship to American foreign policy. She deals much more briefly, although capably, with the short but important war with China in 1979, and with the post-American War period in general. I think the Vietnam War (1954-1975) should be considered as one phase. The Geneva Agreement was signed in 1954, officially ending the French rule in Vietnam, and this was the year when Ngo Dinh Diem's government was established with support of the U.S. 1975 was the year the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) won the war and Vietnam reunified.



In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the historiography of Vietnam War, two prominent scholars are David L. Anderson, and Fredrik Logevall.<sup>5</sup> In *Trapped by Success: The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953-1961*, David L. Anderson sheds more light on the role of the Eisenhower administration in the origins of Vietnam War.<sup>6</sup> After looking at the reason of the failure of Eisenhower's policy in Vietnam, the author concluded that the administration's fault was ultimately one of perspective. He writes:

The Eisenhower administration was both the creator and the captive of an illusion in Vietnam. A combination of factors – cold war bi-polarism and paranoia, the arrogance of power, cultural and racial chauvinism – blinded U.S. leaders to social, political, historical, and military realities in Vietnam [...] The U.S. strategy of containment failed in Vietnam partly because there was no self-sustaining state in the South for the United States to support.<sup>7</sup>

Fredrick Logevall's *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* argues that although members of the U.S. government had doubts about the likelihood of winning the war in Vietnam, they chose war to protecting their own personal credibility.<sup>8</sup> Logevall's *The Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* is a widely researched interpretation of the Vietnam War.<sup>9</sup> The book begins with the image of the young Vietnamese man Nguyen Ai Quoc ("Nguyen the Patriot," later to be known as Ho Chi Minh) presenting a petition for Vietnamese independence to the members of the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. Logevall argues that we cannot understand the nature of the Vietnam War if we disconnect it from Vietnam's resistance to French colonialism. He confirmed that

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<sup>5</sup> The Vietnam War (1954-1975) is sometimes called "the American War" or "the Second Indochina War." I prefer to use "the Vietnam War" because the term "Vietnam War" describes the geographic location of the fighting (on Vietnamese territory), and it focuses on only a single country. In addition, although the U.S. was a major belligerent of this war, other foreign powers such as China and the Soviet Union were involved as well.

Marilyn Young calls her book *The Vietnam Wars*. The title is accurate but mildly misleading. To most historians these days, there were three wars, referred to as the first, second, and third Indochina Wars, or the French, American, and Chinese Wars, respectively. Young's history is concerned mostly with the first two of these wars, and their relationship to American foreign policy. She deals much more briefly, although capably, with the short but important war with China in 1979, and with the post-American War period in general. I think the Vietnam War (1954-1975) should be considered as one phase. The Geneva Agreement was signed in 1954, officially ending the French rule in Vietnam, and this was the year when Ngo Dinh Diem's government was established with support of the U.S. 1975 was the year the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) won the war and Vietnam reunified.

<sup>6</sup> David L. Anderson, *Trapped by Success: The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953-1961* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 208.

<sup>8</sup> Fredrick Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles- California: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Fredrick Logevall, *The Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012).

“France’s war was also America’s war-Washington footed much of the bill, supplied most of the weaponry, and pressed Paris leaders to hang tough when their will faltered. Well before the climax at Dien Bien Phu, Viet Minh leaders considered the United States, not France, their principal foe.”<sup>10</sup> In reality, that is the reason why the DRV/NLF (Democratic Republic of Vietnam and National Liberation Front) considered Americans as imperialists and the Vietnamese struggles against the U.S./South Vietnamese as a struggle for national liberation and salvation.

In the preface of *Embers of War*, Logevall recounts a story about journalist David Halberstam:

Halberstam, asked by a British colleague to comment on his wartime reporting in Vietnam, remarked, “The problem was trying to cover something every day as news when in fact the real key was that it was all derivative of the French Indochina war, which is history. So you really should have had a third paragraph in each story which should have said, ‘All of this is shit and none of this means anything because we are in the same footsteps as the French and we are prisoners of their experience.’” America’s intervention, Halberstam said on a later occasion, occurred “in the embers of another colonial war.”<sup>11</sup>

In 2006, Mark Moyar’s *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965*, argued that the Vietnam War was a civil war among the Vietnamese people about the future of Vietnam.<sup>12</sup> This argument, however, does not take into consideration that during the Vietnam War, the U.S. played the leadership role and not the South Vietnamese in the fight against the DRV/NLF. Moyar also considers Ho Chi Minh a servant of Chinese Communists and disregards the centuries of Vietnamese resistance to Chinese Imperialism. Therefore, it can be concluded that Moyar, like many Americans, seriously misunderstood Vietnamese traditional culture and history. The long history of the relations between Vietnam and China has been one of animosity and not cooperation as Moyar describes. For thousands of years, Vietnam has known that the aim of their neighboring country China was to grab its territory for Chinese expansionism and the Vietnamese defeated Chinese invasions many times through history. Deep inside the psychology of every Vietnamese is distrust towards their neighboring country, China. Ho Chi Minh was a patriotic Communist, not a puppet of Chinese government. William J. Duiker, in his book *Ho Chi Minh*, writes about that

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. “Preface,” xxi.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Vietnam's leader: "Ho was first and foremost a patriot."<sup>13</sup> This echoed in Luu Doan Huynh's speech in *Argument Without End*, in which he stated: "Ho Chi Minh was a nationalist first and a communist second."<sup>14</sup> In my dissertation, I argue Ho Chi Minh was a patriot as well as a Communist and Ho Chi Minh never was a puppet of China or the Soviet Union.

There are a number of books and studies that have specifically dealt with the peace initiatives and negotiations that took place during the Vietnam War. *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating Volumes of the Pentagon Papers*, a collection of U.S. government documents, traces secret missions from 1964 to 1968, but it does not analyze or comment on the peace initiatives.<sup>15</sup> *Tiếp xúc bí mật Việt Nam Hoa Kỳ* [Secret contacts between Vietnam and the United States before the Paris conference] by Vietnamese diplomats Luu Van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu describes the secret contacts between Vietnam and the United States, but it does not give an adequate explanation for many questions relating to those secret contacts.<sup>16</sup> The recently published book *Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam* by James G. Hershberg tells the story of the secret Polish-Italian peace initiative, codenamed "Marigold," that was an opportunity to start negotiations between Washington and Hanoi, in 1966.<sup>17</sup> The author did archival research in many countries, including the United States, Australia, Poland, Canada, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Italy, India, and Hungary. Hershberg sketches the efforts of the junior Polish diplomat Janusz Lewandowski in Saigon who was a member of the International Control Commission and Italy's ambassador to Saigon Giovanni D'Orlandi to initiate talks between Washington and Hanoi. *Marigold* explains the failure of this negotiating initiative with the American bombing campaign "Rolling Thunder" of North Vietnam which destroyed American credibility. *Marigold* is major study that explains America's determination to stay in Vietnam, but it does not convincingly tell the history of Vietnamese side. In this dissertation, I argue that there was no chance for peace in Vietnam from 1965 to 1968.

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<sup>13</sup> Logevall, "Bring in the 'Other Sides': New scholarship on the Vietnam War," *Journal of Cold War studies*, Volume 3, Number 3 (Fall 2001), 84-85.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 85.

<sup>15</sup> George C. Herring, *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating Volumes of the Pentagon Papers* (University of Texas Press, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> Luu Van Loi, Nguyen Anh Vu, *Tiep xuc bi mat Vietnam Hoa Ky truoc hoi nghi Paris* [Secret contacts between Vietnam and the United States before the Paris conference] (Hanoi: International relations institute, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> James G. Hershberg, *Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012).

In the sets of meetings which were held in Hanoi between November 1995 and February 1998 involving U.S. and Vietnamese scholars and former civilian and military officials, U.S. Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara argued that: “From the start of U.S. involvement through the end of the 1960s, American policy makers consistently misinterpreted the mindset, objective, and capabilities of their adversaries in Hanoi.”<sup>18</sup> Logevall disagreed with all arguments and pointed out: “There is something in the argument, but McNamara takes it too far.”<sup>19</sup> McNamara concluded that both sides missed opportunities for peace in Vietnam because of misunderstanding.<sup>20</sup> In this dissertation, with research gathered from Vietnamese and the U.S. resources, I argue that during 1960s both sides understood each other well and all the peace initiatives 1965-1968 failed in spite of this.

My research has led to views different from those of James G. Hershberg. In my opinion, the Marigold initiative as well as other peace initiative (1965-1968) could not present any real opportunity for peace in Vietnam. The negotiations that took place between 1965 and 1968 have not been studied adequately or systematically. Many questions relating to the negotiation during the Vietnam War were left unanswered.

My research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the negotiations during the Vietnam War. I used recently released archival material as well as unpublished documents in order to describe the secret negotiations and to explain why the negotiation initiatives failed. With this new evidence and analysis of negotiations during the Vietnam War, my research sheds more light on Vietnamese communist foreign policy and American foreign policy towards Vietnam during the war.

First, the negotiations between 1965 and 1968 will be analyzed in the context of diplomatic strategy of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) during the Vietnam War. It is important to understand how the DRV’s diplomatic strategy was formed with regard to Vietnamese resistance wars against foreign rule from earlier times. It is often said that Vietnam’s history is a litany of resistance to foreign domination. Having a long history of resistance against foreign rule, the Vietnamese people have a great sense of national identity and national independence. Vietnam strongly wanted to decide its own destiny on its own terms.

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<sup>18</sup> Logevall, “Bring in the ‘Other Sides’,” 86.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>20</sup> Robert S. McNamara, James Blight, and Robert Brigham, with Thomas J. Biersteker and Herbert Y. Schandler, *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999).

How did Vietnamese traditional diplomacy, history, culture and religion affect the DRV's diplomatic strategy and Hanoi's decisions-making process in the negotiations between 1965 and 1968 in the Vietnam War? It will be important to discuss in how far the history of Vietnamese resistance against foreign rules, specifically the resistance war against France, affected Vietnamese attitudes regarding the involvement of the United States in the Vietnam since 1945.

Second, it is important to take into account the DRV's relations with its allies China and the Soviet Union. The Vietnamese felt betrayed by the Chinese in Geneva in 1954 where they had put pressure on them to agree to the "temporary" separation of the country. At the same time, Vietnam needed allies like China and the Soviet Union for economic aid, military aid, spiritual support and diplomatic relations. To what degree and in which ways were Hanoi's decisions influenced by their allies in Moscow and Beijing?

Third, I will discuss the negotiations in the context of Hanoi's relations with its internal ally, the National Liberation Front (NLF). What was the exact nature of Hanoi's relations with the NLF-Provisional Revolutionary Government? And to what extent did the NLF in the South influence Hanoi's decisions regarding the negotiations?

Fourth, the contexts of American domestic affairs must be considered in order to understand American motives in the negotiating initiatives. During the Johnson administration, the protests against the Vietnam War constituted the largest and most sustained anti-war movement in the nation's history. From March 1965 when the antiwar movement was launched as a response to the bombing of North Vietnam-through March 31<sup>st</sup> 1968-when President Johnson announced his decision to limit the war in Vietnam and told the public that he would not seek reelection, the anti-war movement continued to grow stronger and stronger. Can a connection between the growing peace movement and Johnson's Vietnam policy be established?

The widening of the Vietnam War during the Johnson administration first in the form of the Rolling Thunder program of systematic and sustained bombing of North Vietnam in early 1965 was intended to affect the will and ability of the North Vietnamese leadership and people to support the guerrillas in South Vietnam. However, it did not work as the American government had planned. The aerial bombardment of North Vietnam led to an international outcry and the condemnation of U.S. war tactics and war aims. What was the relation between the U.S. bombing of

North Vietnam and the negotiations initiatives? Was the U.S. bombing responsible for the failure of negotiation initiatives to end the conflict earlier?

Fifth, I will discuss the nature of the U.S. relations with South Vietnam. To what degree did the Republic Government of South Vietnam influence U.S. decisions regarding negotiations?

Finally, I will discuss the relations between the U.S. negotiations decisions and the U.S. presidents' efforts to protect U.S. credibility, the credibility of their own Party, and their personal credibility.<sup>21</sup>

### **Negotiating Initiatives (1965-1968)**

In 1965, each side released formal statements of their respective negotiation positions: Hanoi's "Four Points" on April 8<sup>th</sup> 1965 and Washington's "Fourteen Points" on December 29<sup>th</sup> 1965. Between 1965 and 1968, there were many secret talks between Washington and Hanoi through a number of channels but all peace initiatives failed. Some scholars say that the fundamental differences of the positions and motives from Washington and Hanoi were simply misunderstood by each party, so they could not move quickly into negotiations.<sup>22</sup>

However, in fact, the two sides understood each other well. Hanoi believed that the U.S. wanted it to surrender, so that the U.S. could keep South Vietnam an independent country-free from the influences of the Soviet Union and Chinese Communists. Hanoi also believed that the U.S. wanted to keep South Vietnam within its circle of influence. North Vietnam felt that the U.S.'s bombing of the North and the arrival of U.S. troops in the South was primary evidence of America's aggression. They did not see the U.S. intermediary efforts as a genuine desire for peace, but instead as a plot to prepare for an escalation in order to trap or even destroy them. At the same time, many in Washington knew about Hanoi's determination to gain national independence and unification, and of the long-term patience of the Vietnamese (with the time on the side of the Vietnamese side), and thus knew that Hanoi would not negotiate until America's will to fight was destroyed. In the end, after the Tet offensive in 1968,

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<sup>21</sup> Some authors also wrote about U.S. presidents' efforts to protect U.S. credibility, their own Party's credibility and the U.S. presidents' own credibility in their decisions in Vietnam War, especially Fredrick Logevall in *Choosing War*.

<sup>22</sup> For example, see the position of authors Robert S. McNamara, Robert Brigham, James Blight, Thomas Biersteker, and Col. Herbert Schandler in their book *Argument without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (1999).

Washington had to accept Hanoi's conditions to enter into serious peace talks in Paris. How could a small country such Vietnam defeat the superpower's aggressive will and force them to accept Hanoi's (the NLF's) conditions for the peace talks?

In order to answer these questions, the history of the U.S./Vietnam negotiations during the Vietnam War (1965-1968) needs to be told from multiple perspectives. The history entails the struggle of the vastness of U.S. postwar ambitions versus the powerful emergence of Vietnamese patriotism; the U.S.'s hard power versus Vietnam's "soft power"<sup>23</sup> stemming from a national leader with irresistible charisma with the romantic ideal of struggle for national independence and unification behind him.<sup>24</sup> These major themes are developed in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 examines Vietnamese patriotism and collective culture as the soft powers of Vietnamese leaders in the Vietnam War. I argue that the DRV's and NLF's war strategy stemmed from a strong belief in the justice of their struggle, from Vietnam's traditional patriotism, diplomacy, psychology, and culture, making it a "just war."<sup>25</sup> At the root of the DRV's and NLF's strategy of peace and war, as well as of the Vietnamese policies on negotiation, was the foundation of Vietnamese patriotism and collective culture.

Chapter 3 explores the emergence and development of U.S. power in the world after World War II and its fear of Communist expansionism. The chapter stresses the ever-deepening U.S. involvement in Vietnam and explains why the Johnson administration was determined to stay in South Vietnam. This helps us to understand the origins of the American determination in keeping their strategy of attempting peace initiatives during bombing phases, while strategically planning the war's escalation to support the South Vietnamese government. This also helps to explain why all peace initiatives between 1965 and 1968 failed.

Chapter 4 explores the U.S. assessment on its rivals and the world's search for peace in Vietnam between 1964-1965. The chapter argues that the U.S. understood the nature of the war and understood the relationship between Vietnam and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, Vietnam and China, Vietnam and the Soviet Union and the outlook on negotiations of countries around the world. I argue that the failures of peace initiatives between 1965 and 1968 was not because of

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<sup>23</sup> "Soft power" is the term created by Joseph Nye in late 1980s.

<sup>24</sup> About Ho Chi Minh's irresistible charisma, see Professor's Dang Van Ngu's memoir (Song Huong Magazin, 1988) or To Huu's poems, Che Lan Vien's poems, Bui Hue's poems and many other Vietnamese works.

<sup>25</sup> The term "Just war" was already used in Vietnamese history in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

misunderstanding, but because the U.S. failed to account for the power of Vietnamese patriotism and collective culture.

Chapter 5 explores the several international efforts and missions to bring peace to Vietnam.

Chapter 6 analyzes the PINTA peace offensive from December 1965 to February 1966. The chapter argues that Johnson was sincerely searching for peace in desperation as he, and American allies knew that the Vietnamese determination in fighting for national independence and unification could not be militarily defeated. However, Johnson could not persuade North Vietnam to come to the peace talk table. Afterwards, the U.S. was more determined to stay in South Vietnam and increased American military power in Vietnam, making the situation even worse.

Chapter 7 analyzes the Sainteny Mission and Harrison E. Salisbury Mission in search of peace for Vietnam. People all over the world were interested in finding a peaceful solution to the Vietnam problem and that North Vietnam sent peace messages through its peace initiatives to the world to gain the hearts and minds of people, not only socialist countries, but also in the West. Diplomacy was one of the most important fronts North Vietnam developed in the fight against the U.S. and South Vietnam that contributed to its final success.

Chapter 8 emphasizes the link between the Vietnamese strategies for war and peace strategies and their negotiation policy during the Vietnam War. The very essence of traditional Vietnamese diplomacy is harmonious and flexible in its attempts to maintain friendly relations and overall peace with foreign countries while always protecting their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. I argue that Ho Chi Minh and the Lao Dong Party seriously wanted to solve the conflict through peaceful means. However, because of the U.S.'s determination to keep South Vietnam as an independent country, far from the influences of Chinese Communists, Ho Chi Minh and his comrades had no choice other than to strive to "gain the hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people and of people all over the world, especially in China, the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.<sup>26</sup> The Vietnamese leaders sought to gain empathy

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<sup>26</sup> "*Gaining the hearts and minds*" was the term used in Vietnamese traditional art of leadership "được lòng dân" or "hợp lòng dân" or "theo ý dân" or "tâm công." It first appeared in the 11th century in the document "Edict on transfer of the Capital" of the King Ly Cong Uan: "Trên kính mệnh trời, dưới theo ý dân" (Listen to the Almighty's desire, and gaining hearts and minds of people.) [Ngo Sy Lien, *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu* (The complete Annals of Great Vietnam), Collection 2, first publishing in Han-old Chinese Language 1697). (Vietnamese version. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publisher, 1993), 81. My own translation from Vietnamese to English]. In the 15th century, Nguyen Trai wrote in "The Proclamation of victory": "without needing violence to attack enemy, but we could win



and solidarity to gather support for their struggle for national independence and unification until victory. The DRV/NLF leaders believed that time was on their side, and they would begin talks only when they knew that the American will had been broken.

Chapter 9 examines the DRV/NLF diplomacy to gain the hearts and minds of people in the world and how the Tet Offensive (1968) changed the process of U.S.-Vietnamese negotiations. In early 1967, while preparing the military plan for the Winter/Spring of 1967-1968, the Central Military Commission of the Vietnamese Communist Party believed that a Vietnamese victory during the Winter/Spring campaign would create new advantages for the DRV/NLF, and that if they continued to conduct strategic attacks, the U.S. would be defeated and would withdraw its troops and both sides would go to the table for peace talks. The Commission decided that they needed a new way of fighting to create a new phase in the war. The Tet Offensive decision was based not only on the military balance of the battlefield, but also on the concept of opportunity. It did not only aim at military targets but included psychological attacks on the enemy, and a way to “gain the hearts and minds” of the Vietnamese people and supporters worldwide. Finally, the success of the Tet offensive defeated the aggressive will of the Johnson administration and opened the way to Paris Peace talks to begin.

I argue that all the peace initiatives failed because of America’s arrogant faith in its superior military power. The U.S. always tried to initiate peace using its strength, and in this case, underestimated the power of Vietnamese patriotism and Vietnamese collective culture. The dissertation also emphasizes that the important questions of whether to make peace or war, negotiation or escalation, were discussed and decided in the White House as well as in South Vietnam and Hanoi. The origin of the war was

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because we have superior stratagem and a humane policy to gain the hearts and minds of people.” [*Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, Collection 10, 357. My own translation from Vietnamese to English]. The phrase “hearts and minds” was first used in the Western political world by American president John Adams in 1818 in a letter to a Baltimore newspaper. [Lieutenant Bertrand Valeyre. *Winning hearts and minds historical origins of the concept and its current implementation in Afghanistan*. Cahier de la Recherche, 2011, 17]. “The phrase “hearts and minds” was first used in the Western Military World in 1952 by British General Gerald Temple: the triumph does not depend on “pouring more troops into the jungle, but in the hearts and minds of the [Malayan] people.” [Sebastiaan J.H. Rietjens and Myriame T.I.B. Bollen, Netherlands Defense Academy, The Netherlands, ed. *Managing Civil-Military Cooperation*. Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008, 13]. During the Vietnam War, President Johnson used the term “hearts and minds” many times, for example: “we must be ready to fight in Vietnam, but the ultimate victory will depend on hearts and minds of the people who actually live out there.” (Lyndon B. Johnson, Remarks at Dinner Meeting of the Texas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. May 4<sup>th</sup> 1965), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26942>.

America's support for the French against the Vietnamese revolution after World War II and America's support of Diem, which prevented a general election in Vietnam in 1956. This means that the real architect of this war was America, from its vantage point of the White House, and not Vietnamese in the South Vietnamese government. As a result, the nature of the Vietnam War was a patriotic war against the U.S. and the U.S. backed South Vietnam government, to achieve Vietnamese national independence and unification in the context of the decolonization movements and the Cold War.

With this analysis of the negotiations during the Vietnam War (1965-1968), my research partly based on Vietnamese documents that are here translated and analyzed for the first time will shed more light on Vietnamese and U.S. foreign policies after World War II and will contribute to a better of understanding of Hanoi's secret diplomacy including Vietnamese psychology and culture during the Vietnam War. In debates about the peace initiatives between 1965 and 1968, too little emphasis has been put on the role of Vietnamese patriotism and culture in the balance of power between Washington and Hanoi. During the period I analyze, the collectivist culture was the root of Vietnamese society. After hundreds of failed peace initiatives, the final victory of Hanoi and the NLF leaders was the (inevitable) result. In the Vietnam War, Hanoi leaders possessed more powerful forces, specifically more powerful soft powers than Washington's leaders did because their strategies of war and diplomacy had roots in Vietnamese culture and history. Vietnamese patriotism and traditional culture were the greatest obstacles to U.S. ambitions in Vietnam.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, Washington must take some blame and bear responsibility for the failures of the peace initiatives and for the loss of lives. Had U.S. policy makers given enough value to the nature of Vietnamese culture and its long history, they would not have supported the French or supported the Republic of Vietnam in its prevention of the Vietnamese general election which led to an escalation of the war.

The Vietnam War was a *people's war* against the U.S. and the government-backed U.S./South Vietnam government.<sup>28</sup> The ultimate victory depends on the ability to

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<sup>27</sup> Robert McMahon wrote about the nationalist movements as the great obstacle to the U.S. ambitions in the Southeast Asia in *Limits of Empire: The United States and Southeast Asia since World War II*.

<sup>28</sup> The term of *the people's war/struggle* was used in Vietnamese in 13<sup>th</sup> Century when the famous general Vietnamese Tran Hung Dao gave the advices to Emperor Tran Anh Tong about the root of the strategy of the people's struggle for independence: "When the enemy advances roaring like fire and wind, it is easy to overcome them. If they use patience like the silk-worm nibbling berry leaves without looking for a quick victory and without fleeing people, we need to have not only good generals but also an elaboration of adequate tactics like in a chess

“gain the hearts and minds” of the people of Vietnam and people worldwide. Diplomacy was one of the most important fronts in the Vietnam War and Hanoi/NLF leaders wisely developed their strength in terms of “soft power” to defeat America’s strength of hard power in the struggle for national independence and unification in the contexts of colonial history and the Cold War.

### **Archives and Primary Sources**

For 6 years, I did archival research at the National Archives II-Ho Chi Minh city, the Archival Bureau of The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam-Hanoi, the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Institute of Ho Chi Minh National Politics. I gained access to primary documents of The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party from the Archival Bureau of the Communist Party's Central Committee of Vietnam, which included the following important reports from North Vietnam’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 1. The international support for Vietnam (1966-1972); 2. International views on Vietnam and Vietnam’s policies on winning friends for anti-American resistance; 3. England and her views on Vietnam (1963-1968); 4. Vietnamese-Soviet relations (1964-1968); 5. The talks between Vietnam and the Soviet Union (February 1964 and February 1965); 6. The Chinese Culture Revolutions and Vietnam’s opinion; 7. Chinese-Soviet relations, its influences on Vietnam; 8. The foreign affairs of the US (1961-1965, 1968). With these never-before-analyzed archival materials of the Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I shed more light on North Vietnam’s decision-making process regarding the negotiation initiatives. These primary resources also helped me to explore the politics of both war making and peace-making during the negotiations not only from the North Vietnam perspective, but also that of South Vietnam, the Soviet Union, China and the United States.

I also conducted research in the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library for 5 months in 2012. I used the National Security File (NSF), the working file of President Johnson’s national security affairs staff, which pertaining to “domestic issues” during the Johnson administration; the recordings of telephone conversations of Lyndon B.

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game. In any way, the whole army should be united, having only one heart like father and sons in a family. We should treat people kindly, listen to their interests, so we can guarantee deep roots of building our nation.” [Ngo Sy Lien, *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu* (The complete Annals of Great Vietnam), Collection 4, first publishing in Han-old Chinese Language 1697). (Vietnamese version. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publisher, 1993), 210 (my own translation from Vietnamese into English)

Johnson; the meeting notes file and Tom Johnson's notes of meetings, as well as The Vietnam Country File. I also used the published records of the foreign relations of the United States (1964-1968) from the State Department as well as from the American Presidency Project of UCSB.

If in Vietnam more primary sources had been published, the scholarship on the Vietnam War would have been understood more clearly and we could have learned many lessons of the past for keeping peace for the present and the future. Many important documents about the Vietnam War in Vietnamese archives still remain classified.

## **CHAPTER 2. VIETNAMESE PATRIOTISM AND VIETNAMESE COLLECTIVIST CULTURE DURING THE VIETNAM WAR**

Vietnamese patriotism and Vietnamese collectivist culture played a very important role in the American-Vietnamese negotiations during the Vietnam War. The Vietnamese war strategy came from the minds of the Lao Dong Party's members, especially the 11 members of the Politburo. To understand the policy of the Lao Dong Party, we have to understand the top decision-makers in Vietnam, especially the wills, the minds, and the personalities of these key leaders of the Lao Dong Party from the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Congress in 1960 onwards. The first president of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) Ho Chi Minh and his comrades were patriotic Communists. The Vietnamese have a proverb that is often said: "knowing others, knowing ourselves; a hundred battles, a hundred wins." This idea may originate from the writings of the ancient Chinese general Sun Tzu in his *Art of War*: "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained, you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."<sup>29</sup> President Ho Chi Minh and his comrades took lessons from their French colonial history in order to analyze the balance of power between DRV and NLF as well as that of the United States and the South Vietnamese regime to decide their strategy for war and peace. They knew the powerful role Vietnamese patriotism and culture could play when backed with international support for their war of independence, which ultimately gave them a strong belief in their final victory. In addition, they understood the determination of the U.S. in its efforts to keep South Vietnam far from the influence of the Soviet and Chinese Communists. As a result, Vietnamese leaders decided to fight an unrelenting battle for national independence and unification, in spite of their nation's comparatively small military. The result was the launch of the Vietnamese people's war to defeat the will of the U.S. to stay in South Vietnam. This entailed the subsequent refusal of all negotiation initiatives from 1965 to 1968.

Vietnam's geo-political position is unique, and helped the Vietnamese to resist natural calamities and foreign threats for thousands of years. The country of Vietnam

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<sup>29</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, quoted in J.E. McCollough, *Terrorism, Knowing the Enemy*, <http://nation.time.com/2013/05/07/knowning-thy-enemy/>

is shaped like the letter “S”, with China on its northern boundary, Laos and Cambodia bordering on the West and a serpentine East coast that faces the East Sea (Bien Dong). The nation lays at the juncture of mainland Southeast Asia and its offshore islands. It is also has a strategic position on the sea-lanes stretching from the South Pacific to Northeast Asia. Throughout its history, Vietnam’s position helped to foster the outstanding cultural features of a strong sense of national identity earned through numerous wars of resistance against foreign domination.<sup>30</sup> Vietnam fell under Chinese rule in 208 BC and struggled to free itself for almost a millennium, finally gaining independence from its much larger neighbor to the North in 938 AD. From that time onward, Vietnam endeavored to maintain its independence. Through their long history of resistance to foreign rule, the Vietnamese people developed a great sense of national pride and identity.<sup>31</sup>

In the modern era, Vietnam again faced near national annihilation in the form of colonial rule. Since the sixteenth century, Western European nations collectively embarked on a global mission to impose their will on smaller, less technically advanced regions of the world.<sup>32</sup> They set about to virtually enslave native peoples and plunder their natural resources for their own national benefit.<sup>33</sup> In this vein, the French launched an effort to colonize Southeast Asia in the 19th century. After careful plans of posturing and preparing for a war, French colonial forces attacked Da Nang, Vietnam’s central and most important city on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1858.<sup>34</sup> This initial act of French aggression quickly overpowered the city. However, the grand French strategy to “fight fast, win fast” had not counted on the Nguyen dynasty’s fierce and steadfast

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<sup>30</sup> Many Vietnamese scholars such as Tran Van Giau, Hoang Minh Thao, Vu Hai Thanh, Nguyen Thanh Tuan and Vu Hanh also wrote about the struggle against foreigners for national salvation as the feature of Vietnamese culture. Vu Hanh, “Vietnamese indomitable spirit,” *Chung ta*, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2014, accessed January 19<sup>th</sup> 2017, <http://www.chungta.com/nd/tu-lieu-tra-cuu/tinh-than-bat-khuat-cua-nguoi-viet-nam/2.html>

Nguyen Thanh Tuan, “The culture of national salvation, the basic characteristic of Vietnamese culture,” *Nha xuat ban chinh tri quoc gia su that*, November 11<sup>th</sup> 2013, accessed January 19<sup>th</sup> 2017, [http://www.nxbctqg.org.vn/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3835:vn-hoa-gi-nc-ni-dung-ct-loi-ca-bn-sc-vn-hoa-dan-tc-vit-nam&catid=112:tin-van-hoa-tu-tuong&Itemid=488](http://www.nxbctqg.org.vn/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3835:vn-hoa-gi-nc-ni-dung-ct-loi-ca-bn-sc-vn-hoa-dan-tc-vit-nam&catid=112:tin-van-hoa-tu-tuong&Itemid=488)

Phung Quang Thanh, “Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom,” *Dang Cong San*, October 12<sup>th</sup> 2016, accessed January 19<sup>th</sup> 2017, <http://dangcongsan.vn/tu-lieu-van-kien/tu-lieu-ve-dang/sach-chinh-tri/books-3105201510003046/index-0105201593906468.html>

<sup>31</sup> Dinh Xuan Lam, Nguyen Dinh Le, Nguyen Van Khanh, *Đại cương Lịch sử Việt Nam* [History of Vietnam] (Hanoi: Ministry of Education Publisher, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> Cao Huy Thuan, “Thiên Chúa Giáo và chủ nghĩa thực dân tại Việt Nam” [Christianisme et Colonialisme au Vietnam 1857-1914] (PhD Dissertation, Sciences Po Paris, 1968) [French version translated into Vietnamese, copyright by Huong Que 1988, Los Angeles, CA 90051, USA].

<sup>33</sup> Nguyen Xuan Tho, *Bước mở đầu của sự thiết lập hệ thống thuộc địa Pháp ở Việt Nam (1858-1897)* [Les débuts de L’intallation du Système Colonial Francais au Viet Nam 1858-1897] (Hong Duc Publisher, 2016).

<sup>34</sup> Dinh Xuan Lam, Nguyen Dinh Le, Nguyen Van Khanh, *Đại cương Lịch sử Việt Nam*, 486.

opposition.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, the French were forced to adopt a program of fighting slowly, winning decisively in a step-by-step battle method. France first seized three provinces in Vietnam's southeastern region: Bien Hoa, Gia Dinh, and Dinh Tuong between 1861 and 1862. The next year the French overpowered three more provinces, this time in the country's southwestern quadrant. All together, it took about a quarter of a century to fully defeat and occupy Vietnam. In their final major campaign during the years 1882 and 1883, the French seized the northern Vietnamese provinces and the kingdom of Hue.<sup>36</sup> It is a testament to the Nguyen dynasty's determination to protect its independence that it took so many years for the French, using modern weaponry against Vietnam's sticks, swords, and cannons, to prevail against the less-advanced country.<sup>37</sup>

In his self-critical statement issued in 1876, King Tu Duc claimed responsibility for the failures, blaming himself for the loss of the six provinces in the South to the French colonialists and for the lamentable situation of the nation having been left open to foreign invasions. According to King Tu Duc's statement, the most important reason for the loss of the nation to the French Colonialists was the King and the Nguyen dynasty, which could not predict the oncoming danger, and did nothing to prepare for a war against foreign invaders.<sup>38</sup> He wrote about himself: "While the country was in peace, I did not care about the situation of the world and the nation; I did not think about the possibility of turmoil when living in peace."<sup>39</sup> Feeling very ashamed and hopeless, he surrendered to the French in order to restore peace for his people.<sup>40</sup>

After the Nguyen Dynasty surrendered to the French in accordance with the treaty of 1883, Confucian scholars and patriotic royalists continued to lead the movement

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Phan Ngoc Lien, *Lịch sử triều Nguyễn: cách tiếp cận mới* [The history of Nguyen dynasty-new understanding] (Hanoi: Hanoi University of Education, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> Tran Trong Kim wrote about the reasons of the failure of The Nguyen Dynasty: "After King Duc Duc's years, Vietnam became the colony of French. Vietnam had the Vietnamese Kings but the real authority belonged to French Colonists. Because the era changed but we did not change, the country became degenerate" (This is the first history book written in Vietnamese alphabet, published in 1920. Tran Trong Kim was a historian as well as a politician. He was the Prime Minister of Vietnam from April 17<sup>th</sup> 1945-August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1945), Tran Trong Kim, *Lịch sử Việt Nam* [History of Vietnam], Saigon: Ministry of Education-The center of studies, 1971, 220.

<sup>38</sup> Tran Viet Ngac, Góp phần tìm hiểu Vua Tự Đức qua dụ tự biếm và một số châu phê [Understanding about King Tu Duc through self critical statements], [http://chimviet.free.fr/35/tvns055\\_tuduc.htm](http://chimviet.free.fr/35/tvns055_tuduc.htm).

<sup>39</sup> Tu Duc, *Dụ tự biếm* [self-critical statement of King Tu Duc] June 2nd 1876, [Record of Royal Documents of the Nguyễn Dynasty]. Quoted in Tran Viet Ngac, Góp phần tìm hiểu Vua Tự Đức qua dụ tự biếm và một số châu phê [Understanding about King Tu Duc through self critical statements].

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

against French occupation. On July 13<sup>th</sup> 1885, Ham Nghi, eighth king of the Nguyen dynasty, declared *Du Can Vương*, an official call to arms in support of the king. *Du Can Vương* appealed to Vietnamese patriots, regardless of social class, to help king Ham Nghi resist French Colonialism. The king lamented:

I feel ashamed that I am not talented enough to keep the kingdom. The kingdom is surrounded by French military. The sin is mine. However, the monarchist officials do not abandon me, someone intelligent will advise policies, someone strong will give the strength, someone rich will give money and weapons and Vietnamese fellows are not afraid of danger. Please make the chaos become peace; please make the dangers become security; take the opportunity to regain our kingdom, our country. The benefits and happiness of royalty and country are also the benefits and happiness of every fellow; we worry together and we will share peaceful times together.<sup>41</sup>

This document, delivered in Vietnamese, was written in the beautiful literary style of the country's literature. Its emotional plea had a profound influence on the Vietnamese populace and especially encouraged the Confucian scholars to call for a general uprising. After Ham Nghi urged his people to resist French colonialism, France quickly designated Dong Khanh as the new king on September 19, 1885. In response arose the new 'Can Vương' patriotic movement to support Ham Nghi and fight against French colonialism.<sup>42</sup> For decades, the Can Vương held sway in many Vietnamese provinces. Between 1884 and 1913, organized uprisings took place in the following provinces: Huong Khe-Phan Dinh Phung, Hung Linh, Tong Duy Tan, Bai Say, Nguyen Thien Thuat. An especially strong uprising occurred in Yen The, led by Hoang Hoa Tham: "Initially led by Luong Van Nam, and then Hoang Hoa Tham; for over 30 years the uprising manifested the Vietnamese people's solidarity and

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<sup>41</sup> King Hàm Nghi (1872-1943), "Chiếu Cần Vương" [Decree for an official call to arms in support the King], in *Collection of Patriotic Literature: Patriotic Literature in the second period of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (1858-1900)*, Ed. Chu Thien. (Hanoi: Literature Publisher, 1976), ed. Chu Thien, 522-523 (my own translation from Vietnamese to English).

According to *Đại Nam Thực Lục- Chronicle of Greater Vietnam, the true record of the Great Vietnam- Chinese languages annual records of the Nguyen Dynasty was written by Nguyen Dynasty's National Institute of History from 1821 to 1909, Ton That Thuyet-a leading manderin of Nguyen dynasty asked King Ham Nghi to order the decree for an official call to arms in supporting the King* [*Đại Nam Thực Lục* 36, trans. Nguyen Ngoc Tinh (Hanoi: Social Science Publisher, 1976), 225-244].

According to Trần Viết Ngạc, *Dụ Cần Vương* instead of *Chiếu Cần Vương* because "Chiếu" means "Proclamation"; "Dụ" means "Decree or Edict." See: Trần Viết Ngạc, "Chiếu hay Dụ cần Vương" in *Hội Nghị nhóm chủ chiến trong triều đình Huế và Nguyễn Văn Tường*, Trường Đại học Sư phạm Tp. HCM, 1996. [Trần Viết Ngạc, "Proclamation or Dcree for supporting the King" in *The records of the conference about the group of supporting fighting in Nguyen Dynasty and Nguyen Van Tuong*, (Ho Chi Minh city: Ho Chi Minh city University of Education, 1996)].

<sup>42</sup> Dinh Xuan Lam and Nguyen Van Khanh, "The role of Ton That Thuyet in National History," *Journal of History studies* 255, no. 6 (1985): 13.



patriotism in fighting against French colonialists.”<sup>43</sup> Despite widespread popular support among the Vietnamese people, all of these uprisings were defeated. The French captured the emperor Ham Nghi in 1888. Eight years later, the strongest of these patriotic uprisings collapsed when its leader, Phan Dinh Phung, died. The failure of the protracted Can Vuong movement destroyed the last Vietnamese hope to restore the monarchy and overthrow colonial rule.<sup>44</sup> Years later, the Vietnamese patriot, President Ho Chi Minh, wrote about the failure of those movements: “Under the control of French colonialism for almost a decade, the Vietnamese patriotic movements for national salvation were unceasing in their development; where the predecessors failed, successors stood up and continued to fight. However all those patriotic uprisings were defeated in blood. A black cloud covered the Vietnamese sky.”<sup>45</sup>

The failure of these popular uprisings against the French in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries showed a need for a new unified ideology as a basis for national liberation, unattached to restoring power to the previous ruling monarchy.<sup>46</sup> Indeed it would attach to the French concept the freedom-equality-fraternity. Vietnamese patriot Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh) found a new way for the Vietnamese patriotic movement against French Colonialism.

Governor General Paul Doumer (1897-1902) initiated the first French campaign to systematically modernize Vietnam. His administration, however, did little to benefit the Vietnamese people, but instead became a useful system to exploit the country and crush any expression of nationalism.<sup>47</sup> Though Doumer touted modernization, he did almost nothing to promote education in Vietnam. Paul Doumer, and those who followed him, were little more than extensions of French colonial rule. They imposed intolerable working conditions, exacted heavy taxes, and favored cruel treatment of the citizenry. Under Doumer and his successors, the Vietnamese people as a whole

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<sup>43</sup> “Bac Giang marks 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Yen The Uprising,” March 17<sup>th</sup> 2014, <http://vovworld.vn/en-us/News/Bac-Giang-marks-130th-anniversary-of-Yen-The-Uprising/223680.vov>

<sup>44</sup> Le Thanh Khoi, *Lịch sử Việt Nam từ nguồn gốc đến thế kỷ XX* [History of Vietnam from the origin to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century] (Nha Nam Publisher, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> Ho Chi Minh, “Con đường cứu nước và giải phóng dân tộc trong thời đại ngày nay (1-1959)” [The way for national salvation and national liberation today (January 1959)], *Ho Chi Minh toàn tập 1* (Hanoi: Nhà xuất bản chính trị quốc gia: 2000), 314, (my own translation).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Dinh Xuan Lam, Nguyen Dinh Le, Nguyen Van Khanh, *Đại cương Lịch sử Việt Nam* [Conspectus of Vietnam history] (Hanoi: Ministry of Education Publisher, 2002).

experienced extreme poverty and endured hard and violent lives of virtual serfdom.<sup>48</sup> This unrelenting oppression only served to instill resentment and anger among the masses, and especially among scholars.<sup>49</sup>

Young Vietnamese intellectuals expressed a vindictive hatred toward their oppressors and felt compelled to fight them. They could no longer invoke the restoration of the monarchy as a rallying point for removing the French, but they needed a new ideology to fight for national liberation to throw off the yoke of colonialism. The question of where this regenerative idea could be found was a question for deep consideration among young Vietnamese intellectuals in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>50</sup>

As Vietnamese society had endured tremendous change and numerous failed movements for national liberation by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Vietnamese intellectuals began searching for inspiration outside Vietnam. They began to read and discuss books translated from Chinese and new ideologies from Western countries and Japan; exploring “democracy-freedom-fraternity-modernization” and initiated new ways of thinking about their national future.<sup>51</sup>

Part of this search stemmed from the first French program of colonial exploitation, which had forced the Vietnamese to alter their class system. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Vietnamese society not only had a peasant class and a ruling class, but also an emerging bourgeois class. Vietnam’s bourgeois class was a recent arrival on the social and political scene and was not yet strong enough to lead the national liberation movement. Instead, it fell to the country’s progressive, patriotic, and learned Confucian scholars who had just broken with the monarchical tradition, to assume

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<sup>48</sup> Nguyễn Ái Quốc, Tội ác của chủ nghĩa thực dân Pháp, Báo La Vie Ouvrière, 129- 30.9.1921 (Hồ Chí Minh, toàn tập, tập 1. Tr. 48-49-50; Nguyễn Ái Quốc, Sự quái đản của công cuộc khai hoá, Báo Le Libéraire, ngày 30-9 7-10. 1921 (Hồ Chí Minh, toàn tập, tập 1. Tr.51-52)

Nguyen Ai Quoc, “Crimes of French colonialism” in *La Vie Ouvrière, 129- 30.9.1921* (Ho Chi Minh, *total works, Vol 1, pp. 48-49-50*. Nguyen Ai Quoc, “The horrible truth behind the term civilization mission” in *Le Libéraire, 30.9 7.10. 1921* (Ho Chi Minh, *total works, vol 1, pp. 51-52*)

See also the chapter “The pressure policies of Paul Doumer” in Cao Huy Thuan, “Thien Chua Giao va chu nghĩa thực dân tại Viet Nam” (Christianisme et Colonialisme au Vietnam 1857- 1914), [PhD Dissertation, Sciences Po Paris, 1968] [French version translated into Vietnamese]

<sup>49</sup> Đinh Xuân Lâm, Nguyễn Đình Lê, Nguyễn Văn Khanh, *Đại cương Lịch sử Việt Nam*.

<sup>50</sup> See also Tran Trong Kim, History of Vietnam, p. 234: “Vietnamese patriotism: Because of dangerous situations, the Vietnamese kept silent. However the Vietnamese patriotic spirit was more and more passionate, and they felt more hatred. Those were reasons why the resistances happened. [...] There was Dong Kinh Nghĩa Thục in Hanoi in 1907. There were patriotic scholars such as Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chu Trinh. Phan Chu Trinh was not afraid of being jailed, and he criticized the corruptions of mandarins. Phan Boi Chau travelled abroad to find the ways for national salvation.” (My own translation from Vietnamese to English)

<sup>51</sup> Vinh Sinh, *Việt Nam và Nhật Bản: Giao lưu văn hoá* [Vietnam and Japan: culture exchange] (Ho Chi Minh city: Arts publisher, 2001), 290-303.

leadership of a revolutionary movement.<sup>52</sup> The generation of Vietnamese intellectuals who rose to prominence in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century represented a period of transition between traditional and modern Vietnam. Among them were Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chau Trinh, Tran Quy Cap, Huynh Thuc Khang, Nguyen Thuong Hien, and Luong Van Can. These men had spent most of their youth preparing for the many examinations required by Han Hoc system to hold degrees, and quickly became famous for their scholastic achievements.

In 1902, for example, Phan Boi Chau won the country's highest honor in a literary competition held every three years in Nghe An. In 1900, Phan Chau Trinh (1872-1926) graduated third in the regional examination and second (pho bang) in the metropolitan examination the following year. Huynh Thuc Khang (1876-1947) passed his regional examination with the highest score in 1900 and came in fourth in his metropolitan examination in 1904 to achieve his doctorate. However, these men would use their traditional education to completely change and modernize political thought in Vietnam.<sup>53</sup>

Although they were successful in Han Hoc, they did not content themselves with their status of Confucian scholars and even repudiated the Confucian educational system after reading Tan Thu, the "new books."<sup>54</sup> These new books came to Vietnam from China through translated works of Chinese scholars such as Liang Chi's "Ch'ao" (1873-1927) and K'ang Yu-wen (1828-1927). Thanks to their exposure to new philosophies, these Vietnamese intellectuals became aware of the great minds of France, Italy, Germany, and Japan, including the scholar Fukuzawa Yukichi. Through their studies they became infused with the ideas of equality, democracy, and modern civilization.

These young intellectuals began to reconsider the usefulness and validity of their own Confucian education, as they drew closer to these new and different trends in thinking. Duong Ba Trac held his Confucian education in such poor regard that he remarked to a friend "if you want my license, I will be ready to sell it to you for only

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<sup>52</sup> Dinh Xuan Lam, Nguyen Dinh Le, Nguyen Van Khanh, *Đại cương Lịch sử Việt Nam*.

See also Chu Hao, Sĩ phu trí thức nước nhà xưa và nay [Confucian Scholars and Intellectuals: Past and Present]. September 8<sup>th</sup> 2013. [http://www.chungta.com/nd/tu-lieu-tra-cuu/sy\\_phu\\_tri\\_thuc\\_nuoc\\_nha\\_xua.html](http://www.chungta.com/nd/tu-lieu-tra-cuu/sy_phu_tri_thuc_nuoc_nha_xua.html)

<sup>53</sup> See also, Chuong Thau, Vị trí quan trọng của phong trào Duy Tân đầu thế kỷ XX trong tiến trình lịch sử văn hoá Việt Nam [The Important Role of Modernization in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Vietnamese Cultural History], [http://www.hids.hoachiminhcity.gov.vn/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=dfd2f775-983c-4e32-983b-fbb930a0ee4a&groupId=13025](http://www.hids.hoachiminhcity.gov.vn/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=dfd2f775-983c-4e32-983b-fbb930a0ee4a&groupId=13025).

<sup>54</sup> Phan Boi Chau, *Tự phán và Ngục Trung Thư* [Self-critical memoir and Prison Diary] (Hanoi: Nhà xuất bản văn hóa thông tin, 2000).

one penny.”<sup>55</sup> In 1905, Phan Chau Trinh, Tran Quy Cap, and Huynh Thuc Khang traveled to the South of Vietnam and wrote a famous poem to criticize the Confucian educational system of the Vietnamese monarchy. Phan Boi Chau considered his degree of Confucian a “useless ragged broom” that had “worn out.”<sup>56</sup> He lamented that traditional education had outlived its usefulness, “becoming a habit to such a degree that I wasted so many days and months following a destiny of examination preparation for almost half of a man’s lifetime. That indeed must be judged a very large stain upon my life.”<sup>57</sup>

Phan Boi Chau and his comrades tried their best to find a new path to independence for Vietnam. In 1904, they established Duy Tan Hoi, the organization for national modernization. Duy Tan Hoi had two main components: the first relied on the strength of the Vietnamese people’s love of their nation and the second hoped to secure aid from Japan.

In Phan Boi Chau’s eyes, the success of Japan after the Meiji restoration became a model for Vietnam. While expressing great admiration for Japan, Phan Boi Chau also showed his abiding respect for Fukuzawa Yukichi, who was considered the founder of the philosophy for the new Japan. Phan showcases how taken he was with Yukichi’s work in *The Letter Written in Blood from abroad* in which Phan Boi Chau mentioned Yukichi in the same breath as the iconic French philosopher Rousseau, whom he held in equally high respect. In this work Phan encouraged Vietnamese scholars to learn from those thinkers and try their best to study and emulate Yukichi and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.<sup>58</sup>

Inspired by Yukichi, Phan attempted to create a new Vietnam patterned after modern Japan. Phan scripted another important letter in 1905 titled, *An Appeal to the Nation to Support Students who Study Abroad Financially*, in which he expressed Fukuzawa’s intellectual influence that encouraged the spirit of independence Vietnam needed to become a civilized country.<sup>59</sup> He wrote:

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<sup>55</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc* [Hanoi: Information and Culture Publisher, 2002], 37 (my own translation).

<sup>56</sup> This quotation from Nguc Trung Thu (Prison Diary) of Phan Boi Chau), English translation by Christopher Jenkins, Tran Khanh Tuyet and Huynh Sanh Thong in David G. Marr, ed. *Reflection from Captivity (Southeast Asia translation Series)* (Ohio University Press, 1978), 11.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> *Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chau Trinh Toàn tập 2* [Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chau Trinh, Total works 2] (Hanoi: Thuan Hoa & East West language center publisher, 2000), 167.

<sup>59</sup> Khuyển Quốc Dân Tư Trợ Du Học Văn- original title translated.

If you study the history of renovation (duy tân) in Meiji Japan, you can clearly understand that the Japanese have been aware of the fact that they could not have achieved a great success without sending students abroad to develop the people's knowledge (dân trí) and cultivate men of talents (nhân tài) [...] Do you make up your mind to become slaves for our enemy, or don't you? Our fellow citizens, please think deeply and be far-sighted!<sup>60</sup>

Phan Boi Chau had great admiration for Fukuzawa Yukichi, and this extended to a hope that Japan could help Vietnam. This is because the nations shared similar ethnic and cultural traditions and because Japan was a new and vibrant power in Asia, as demonstrated by its defeat of Russia in the war of 1905. As he saw Japan as a model for Vietnam's future, Phan Boi Chau and his comrades organized a movement called Dong Du, literally "Go East" to bring Vietnamese youth to Japan to study. It was an effort to cultivate individual knowledge and technical skills for the modernization of Vietnam. Phan Boi Chau and his countrymen persuaded the youth of Vietnam to awaken and risk their lives by studying in Japan with the intention of returning home to develop the skills and abilities of the Vietnamese people.<sup>61</sup> These new Vietnamese intellectuals looked to the Japanese model in order to administer their national salvation from French domination. Phan Boi Chau fervently hoped that the Vietnamese would use armed forces to fight against the French with aid from Japan. However, by the latter half of 1907, Japan signed a treaty with the French, making Phan Boi Chau realize that a shared cultural heritage did not play a role in international power politics, and that Japan, too, was merely a young imperialist nation, that would not help Vietnam in its mission to free itself from French domination.<sup>62</sup>

Although Phan Boi Chau and his comrades did not succeed in wooing Japan to the Vietnamese cause, the Dong Du Movement (1905-1909) and Phan Boi Chau's activities within Japan generated a new hope for the Vietnamese. Phan Boi Chau maintained that the future of his country's most dangerous enemy to Vietnam's future was French imperialism, which necessitated the country to establish a constitutional monarchy or a democratic form of government as soon as possible. Japan's success

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<sup>60</sup> Phan Boi Chau, *Phan Chau Trinh Toàn tập* 2, 257 – 258 (my own translation).

<sup>61</sup> Shiraishi Masaya, "Phan Boi Chau in Japan," *Phan Boi Chau and the Dong Du Movement* ed. Vinh Sinh (Council on Southeast Asia Studies, Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1988), 62.

<sup>62</sup> Phan Boi Chau and Japan in Shiraishi Masaya, *Vietnamese Nationalism and Its Relations with Japan and Asia: Phan Boi Chau's Ideas of Revolution and the World* (Gannando Shoten, Tokyo, 1993, Vietnamese translation: Phong trào Dân tộc Việt Nam và Quan hệ của Nó với Nhật Bản và Châu Á: Tư tưởng Phan Boi Chau về Cách mạng và Thế giới, 2 vols. was published by NXB Chính trị Quốc gia, Hanoi, 2000). See also, Masaya, "Phan Boi Chau in Japan," 75.

helped point out a new path for the Vietnamese revolution and marked an important turning point in Vietnamese history. The exodus of its students to Japan marked the first time that Vietnam had engaged in revolutionary activities on a transnational scale. Reaching out to Japan was, in fact, the first overt step taken by the Vietnamese people to throw off colonial control and embrace modernization.

Phan Chau Trinh was another key leader of Duy Tan Hoi, the modernization organization. Whereas Phan Boi Chau thought that French imperialism was his country's most important enemy, Phan Chau Trinh believed it to be the monarchy. He thought that the monarchy should take responsibility for the country's failures before the French invasion. Phan Chau Trinh especially criticized Phan Boi Chau's proposed path to national salvation through the use of violence, believing that national salvation depended on the self-awareness of every citizen. Phan Chau Trinh had the famous motto: Develop education; develop the awareness of personal identity; develop the economy.<sup>63</sup> This conceptual blueprint for independence would bring about one of the most revolutionary actions of the Duy Tan movement in the establishment of the Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục school.<sup>64</sup>

Many of the leaders of the Duy Tan Movement included famous scholars as well as lesser known teachers that taught at the Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục school, and led the revolution in Vietnamese education. They established Duy Tan Hoi to encourage patriotism in every Vietnamese student. The teachers of Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc instructed their students through lectures and by example, both in their words and actions. These teachers were admired because they embodied the spirit of the nation. They felt their country's pain in a difficult and oppressive situation and expressed their concern by disseminating a new ideology to gain national independence. As this generation of intellectuals had experienced the loss of their country to the French imperialists, they continually decried the loss by writing prolific, and sorrowful texts.

Patriotism motivated the scholars and they helped to nourish in their students a belief in a future of independence. To disseminate their new ideas of modernization, the scholars organized many talks on the themes of independence and freedom under the proscription of French colonialism. In one example, scholar Luong Truc Dam wrote: "Does anyone have patriotism? I would like to say that the people of our

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<sup>63</sup> "Khai dân trí, chấn dân khí, hậu dân sinh" (my own translation).

<sup>64</sup> "Đông Kinh" means Eastern Capital, "Nghĩa Thục" means nontuition school, established from March 1907-December 1907.

country must love our country.”<sup>65</sup> Scholar Luong Van Can wrote a book on the necessity of developing a Vietnamese national economy, so that wealth could be kept inside the nation and raise the standard of living for its people.<sup>66</sup> Even during the first days of the Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc school, when some were hesitant about the proposed educational changes, scholar Phuong Son responded with determination, saying: “If you decide to do something, please do not care only about the result much [...] We are only afraid of lacking willpower, please do not be afraid of lacking money, please don’t be worried.”<sup>67</sup>

The notion of sacrifice for one’s country was demonstrated consistently in their teachings and their willingness to sacrifice their own careers and personal prosperity under the monarchy. Many taught only voluntarily and contributed private money for the school and Vietnam’s benefit. The strength of their belief in personal sacrifice in the name of patriotism is also demonstrated in Phan Chau Trinh’s famous poem *Ready to Die for the Ideal*. “We are ready to sacrifice ourselves for justice and the ideal. If we want to do something, we need to keep persistence and determination.”<sup>68</sup> It was only with persistence and patriotic faith that these scholars and future leaders overcame many difficulties in order to open Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc in Hanoi, as well as campuses in other provinces. This contributed to the teachers being memorialized and remembered as tragic, heroic, selfless and proud symbols of their country under French colonial control.

The end of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the Vietnamese in the difficult position of a colonized nation, with the Can Vuong movement defeated and the Vietnamese revolutionary effort in turmoil. Their intellectuals sought a solution from an ideology that could motivate the populace and produce national salvation. In that social and political climate, the winds of democracy began to blow across Vietnam, through Tan Thu and Tan Van (the new literature) and across Vietnam, which influenced scholars and intellectuals alike. They taught passionately about freedom and independence in the hopes of modernizing Vietnamese civilization, and were instrumental in generating

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<sup>65</sup> Chương Thân, *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục và Phong trào cải cách văn hoá đầu thế kỷ 20* [Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc and the Cultural Reform Movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century] (Hanoi: The Information Culture Publisher, 1997), 442 (my own translation).

<sup>66</sup> Luong Van Can, *Thuong hoc phuong cham* [Economy Motto], [http://www.pace.edu.vn/tu-sach/ChiTiet/786/luong-van-can-xay-dung-dao-kinh-doanh-cho-nguoi-viet?term\\_taxonomy\\_id=30](http://www.pace.edu.vn/tu-sach/ChiTiet/786/luong-van-can-xay-dung-dao-kinh-doanh-cho-nguoi-viet?term_taxonomy_id=30).

<sup>67</sup> Nguyễn Hiến Lê, *Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục* (Hanoi: The Information Culture Publisher, 2002), 50 (my own translation).

<sup>68</sup> “Gặp việc nghĩa trăm thân không tiếc, Làm việc gì, chí quyết cho nên, Lòng son dạ đá vững bền,” Ibid., 365.

the revolutionary spirit among generations of the Vietnamese for the ultimate goal of national independence. They helped foster a growing patriotism in the defeated nation that had lasting implications for the wars of independence to come.

Although Duy Tan Hoi, the Association for Modernization movement, lasted only from 1904 to 1912, its activities inspired Vietnamese society and nourished a new generation of young people calling for national independence. In particular, Ho Chi Minh found his revolutionary voice during the Duy Tan movement with the help of his teachers, which shaped his character and personality. In the Nam Dan district of the Nghe An province, Ho Chi Minh's father Nguyen Sinh Sac was a friend of Phan Boi Chau, a key leader of the Duy Tan movement. The patriotic atmosphere fostered by his family would plant the seeds of revolution in Ho Chi Minh and his comrades who developed the Vietnamese Communist Party in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>69</sup>

There is a Vietnamese saying that goes: “a difficult era creates heroes,” and many Vietnamese leaders were raised in the period of French Colonialism under this new education system.<sup>70</sup> At a time when patriotism among the Vietnamese remained an untapped resource in the fight for independence, Nguyen Sinh Cung was born in a small village in Nam Dan-Nghe An-, in the central part of Vietnam.<sup>71</sup> Later dubbed Nguyen Ai Quoc, “Nguyen the patriotic,” Nguyen Sinh Cung was born into a traditional Confucian family on May 19<sup>th</sup> 1890. His father, Nguyen Sinh Sac was an intellectual who had passed the Confucian examination in 1894 and gained second place in the Hoi examination in 1901. Nguyen Sinh Sac became a bureaucrat of the Nguyen dynasty, but resigned in 1917, before coming to Dong Thap, a South province of Vietnam where he chose to become a teacher as well as a physician. It was there that Nguyen Sinh Sac and Phan Boi Chau became acquainted and began to critically discuss the status of the country and methods to achieve national independence. His son, Nguyen Sinh Cung listened to the talks between his father and his father's friend and became politically informed about Vietnam's situation. Later, Nguyen Ai Quoc conveyed his thought on the shortcomings of Phan Boi Chau and other influential national leaders in Vietnamese thought at the turn of the 20th Century, explaining:

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<sup>69</sup> Tran Anh Vinh, “The Relations between President Ho Chi Minh and Phan Boi Chau,” *Journal Song Huong*, no. 259 (2010), <http://tapchisonghuong.com.vn/tap-chi/c218/n6279/Chu-tich-Ho-Chi-Minh-qua-nhung-moi-quan-he-va-gap-go-voi-Phan-Boi-Chau.html>.

<sup>70</sup> “Thời thế tạo anh hùng” (my own translation from Vietnamese idiom).

<sup>71</sup> Nguyen Sinh Cung is the birth name of Ho Chi Minh.



Phan Chau Trinh only asked the French for reform [...] That was a mistake. It is similar to asking the enemy for fraternity. Phan Boi Chau asked Japan for help. It was very dangerous. It is similar to ‘fighting against a tiger at the front door, and inviting him in through the back door.’ Hoang Hoa Tham was more pragmatic; he fought against the French directly and independently. However, he was still very much a monarchist.<sup>72</sup>

Although Nguyen Ai Quoc admired his patriotic predecessors, he understood why their movements had failed. Nguyen Ai Quoc reexamined the question of national independence and the best methods to attain it. During his high school studies at Quoc Hoc Hue for his French education, Nguyen was exposed to the concepts of the national French motto “Freedom-Equality-Fraternity.”<sup>73</sup> He analyzed the failure of the previous patriotic movements with the knowledge he had gained in school. This compelled him to learn more about how society and politics operated in the outside world by traveling, so that he could bring those ideas back to help the Vietnamese people.<sup>74</sup> From September 1910 to February 1911, Nguyen was a language teacher in Duc Thanh-Phan Thiet. On June 5<sup>th</sup> 1911, Nguyen Ai Quoc left Nha Rong port in Saigon to go to Paris in the hopes of pursuing his dream of an independent Vietnam. He traveled around the world, to London, Boston, New York, Paris where he learned history and philosophies that would aid in the Vietnamese revolution. He concluded that the world was divided into two categories of people: progressive people who supported the Vietnamese in their struggle to find freedom, independence and peace, and conversely; colonialists, imperialists and their supporters, who were enemies of the Vietnamese cause.<sup>75</sup> Second, Nguyen Ai Quoc emphasized the importance of racial and gender equality among people throughout the world. After witnessing the results of capitalism in the world, Nguyen Ai Quoc knew that Vietnam could not follow the American and French revolutionary models because the American and French societies still faced inequality, with some citizens desiring further revolutions to remedy their situations.

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<sup>72</sup> Tran Dan Tien, *Nhung mau chuyen ve cuoc doi hoat dong cua Ho Chi Minh* [The Stories about Ho Chi Minh's Life] (National Politics Publisher, 1994), 12. (my own translation) (This book was first published in 1948).

<sup>73</sup> See also in *Báo Ogoniok*, số 39, ngày 23-12-1923. (*Ho Chi Minh's Interview in Newspaper Ogoniok, Number 39, 23 December 1923*). Bui Kim Hong- Director of Museum of President Ho Chi Minh at Presidential Palace, *Ho Chi Minh- Patriotism and the way of national salvation*, <http://tennguoidepnhat.net/2011/06/04/h%E1%BB%93-chi-minh-t%E1%BB%AB-long-yeu-n%C6%B0%E1%BB%9Bc-d%E1%BA%BFn-con-d%C6%B0%E1%BB%9Dng-gi%E1%BA%A3i-phong-dan-t%E1%BB%99c/>

<sup>74</sup> See also, Phan Ngoc Lien, *Hồ Chí Minh trong Lịch sử Dân tộc* [*Ho Chi Minh in National History*] (Hanoi: Education Publisher, 2000).

Pham Thu Nga. *Quan hệ Việt Nam-Hoa Kỳ 1939-1954* [Vietnam-U.S. Relations 1939-1954] (Hanoi: Hanoi National University Publisher, 2004).

<sup>75</sup> Tran Dan Tien, *Nhung mau chuyen ve cuoc doi hoat dong cua Ho Chi Minh*.

Nguyen Ai Quoc wanted the Vietnamese to pursue revolution as a path to national liberation from French colonialism, while establishing equality for his people.<sup>76</sup>

In 1919, at a meeting of world leaders at the Peace Conference in Versailles following the First World War, Nguyen Ai Quoc presented an appeal for independence consisting of eight points to benefit the Vietnamese people.<sup>77</sup> No one responded to his appeal. Despite his apparent failure, this event held significance for what would later transpire in Vietnam. It was the first time that the issue of colonialism had been brought before an international conference by a colonial subject rather than by a colonial power. He described in no uncertain terms what the French meant by a civilizing mission in Vietnam, a term that colonial rulers often used to hide their crimes.<sup>78</sup> Nguyen Ai Quoc had to find another way for Vietnamese national liberation. About the aftermath of disappointment of Ho Chi Minh and many others in the colonial world at the outcome of the Versailles conference, historian Manela Erez wrote: “The disillusionment that followed the collapse of this ‘Wilsonian moment’ fueled a series of popular protest movements across the Middle East and Asia, heralding the emergence of anticolonial nationalism as a major force in world affairs.”<sup>79</sup>

In July 1920, Ho Chi Minh read Lenin’s *Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Question*, which would conclude his search for a new ideology to revolutionize Vietnam. In this document, Lenin criticized the mistakes of The Second International, the leading socialist organization worldwide, on the issue of ethnic and colonial issues.<sup>80</sup> Lenin strongly condemned the ethnic prejudices and bigotry of the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Tran Dan Tien, *Ho Chi Minh-the Founder of Independent Vietnam* (Hanoi: Languages Publishing House, 1989), 11.

<sup>78</sup> Tran Dan Tien, *Nhung mau chuyen ve cuoc doi hoat dong cua Ho Chi Minh*.

<sup>79</sup> Erez Manela, “Introduction,” *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (The Oxford University Press, 2007), 34.

The book *Ho Chi Minh, the founder of Independent Vietnam* also indicated the aftermath of Versailles Conference (first published in Chinese in 1948):

“At the Versailles Conference progressed, President Wilson’s 14 points gradually disappeared and the Chinese people were bitterly disappointed. To ‘thank’ Chinese for having cooperated during the war, the Western powers divided China and offered Singtao to Japan. The Chinese youth revolted against the bitter injustice. The Chinese delegation to the Conference was ordered to return, and an anti-imperialist movement led by the intelligentsia spread all over China.”

[Tran Dan Tien, *Ho Chi Minh, the founder of Independent Vietnam* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1989), 11].

<sup>80</sup> Nguyen Ai Quoc read this draft on L’Humanité, 16 and 17-7-1920, <http://www.baotanghochiminh.vn/TabId/495/ArticleId/377/PreTabId/465/Default.aspx>.

organization, which only served to limit the reach of Marxism. In addition, Lenin emphasized the duties of the Communist Party to help revolutionary movements of the colonial countries, stressing the solidarity between the proletariat class of the capitalist countries and the people of colonial countries to fight against imperialism and feudalism.<sup>81</sup> The most important feature Ho Chi Minh found in Lenin's writings was his denouncement of all the prejudices, which "still persisted in the minds of many European and American revolutionaries. [...] Lenin was the first to point out that, without the participation of the colonial peoples, the socialist revolution could not come about."<sup>82</sup> Ho Chi Minh began to conceptualize the Vietnamese revolution as part of an international, socialist revolution, the power of which would establish international solidarity to help Vietnam win the war of national liberation. Because of this, revelation, Ho Chi Minh wrote about Lenin's appeal with considerable emotion:

Lenin's thesis moved me enthusiastically and confidently towards enlightenment. I cried with happiness. Sitting alone, I talked with myself loudly as if addressing a large crowd: Oh my martyred compatriots! This is the necessary way for us. This is the way to our national liberation.<sup>83</sup>

It was Lenin's inclusiveness that made Ho a strong believer in Leninist ideology. Since that time, he changed fundamentally from a patriotic young man to a patriotic young Communist. His loyalty to Lenin, the Soviet Union and the wider communist world became fundamental in this fight for Vietnamese independence. This event marked an important transformation in the history of the Vietnamese revolutionary ideology. In 1923, he came to Moscow and studied Marxism at the Lenin School of Oriental Peoples. At the end of 1924, he arrived in China to prepare for the establishment of a Vietnamese Communist party. On February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1930, the Vietnamese Communist Party was established in Hong Kong. Equipped with a radically different ideology from previous Vietnamese revolutionaries, he would be

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V.I. Lenin drafted these on National and Colonial Questions for the Second Congress of the Communist International; written on 5 June 1920, first published in June 1920, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jun/05.htm>.

<sup>81</sup> See also Pham Xanh, *Nguyễn Ái Quốc và sự truyền bá chủ nghĩa Mác vào Việt Nam* [Nguyen Ai Quoc and the disseminating Marxism in Vietnam] (Hanoi: National Politics Publisher, 2009).

<sup>82</sup> Ho Chi Minh, "Lenin and the colonial peoples," *Ho Chi Minh selected writings* (Hanoi: Foreign languages publishing house, 1977), 37-38.

<sup>83</sup> Hồ Chí Minh, *Con đường dẫn tôi đến với chủ nghĩa Lenin (22-4-1960)* [The Way Leads Me to Leninism (22-4-1960)], [http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/Preview/PrintPreview.aspx?co\\_id=0&cn\\_id=90641](http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/Preview/PrintPreview.aspx?co_id=0&cn_id=90641) (my own translation)

able to gain huge international support for the upcoming Vietnamese revolution by tying it to a global Marxist struggle of colonized people.<sup>84</sup>

As a young, patriotic, and confident man, Nguyen Ai Quoc traveled around the world. His travels increased his understanding of the world and with this broad knowledge, a patriotic heart, and an enthusiastic desire for Vietnamese independence, Nguyen Ai Quoc, known as Ho Chi Minh, became a charismatic speaker on behalf of the Vietnamese people. He was described as pure, simple, friendly and warmed-hearted, making others feel comfortable to be with him, evoking an image of one who delivers candies.<sup>85</sup> Soviet journalist Yosif Mandenstam wrote similar impressions of Ho Chi Minh when he met him in the Soviet Union in December 1923: “He was well-mannered, tolerant, and disliking of extravagance. From Nguyen Ai Quoc there radiates a culture, not of Europe, but of the future.”<sup>86</sup> In a review of the book *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of a Postcolonial Vietnam* by Mark P. Bradley, Logevall described the impression of Ho Chi Minh made on Americans in the 1940s:

U.S. officials in 1944 and 1945 had a relatively favorable impression of Ho Chi Minh. Almost all U.S. intelligence and military observers in Hanoi who encountered Ho praised his acumen and sincerity as well as his calm manner and political pragmatism. Bradley attributes these impressions partly to the appeal and force of Ho’s personality and partly to his perceived cosmopolitanism.<sup>87</sup>

Ho Chi Minh’s character certainly played a role in his ability to draw people to him and his new agenda for Vietnam. On the other hand, Ho Chi Minh was very determined to expose and defeat his nation’s enemies, even fighting against those Vietnamese who he considered traitors or puppets of colonialists and imperialists. For Ho Chi Minh, the criterion of choosing friends and enemies was always what was in the national interest. He wrote: “Foreigners who benefit the Vietnamese and Vietnam

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<sup>84</sup> Dang Dinh Quy and Nguyen Vu Tung, “Hồ Chí Minh và một số vấn đề quốc tế” [Ho Chi Minh’s Viewpoints on some International Issues], <http://www.tapchiconsan.org.vn/Home/Nghien-cuu-Traodoi/2013/23058/Quan-diem-cua-Ho-Chi-Minh-ve-mot-so-van-de-quoc.aspx>

See also, Ha Huy Thong, “Ho Chi Minh’s Ideology about International Solidarity-The Heritage of Today”, <http://dangcongsan.vn/tu-lieu-van-kien/c-mac-angghen-lenin-ho-chi-minh/ho-chi-minh/nghien-cuu-hoc-tap-tu-tuong-ho-chi-minh/doc-010720153020456.html>

<sup>85</sup> Read more songs, poems about Ho Chi Minh by To Huu, Che Lan Vien, Bui Hue, Thuan Yen, Van Cao, Luu Huu Phuoc, Le Loi, Hoang Long- Hoang Lan, Huy Thuc, An Thuyen, Tran Hoan, Ta Huu Yen, Phan Huynh Dieu, Chu Minh, Doan Nho, Nguyen Tai Tue, Vien Phuong- Bang Viet, Tran Dang Khoa.

<sup>86</sup> Nguyen Duy Nien, *Ho Chi Minh Thought on Diplomacy* (Hanoi: The World publishers, 2008), 43.

<sup>87</sup> Logevall, “Bringing in the ‘other side’: New scholarship on the Vietnam Wars,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 82.

through their ideologies and actions are our friends. In contrast, anyone who harms the Vietnamese and Vietnam are our enemies. Therefore, we have enemies and friends both inside and outside our home.”<sup>88</sup> Ho Chi Minh quickly became a symbol of the nation, attracting the Vietnamese people and international friends to support his revolution against France and the United States. Vietnamese admired him as well as believed in the success of his revolution.

Why was Ho Chi Minh able to have such strong inspirational power? It is perhaps because he had a radical political dream and devoted his life to improving the nation of Vietnam. In his 79 years on earth, Ho Chi Minh constantly expressed his dream for Vietnamese happiness. In 1920, at the Tours Congress of the French Socialist Party, he answered a question from a colleague as to why he voted for the Third International Party. Ho Chi Minh answered, “I do not understand proletarian strategy and other ideas. But the Third International is interested in the issue of colonial liberation. [...] Freedom for our people, independence for our nation; that is all I want, that is all I know.”<sup>89</sup> In 1924 he said, “Patriotism is the great motivation for national development.”<sup>90</sup> Similarly, patriotism was the great motivation for his thought and activity. In 1946, Ho Chi Minh talked about what he wanted most in his life. He answered, “I have only one desire, one supreme desire and that is to make our nation an independent country, where our people can obtain freedom, everyone has enough food to eat, everyone has the right to study.”<sup>91</sup>

Ho Chi Minh had been a revolutionary since 1911 and he expressed patriotism as the motivation for all of his activities. It was patriotism in particular that compelled him to come to the Third International and follow Leninism, saying that: “at first, patriotism itself rather than communism made me believe in Lenin and the Third International.”<sup>92</sup> He became a Communist only because he believed that Leninist theory and Communism was “a magic handbook” which could help the Vietnamese

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<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Nguyễn Thế Thắng et. al, *Hồ Chí Minh-Biên niên tiểu sử 6* [Ho Chi Minh Biography 6], ed. Đặng Xuân Kỳ, (Hanoi: Information Analysis Publisher, 1992), 18 (my own translation).

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Nguyễn Huy Hoan et. al, *Hồ Chí Minh-Biên niên tiểu sử 1* [Ho Chi Minh Biography 1], ed. Đặng Xuân Kỳ, (Hanoi: Information Analysis Publisher, 1992), 105 (my own translation).

<sup>90</sup> Hồ Chí Minh, “Báo cáo về Bắc Kỳ, Trung Kỳ và Nam Kỳ-1924” [The Report on North, Central and South-1924] (my own translation), [http://123.30.190.43/tiengviet/tulieuvankien/4lanhtu/details.asp?topic=3&subtopic=91&leader\\_topic=9&id=BT107037435](http://123.30.190.43/tiengviet/tulieuvankien/4lanhtu/details.asp?topic=3&subtopic=91&leader_topic=9&id=BT107037435)

<sup>91</sup> Hồ Chí Minh, “Trả lời các nhà báo nước ngoài” [Reply to foreign journalists], *Báo Cứu quốc*, no. 147 (January 21<sup>st</sup> 1946) (my own translation), <http://www.bqllang.gov.vn/tin-tuc/tin-tong-hop/1442-nh-ng-cu-c-tr-l-i-ph-ng-v-n-bao-chi-c-a-bac-h-ph-n-9.html>.

<sup>92</sup> Hồ Chí Minh, “Con đường dẫn tôi đến chủ nghĩa Lenin (22-04-1960)” [The way lead me to Lennin (April 22rd 1960)], (my own translation), [http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/Preview/PrintPreview.aspx?co\\_id=0&cn\\_id=90641](http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/Preview/PrintPreview.aspx?co_id=0&cn_id=90641).

revolt and ultimately gain the victory of national independence and the liberation of labor from inequality and exploitation.<sup>93</sup>

Ho Chi Minh's vision of Vietnam's free future attracted many of Vietnam's elites to follow him. As a result, Ho Chi Minh built a strong team around him that succeeded in assembling both the patriotic and progressive forces in Vietnam and, eventually, the world, in their struggle against imperialism and feudalism. Members of his core group included 11 members of the Communist Party's Politburo (1960-1976): Vo Nguyen Giap, Pham Van Dong, Truong Chinh, Le Duan, Pham Hung, Le Duc Tho, Nguyen Chi Thanh, Nguyen Duy Trinh, Le Thanh Nghi, and Hoang Van Hoan. Although they had different personalities and talents, and came from different educational backgrounds, they each believed in and propagated the same dream for Vietnam, to one day become an independent, unified, and socialist country.

Le Duan was chosen by Ho Chi Minh himself to be the General Secretary of the Lao Dong Party because he possessed strong leadership characteristics for the launch of a revolution, as well as a deep understanding of South Vietnamese sentiment. Le Duan was born on April 7<sup>th</sup> 1907 in the Quang Tri Province. From 1928 to 1929, he participated in and worked actively for the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League (Vietnam Thanh nien Cach mang Dong chi Hoi), the precursor of the Indochina Communist Party. He became a very active communist in the South prior to the August Revolution (1945) as well as during the First Indochina War, specifically when he headed the Central Office of South Vietnam from 1951 until 1954.<sup>94</sup> When the Geneva Accord in 1954 resulted in the division Vietnam into two parts, Le Duan was bitterly disappointed. It was reported that Le Duan cried when he saw people saying goodbye to each other with the two-finger signal, symbolizing that they would see each other again two years later when national reunification would take place as laid out in the Geneva accords, because he knew that the country would be divided for much longer.<sup>95</sup> In 1954, when he said good-bye to Le Duc Tho, who went to the North while Le Duan remained in the South, Duan said: "You should tell Uncle Ho that I

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Tran Thanh, "Đồng chí Lê Duẩn, nhà lãnh đạo kiệt xuất của Đảng ta, nhà lý luận Mác-xít-Lênin sáng tạo, người học trò xuất sắc của chủ tịch Hồ Chí Minh" [Comrade Le Duan, an Excellent Leader of Party, a creative Marxist-Leninist analysis, an Excellent student of the President Ho Chi Minh] in *Le Duan va Cach Mang Mien Nam* [Le Duan and South Vietnam Revolution]. Ed. Institute of Ho Chi Minh and Party leaders studies, (Hanoi: National Politics Publisher, 1997), 12.

<sup>95</sup> Thao Nguyen, "The story about general secretary Le Duan" (July 08<sup>th</sup> 2014), <http://motthegioi.vn/xa-hoi/co-tbt-le-duan-chung-ta-khong-duoc-phep-so-trung-quoc-85605.html> (my own translation).

will meet him 20 years from now.”<sup>96</sup> This event illustrates Le Duan’s foresight that the struggle for liberation would be a long one. At the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lao Dong Party Congress in 1951, Le Duan was elected to the party’s Central Executive Committee. In 1957, Le Duan was dispatched to Hanoi and worked closely with Ho Chi Minh.<sup>97</sup> At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lao Dong Party Congress in 1960, he was elected The First Secretary (Secretary General) of the Party and a member of its Politburo.<sup>98</sup>

Le Duan was proud of the Vietnamese language and literature, and enthusiastically spoke of Vietnam’s ancient culture of familial relationships. He was also particularly proud of the culture’s reputation for having good relationships with its neighbors. He would use the story of his family sharing a pot of sweet potatoes and green tea with his neighbors as an allegory for his nation’s tradition of hospitality and kindness.<sup>99</sup> In his eyes, every neighbor was a friend and communities loved each other like brothers in a family. This likely contributed to his love of Communism because he considered it a system concerned with human beings and a system that could do the most good for the greatest number of people. For Le Duan, as well as other Communist leaders, there was no class distinction between Vietnamese civilians and Communist leaders.<sup>100</sup>

Another important leader in Ho Chi Minh’s party, who contributed to its successful utilization of Vietnamese culture and patriotism, was General Vo Nguyen Giap.<sup>101</sup> Born on August 25<sup>th</sup> 1911 in the Quang Binh Province in central Vietnam, Giap was a teacher of history at the Thang Long school in Hanoi and wrote articles for *Tieng Dan* (The Voice of the People). He also founded the *Hon Tre Tam Moi* (Soul of Youth) and *Le Travail*. From the years 1936 to 1939, Giap helped found the Democratic Front party and took part in several demonstrations against French imperialism. In May 1941, he helped establish the Vietnam Independence League (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi-Viet Minh).<sup>102</sup> On September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1945, Ho Chi Minh declared

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Tran Thanh, [Comrade Le Duan, an Excellent leader of Party, a creative Marxist Leninist, an Excellent Student of the President Ho Chi Minh], 13.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>99</sup> Hoang Tung, “Lê Duẩn suốt đời say mê tìm tòi chân lý” [Le Duan-enthusiastic for ideal in all of his life], in *Le Duan and the revolution of Vietnam* (Hanoi: National Politics Publishing, 1997), 36.

<sup>100</sup> Pham Van Dong, “Le Duan-a Great Patriot,” *Le Duan va Cach Mang Mien Nam* [Le Duan and the South Vietnam Revolution] (Hanoi: National Politics Publishing, 1997), 36 (my own translation).

<sup>101</sup> Vo Nguyen Giap was the Commander of the People’s Army of Vietnam during the Vietnam War 1954-1975 and he was Deputy Prime Minister of Vietnam from 1955 to 1991.

<sup>102</sup> The Vietnam Independence League was an anti-imperialist united front to seek independence for Vietnam from French Colonialism since 1941. Later, the Vietnam Independence League fought against Japan, France, the U.S. and the Republic of Vietnam.

independence for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and appointed Giap as Minister of the Interior. After Ho Chi Minh's national declaration, Vo Nguyen Giap read a speech to express the desires of all Vietnamese patriots:

Vietnam will ask for independence, freedom and equality until the ultimate victory. If we cannot win through peaceful diplomacy, we have to use the sword. We will be ready to accept any result. We are not as strong as our enemy, but we will win like our ancestors in the Tran dynasty. We may lose 50 battles, but we will win in the end.<sup>103</sup>

Similarly to Ho Chi Minh when he announced independence for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Vo Nguyen Giap looked to America for inspiration. In his speech, Giap quoted the words of one of its most visionary presidents, Franklin D. Roosevelt: "As President Roosevelt used to say, oppression and atrocities make us understand the meaning of freedom."<sup>104</sup> Ironically, Giap, Ho, and the North Vietnamese would eventually come to fight against the U.S. for freedom.

Giap harbored a strong belief that Vietnam would ultimately win the final victory because he believed that every Vietnamese citizen was very determined to fight for national independence and unification and ready to sacrifice themselves for their country.<sup>105</sup> Vo Nguyen Giap used his talent as a writer and speaker to rally and strengthen the resolve of the Vietnamese people-soldiers and civilians alike-in support of the Communist Party's final war of independence.

Another important figure in the Vietnamese Communist Party was diplomat Pham Van Dong. He was born on March 1<sup>st</sup> 1906 in the village of Duc Tan, in the Mo Duc District of the Quang Ngai province. In 1925, he joined a student strike against French colonialism and after the August Revolution of 1945, Pham Van Dong was appointed Minister of Finance in Ho Chi Minh's government. He became better known, however, for his diplomatic activity. He was the head of the Vietnamese delegation to the French Vietnamese postwar negotiations at Fontainebleau in France in May 1946. He also led the Vietnamese Communist's delegation to the Geneva Conference in 1954 which concluded the French war in Indochina. Dong served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1954 to 1961. Since the 5<sup>th</sup> session of the DRV First National

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<sup>103</sup> The Speech of Vo Nguyen Giap on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1945 at Ba Dinh square, Hanoi (my own translation), <http://www.qdnd.vn/qdndsite/vi-vn/61/43/dai-tuong-vo-nguyen-giap/vo-nguyen-giap-va-nguoi-thay-cua-minh/285799.html>

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. (Giap did not indicate who is Roosevelt: Theodore or Franklin Delano)

<sup>105</sup> Vo Nguyen Giap, "Vietnamese people's solidarity escalates the great patriotic struggle and determination to win an anti-American invasion war," Nhan Dan newspaper, January 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> 1966 in *General Vo Nguyen Giap and the Resistance War against America for National Salvation*, (Hanoi: People Military, 2005), 92.



Assembly convocation (1955), he became the DRV's Prime Minister for three decades (1955-1987).<sup>106</sup> In his talks with young diplomats, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong always reminded them of his favorite quote from Goethe: "Dear friend, all theory is grey, And green the golden tree of life."<sup>107</sup> For Pham Van Dong, the ideas and important decisions of a country needed to be rooted in the realities of life, the specific situations and characteristics of the nation, and the era. Pham believed that every country had a right to decide its own fate and to choose its own beliefs.

Another important revolutionary leader, Truong Chinh (real name Dang Xuan Khu), was born on February 9<sup>th</sup> 1907, in the village of Han Thien, Xuan Truong District, in the Nam Dinh Province. His grandfather, Dang Xuan Bang, received his doctoral degree in 1856 and became a famous historian of the Nguyen dynasty. Because he was born into a traditional, highly educated family, Truong Chinh's father taught him about Confucianism, national history, and Vietnamese culture from the time he was just a child. As an adult, Truong Chinh gained a French education and became the leader of a patriotic student movement against the French to commemorate the death of the famous patriot, Phan Chu Trinh at the age of 19. At the end of 1930, while serving in the Indochina Communist Party in the North Vietnam region, he was arrested, sentenced and detained at the prisons of Hoa Lo and Son La. The hard time he endured in Son La Prison did not dim his determination to fight for national independence.<sup>108</sup> In fact, it only strengthened his resolve. His writings in prison reveal his thoughts clearly, stating, "Our fellow men are in misery [...] Supply them with a life in prison to encourage hatred against enemies, to let everyone know who the heroes are."<sup>109</sup> Truong Chinh became Secretary General of the Indochina Communist Party during the years 1941 to 1956, and again in 1986, after Le Duan's death.

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<sup>106</sup> Nguyen Ngoc Hung, "Thủ tướng Phạm Văn Đồng với Ngành Ngoại Giao" [Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and Diplomacy Studies], <http://baoquocte.vn/thu-tuong-pham-van-dong-voi-nganh-ngoai-giao-27707.html>.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Tran Viet Phuong-private secretary of Pham Van Dong, "The nature of foreign affairs and the good personality of a diplomat", *Pham Van Dong and Vietnamese Diplomacy*, ed. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (Hanoi: National Politics Publisher, 2006), 110. "Grau, teurer Freund, ist alle Theorie, Und grün des Lebens goldner Baum." Goethe, "*Faust*." ([http://www.zjs-online.com/dat/artikel/2009\\_5\\_246.pdf](http://www.zjs-online.com/dat/artikel/2009_5_246.pdf)).

<sup>108</sup> Phung Nguyen, "Dòng chảy thế hệ trong gia đình cố Tổng bí thư Trường Chinh" [Former General Secretary Truong Chinh's Family], <http://www.nhandan.com.vn/hangthang/item/27307202-dong-chay-the-he-trong-gia-dinh-co-tong-bi-thu-truong-chinh.html>

<sup>109</sup> Đồng bào đau xót lắm than. Mà ai nỡ xé sương tan qua ngày. Đốt cho muôn kiếp tù đầy. Cho bừng lửa hận biết tay anh hùng. Song Hong (Pen name of Truong Chinh), *Lấy củi* (written about 1934-1935 when Truong Chinh in Lao Bao prison) *Tinh tuyển văn học Việt Nam 7 (Văn học giai đoạn 1900-1945)* (Trung tâm Khoa học xã hội và

The Communist Party had both members of the elite, who had earned high education degrees in the French educational system, as well as from the working class. They shared a common desire to throw off colonialism so that it could not further destroy the country they loved and to release their people from a life of servitude. Many of them originally joined together in the student' strikes against French rule, resulting in their imprisonment for many years. However this did nothing to deter them from their goals of national independence, unification, and socialism, peace, democracy, and happiness for their people.

An important aspect of Vietnamese patriotism comes from its traditional culture, which is a collective culture, meaning those who sacrifice themselves to benefit the collective are greatly admired as martyrs. It is critical to understand that the Vietnamese people incorporate national heroes and their ancestors into their religious practices of worship. This culture of collectivity begins in childhood, with Vietnamese parents usually teaching their children according to established idioms such as: "When eating fruit, please remember the planter" and "when drinking water from a stream, one must think of the source."<sup>110</sup> This made it possible for leaders of the Communist Party, especially Ho Chi Minh, to become models for young people to follow, due to their dedication to the nation and their use of traditional values throughout their campaigns. Deeply patriotic Vietnamese people in both North and South Vietnam flocked to Ho Chi Minh and joined in the revolution.

Vietnamese society has its roots in the collective culture, which emphasizes values such as a total dedication to the public interest and complete selflessness. This communal value is a characteristic of their long history of their traditional economy, village architecture, and the psychology of the people. When the ancient agrarian Vietnamese people irrigated the land and fought against foreign invasions, they needed to cooperate with one another, so they maintained very close communal relationships. They lived together in small villages which had village centers around the "cây đa" (Banyan tree), "giếng nước" (village wells) and "đình làng" (a big village house for every people of village). These were daily meeting places for work, social activities,

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nhân văn quốc gia, NXB Khoa học xã hội, 2004) (my own translation). [http://www.thivien.net/S%C3%B3ng-H%E1%BB%93ng/L%E1%BA%A5y-c%E1%BB%A7i/poem-R93RG8EnD2g1oBRVM\\_-KUg](http://www.thivien.net/S%C3%B3ng-H%E1%BB%93ng/L%E1%BA%A5y-c%E1%BB%A7i/poem-R93RG8EnD2g1oBRVM_-KUg).

<sup>110</sup> Vietnamese Idioms (my own translation).

and relaxation.<sup>111</sup> The traditional villages had many festivals to promote and increase the strength of their communal relationships every year. Personal characteristics that put societal relationships ahead of material values were highly respected, such as of putting work first and enjoyment later, and kindness and generous use of talent in the community. Parents would remind children of the idiom: respect love, have contempt for money. As a result, when the DRV faced many difficulties including a poor economy during the Vietnam War, most of the Vietnamese were not concerned about material deprivation. Many felt proud to follow in the footsteps of their national heroes, some of whom had given their lives for the sake of the people and the Party. They were eager to devote their lives to the struggle for national independence, unification, and socialism, to work hard for their country and to serve the people wholeheartedly.

There are many examples of this respect culture, or culture of gratitude in Vietnamese artistic works. This is taught beginning in childhood through songs and fables, such as the following lullaby:

Mother, please know your son's true feelings.  
All around me, rivers have their sources and trees have their roots.  
You bore me in your womb for nine months  
And my gratitude and debt to you is boundless.<sup>112</sup>

A by-product of this collective, ancient and respectful culture is a very strong sense of patriotism. Although people tend to love their countries and feel patriotism all over the world, it performs different functions in different countries. For the Vietnamese, patriotism was a sacred, almost religious emotion that expresses itself in daily life. This is because the special characteristic of Vietnamese patriotism is its relation to religion and the moral standard of behavior in Vietnamese society.<sup>113</sup> Throughout the past 2000 years, the most important traditional religion in Vietnam has been ancestral and national hero worship. In the legend of Vietnam's origins, it is said that all

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<sup>111</sup> See also, Tran Ngoc Them. *Tim ve ban sac van hoa Vietnam* [The characteristics of Vietnamese culture] (Ho Chi Minh city: Ho Chi Minh city Publisher, 1996).

<sup>112</sup> *No other road to take*, Memoirs of Nguyen Thi Dinh (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1976), 36.

"Van Tien was on his way to take the literary examination when he heard the news of his mother's death. Struck with grief, he wept until he went blind. When he returned home, he went to her grave to pay his respects and express his sorrow. This scene quoted above took place at the graveside, when Van Tien appealed to his death mother's spirit to come back and witness his sorrow" (Ibid.)

<sup>113</sup> See also Tran Van Giau, "He tu tuong yeu nuoc Vietnam" [Vietnamese Patriotism], *Communist Magazine*, no. 16 (August-1998)

Song Thanh, "Chu nghia yeu nuoc Vietnam- Nen tang tinh than, dong luc phat trien cua chung ta" [Vietnamese Patriotism- the Spiritual Motivation for Development], <https://www.vanhoanghean.com.vn/chuyen-muc-goc-nhin-van-hoa/nhung-goc-nhin-van-hoa/chu-nghia-yeu-nuoc-viet-nam-nen-tang-tinh-than-dong-luc-phat-trien-cua-chung-ta>.

Vietnamese were siblings from the same womb of mother Au Co. This myth persists today in the Vietnamese language, and the mentality of the people. For instance, the word “dong bao”, meaning fellow- citizen came from the two words “dong” meaning “the same” and “bao” meaning womb. The legend is retold to remind Vietnamese people that they are brothers and sisters and need to take care of each other.<sup>114</sup> The legend tells how the nation is a “father” to the people, while the landscape is the “mother,” who nourishes her children. The origin legend’s metaphors and imagery show the strength of Vietnamese patriotism and the way it is connected to both the geographical land and its citizenry.

The poem *Nation* written in 1971 when the author was 28 years old is a typical expression of Vietnamese patriotism that emerged in full force during the Vietnam War.<sup>115</sup> This poem has a romantic melody, with Nguyen Khoa Diem playing the role of a lover, who is softly whispering to his darling about his deep love for dear Vietnam. The poet used material from folk culture to draw an evocative picture of the country. The poem opens with impressive images of the country: the image of a mother telling fairy tales which nourish the souls of men; the image of a grandmother eating betel; the image of people using bamboo to fight against foreign enemies; the image of a mother and father taking care at each other. This nostalgic poem portrays the country with emotional folk imagery, customs, and familial relations. In the poet’s words, the beauty of Vietnam is found in its rich history and culture.<sup>116</sup>

The poem *Nation* not only utilizes imagery of the county’s historic culture but also gives a feeling for its territorial space. *Nation* describes a place that is alive, with specific spaces that anyone could identify with; a meeting place for young lovers, a school, a local river, and green rice fields. It is portrayed as a beautiful place on the earth with mountains, beaches and the society Vietnamese society living peacefully for thousands of years. The poem evokes this deep love for the beauty of the country in order to incite rage towards those who would harm their homeland. The provocation at the end of the poem shows the mentality of the Vietnamese, who are willing to fight against anyone who tries to hurt their beloved Vietnam:

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<sup>114</sup> The Vietnamese Legend: Lac Long Quan-Au Co

See also *Tuyển tập truyền thuyết Việt Nam* [Collection of Vietnamese Legends], ed. Nguyen Dong Chi (Ho Chi Minh city: Young Publisher, 2015).

<sup>115</sup> Nguyen Khoa Diem, “Dat nuoc” [Nation], *The Way of Desire and Hope*, (Hanoi: Liberation Culture and Arts Publisher, 1974).

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

For thousands of years fighting against foreign invasions  
Fire on the fatherland  
Harvest of hatred, harvest of love  
Never let blood or bone alone (never abandon the ancestors)  
River mountain motherland smoky (fire of bullet, guns, violence)  
Fatherland, do you hear our voices, we will come when you need us  
We wish to be volunteer soldiers to protect our hometown<sup>117</sup>

Another example of this comes from Hoang Cam, who wrote *On the River Duong* in 1948. It is a tragic poem about the feelings of a man after his hometown had been destroyed by the French. It begins with familiar beautiful imagery of the countryside, juxtaposed against the terrible destruction brought by the invaders:

Darling, please don't be sad, I will take you to the Đuống River.  
The river runs over beautiful sand,  
The river is in the resistance war,  
By the green fields near the river,  
I am standing on the other river bank and missing something so painfully  
It is as if I have lost my hands  
...  
Our Motherland with fragrance of sticky rice  
The bright peaceful color of Dong Ho paintings  
The colors of patriotism in the paintings  
Our Motherland in the horrible days  
The enemies come with the fires of grimmest violence  
[...] History writes of their crimes  
We cannot stop our hatred [...]  
I will go to kill the enemies  
I will take their blood for revenge.<sup>118</sup>

Also in this vein of overly patriotic artistic expression from Vietnam comes *The Song of the Advancing Soldiers*. Beginning in March 1946, the song became the national anthem of Vietnam. It is a clear example of the soldier's patriotic duty to fight for their nation's independence:

Soldiers of Vietnam, march onward  
Solidarity for national salvation  
Our steps resound on the long and arduous road.  
Our flag, red with the blood of victory, bears the spirit of the country  
The distant rumbling of guns mingles with our marching song  
The path to glory is built by the bodies of our foes  
Overcoming all hardships, together we build our resistance bases  
For our people, we fight ceaselessly<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Nguyen Khoa Diem, "Dat nuoc" (my own translation).

<sup>118</sup> Hoang Cam, "Ben Kia Song Duong" [On the Duong River], *Ben kia song Duong* (Hanoi: Literature Publisher, 1983). This poem was written and published first time in 1948 (my own translation).

<sup>119</sup> Van Cao, *Tien quan ca* [The song of advancing soldiers] (1944) (my own translation).

Throughout these works a constant theme of solidarity and family appear to remind the Vietnamese of their origins. The poem *Nation* for instance tells its readers that they should never neglect to worship their ancestors, which is a tenet in Vietnamese faith. The Vietnamese worship their ancestors, and great national leaders, including Hung Vuong, the first King of Vietnam.<sup>120</sup> Ancestor worship is a system of belief that relies on the existence of the relationship between the living and the deceased of the same bloodlines. The Vietnamese believe that ancestors and national heroes may witness the offspring's behavior and consequentially bless or punish them.<sup>121</sup> This moral code requires its followers to consider that when an action is taken, it must be considered in relation to “gaining good fortune from the ancestors” (phúc âm của tổ tiên). This instructs believers to “live because of the grave, not because of the bowl of rice,” (sống vì mồ mả, ai lại sống vì bát cơm), with a perspective oriented to those before them. This faith system functions also to make decisions in their lives with regard to how it would effect the gains or losses of their offspring. There are numerous idioms in the Vietnamese language to remind the people of these beliefs, such as: “the children's welfare comes from how their mothers lived” (phúc đức tại mẫu) or “if the father eats salty, the children are thirsty” (đời cha ăn mặn, đời con khát nước).<sup>122</sup>

This belief of the existence of life after death played a very important role in Vietnamese spiritual life during the Vietnam War. The Vietnamese largely believed that their ancestors not only protected them, but also held the power to punish them and future generations if they behaved immorally. This spiritual belief became a powerful force behind the Vietnamese courage to fight against any actions foreigners took against their homeland, due to its effect on future and past generations. Therefore, in both the North and in the South, people fought against the French colonialists and later the U.S., out of faith, and with respect to their ancestors, to gain their national independence. Many believed dying in the fight for their nation was for a just cause, and they were ready to sacrifice themselves for national salvation.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> “Phát hành bộ tem về tín ngưỡng thờ cúng Hùng Vương” [Publishing collection of stamps about Hung Vuong worship] <http://tuoitre.vn/tin-nguong-tho-cung-hung-vuong.html>.

<sup>121</sup> Đinh Kiều Nga, “Tín ngưỡng thờ cúng tổ tiên, bản sắc văn hoá của người Việt” [The Ancestor Worship, A Feature of Vietnamese Culture], [http://btgcp.gov.vn/Plus.aspx/vi/News/38/0/240/0/1426/Tin\\_nguong\\_tho\\_cung\\_to\\_tien\\_ban\\_sac\\_van\\_hoa\\_cua\\_nguoi\\_Viet](http://btgcp.gov.vn/Plus.aspx/vi/News/38/0/240/0/1426/Tin_nguong_tho_cung_to_tien_ban_sac_van_hoa_cua_nguoi_Viet).

<sup>122</sup> Vu Ngọc Phan, “Parents, Children, Family and Blood Relations”, *Tục ngữ, ca dao, dân ca Việt Nam* [Vietnamese Idioms, Proverbs, Lullabies] (Hanoi: Social Sciences, 1996), 417-436 (my own translation).

<sup>123</sup> See also Doan Quang Khai, *Vì nhân dân quên mình* [Song: We sacrifice ourselves for the people interests, (1951)].

Ho Chi Minh was a leader who always understood the power behind Vietnamese patriotism as it related to ancestor and national hero worship in the revolution, and acted accordingly. In August 1930, Ho Chi Minh talked with his Vietnamese Communist comrades in Shanghai about the power of patriotism to gain the hearts and minds of Vietnamese soldiers:

For soldiers, we should evoke homesickness, in order to stir their patriotic consciousness and thoughts of their ancestors and families. That is the way to gain the hearts and minds of the people.<sup>124</sup>

After 1945, Ho Chi Minh had indeed gained the hearts and minds of many Vietnamese when his organization Viet Minh and his Party had discovered they could use the Communist ideology as a method to reach their target of national independence. On September 19<sup>th</sup> 1954, Ho Chi Minh talked with the officers and soldiers of the Vanguard Division at the Hung Kings Temple: “The Hung Kings built the nation, today we have to defend our nation.”<sup>125</sup> Due to the religious connotations behind national liberation, as well as Ho Chi Minh’s charisma, also many Vietnamese intellectuals such as Tran Dai Nghia, Ton That Tung, Luong Dinh Cua and Pham Ngoc Thach followed the revolution. When discussing Ho Chi Minh’s charisma, Tran Dai Nghia said: “Especially those of us who are overseas Vietnamese intellectuals, the words of ‘Uncle Ho’ has touched our hearts.”<sup>126</sup> Ho Chi Minh and the Lao Dong Party considered the Americans in South Vietnam imperialists because the Americans had supported French colonialists to fight against the Viet Minh in the first Indochina War (1946-1954). During the secret conversations for peace between Hanoi and the intermediaries of Washington, Ho Chi Minh and the Lao Dong Party always reminded the people of the righteous role of the Party in the war and the injustice of American intervention in supporting France, which was the origin of the Vietnam War.

Ho Chi Minh and his Lao Dong Party believed the war would not end until the country was unified saying: “Our people is one, Vietnam is one. Our people will certainly overcome all difficulties and achieve at all costs the reunification of the

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<sup>124</sup> Quoted in Hoang Tranh, *Ho Chi Minh va Trung Quoc* [Ho Chi Minh and China] (China: New Star Publisher (8-1990) (Vietnamese version, translated from Chinese to Vietnamese by Tang Quang Sam, Tran Que Quang, Tran Tac Minh, Ly Khai Binh), 88. (my own translation from Vietnamese to English).

<sup>125</sup> “Các vua Hùng có công dựng nước Bác cháu ta phải có công giữ nước” [The Hung Kings built the nation, today we have to defend our nation.] <http://tuoitre.vn/tin/theo-guong-bac/20080412/cac-vua-hung-dung-nuoc-bac-chau-ta-giu-nuoc/252390.html> (my own translation).

<sup>126</sup> Le Van Yen, “Hồ Chí Minh và trí thức Việt Nam” [Ho Chi Minh and Vietnamese Intellectuals], *Tạp chí Công sản* [Journal of Communist Party], (July 17<sup>th</sup> 2015), <http://www.tapchicongsan.org.vn/Home/Nghiencuu-Traodoi/2015/34282/Chu-tich-Ho-Chi-Minh-voi-doi-ngu-tri-thuc-Viet-Nam.aspx> (my own translation).

country, the reunion of North and South under the same roof.”<sup>127</sup> On another occasion he evoked the legendary familial bonds of the nation, stating: “The North and South belong to the same family, they are blood brothers and can never be separated.”<sup>128</sup> He stressed the necessity of military action to achieve unification: “Our army should not indulge in relaxation because of peace. So long as the imperialists still stay in the South, so long as they still live in the world, we should keep on building a strong army.”<sup>129</sup> In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, General Tran Binh Trong famously said: “I would rather be a ghost of Vietnam than a King of China.”<sup>130</sup> In a similar demonstration of patriotic thinking, a 19<sup>th</sup> century leader of an uprising against French Colonialism in the South of Vietnam, Nguyen Trung Truc, replied to a French colonialist with: “You can only kill all patriotic people of my country when you destroy every last blade of grass of Vietnam.”<sup>131</sup>

In 1965, when the units of American troops increased in the South of Vietnam and the Vietnamese fighting spirit gained momentum, Nguyen Trung Thanh wrote the popular short story *Xa nu Forest* to describe the resistance against the Americans of the ethnic minority in a small village Xo Man in Tay Nguyen. It is an allegory rich with meaning to the wider psychological conflict that was taking place all over Vietnam, where villagers fought in their own backyards. The story centers around a Xa nu tree, a special symbol of the spirit of people in Tay Nguyen. Just like the character of the Tay Nguyen people, the Xa nu tree was a majestic, wise, and strong life form, as if it had lived for thousands of years. The Xa nu tree was a part of the everyday life of the village and its people, and became the symbol of the villagers’ pain when American forces invaded their country. When the village became consumed by war, the people were injured and the Xa nu tree was maimed and died. However, the enemy could not destroy the Xa nu forest, just as they could not destroy the Tay Nguyen and their desire to live in freedom. The Xa nu tree’s love of sunlight and pure air is compared to the people of Tay Nguyen’s love of freedom and peace. Although it was bombed, the Xa nu forest recovered quickly and sheltered the small village and its

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<sup>127</sup> Quoted in *Our President Ho Chi Minh* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing house, 1970), 167.

<sup>128</sup> *Our President Ho Chi Minh*, 167.

<sup>129</sup> The Commission for research on Party History, *Ho Chi Minh, the Man who Made a Nation* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1988), 131.

<sup>130</sup> “Tìm hiểu danh tướng nổi tiếng với câu nói ‘không thèm làm vương đất Bắc’” [The general was famous for the speech ‘never want to be the King of China’], <https://vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/giao-duc/trac-nghiem/tim-hieu-danh-tuong-noi-tieng-voi-cau-noi-khong-them-lam-vuong-dat-bac-3562044.html> (my own translation).

<sup>131</sup> “Lịch sử về anh hùng Nguyễn Trung Trục” [History of Hero Nguyen Trung Truc], <http://phuquocnews.vn/lich-su-ve-anh-hung-nguyen-trung-truc> (my own translation).



people. The Xa nu tree is symbolic of the many generations of villagers who continuously fight for national independence. When the old Xa nu tree in the story fell, many small Xa nu grew to take its place, just as many generations of men joined the revolution and fought in the tale. The distinguished son of the village of Tnu was powerful, indomitable, wild in his nature, but he could not save his wife when enemies came to the village because he did not have any weapons. Afterwards, he joined the revolution in the cause of national salvation. The village boy Heng, although he was just a child, also joined revolution with pride, as one doing a righteous thing to protect his village. His smiling eyes expressed the hope, the belief for the future of his small village, as well as for the ultimate victory in the people's struggle.<sup>132</sup>

President Ho Chi Minh promoted works of arts such as these because arts evoked emotions in every medium. He insisted on the primary importance of culture as part of power: "The mission of culture is not only to encourage the people's spirit and nation-building resistance forces, but also to clearly show the world the achievements of our great causes of resistance and nation building [...] and to save these heroic images for our future generations."<sup>133</sup> As Hoai Thanh pointed out in 1946: "The psychology is similar to the psychology of children. Children often sing but rarely pay attention to meaning. But we should not be embarrassed about it or think that our people are still juvenile, barbaric, or uncivilized. We are young, which means that we have a lot of energy, and we can still go far."<sup>134</sup> To Ho Chi Minh the arts were all about encouraging Vietnamese patriotism in the war: "Our people have deep patriotism. That is the very precious traditional value of Vietnamese. From the past to the present, whenever the country is invaded, that spirit is strongly exposed, becomes a very huge, strong wave overcoming many difficulties, dangers, and destroying the invaders and the traitors."<sup>135</sup> Ho Chi Minh and his Party used the arts to attract the Vietnamese people to follow them and devote their lives to national independence through disseminating the appealing, emotional images of the patriotic leaders as heroes in their fight for independence.

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<sup>132</sup> Nguyen Trung Thanh, Rừng Xà Nu [Xa Nu Forest]. Written in 1965-first published in the magazine *Military Literature-Arts of the Liberation Army of Mien Trung Trung Bo*, Feb. 1965.

<sup>133</sup> Ho Chi Minh, "Letter to National Cultural Assembly II-July 1948," in *Marxism and Vietnamese culture, ed. Truong Chinh* (Hanoi: The True publisher, 1974), 74 (my own translation).

<sup>134</sup> Hoai Thanh, *Có một nền văn hoá Việt Nam [There is a Vietnamese Culture]* (Hanoi: Culture Organization of National Salvation, 1946), 17 (my own translation).

<sup>135</sup> Ho Chi Minh, "The Report at the National Congress II of the Communist Party, February 1951", *Ho Chi Minh Complete volume 6* (Hanoi: National Politics Publishing, 2000), 171 (my own translation).

Ho Chi Minh and the Lao Dong Party prevented any activity from having a detrimental effect on the revolution, which included any anti-war sentiment spread by artists. The Lao Dong Party understood the potentially destructive power of arts through literature and song to the resistance war if an anti-war sentiment spread throughout society. As a result, they controlled the activities of several creative artists. There were some Vietnamese intellectuals in the North who held reservations about the necessity of the war in the South. This was due to the influence of the Western philosophies of humanism and individualism that appeared in 20<sup>th</sup> century Vietnamese thought. Some Vietnamese intellectuals expressed their beliefs in the importance of human life and of the rights of individuals to refuse to fight in their writings. Pacifist and anti-war sentiment was in danger of spreading. However, they did not have a choice in fighting in the war for national independence.<sup>136</sup> The tragic poems these authors produced express their sadness at the loss of their individual freedoms for the sake of the nation at war. One of the more distinguished writers of this trend of literature was Tran Dan. In 1956, he wrote of the true story of a man in a Northern city, who expresses his sympathy with a girl who is searching for work without hope:

I was on Sinh Từ street  
 There was much sorrow  
 I trudged  
 Could not see the roads  
 Could not see the houses  
 Only see the rains falling  
 On the red flag  
 I met her in the rains  
 ....  
 Day and night like orphans  
 Sadly in droves they go  
 She went  
 In the rain  
 Bowed down  
 With Inclined shoulders  
 The 19-year-old girl.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> *Nhóm nhân văn giai phẩm trước toà án dư luận* [The Group “Humanism-Arts” before Public Opinions] (Hanoi: The True Publisher, 1959).

See also, Hoài Thanh, *Có một nền văn hoá Việt Nam* [There is a Vietnamese Culture] (Hanoi: Culture organization of National Salvation, 1946).

Truong Chinh, *Chủ nghĩa Mác và văn hoá Việt Nam* [Marxism and Vietnamese culture] (Hanoi: The True Publisher, 1974).

<sup>137</sup> Tran Dan, “Nhất định thắng” [Certainly We Win] (written in 1955, first published in *Giai phẩm mùa xuân* [Spring Beautiful Poems] in January 1956 (my own translation), <http://tuoitre.vn/tin/van-hoa-giai-tri/van-hoc-sach/20080310/bai-tho-nhat-dinh-thang-cua-tran-dan/246626.html>

Tran Dan describes the sorrow of a divided country and the sadness of going to the South to fight in the war:

I lived in mentally and physically tiring  
The painful time of thinking about going to the South

....  
Too much pain<sup>138</sup>

However, the poem gives hope at the end for those homesick and sad soldiers by delivering belief in the final victory of their cause:

Everyone works for the future of peace, national unification, independence, and democracy. The struggle of the heart, the blood of my life is the love in the clothes and rice; certainly we win!<sup>139</sup>

A *Certainly We Win* expresses the poet's feelings about the sad reality of the Northern society after the war: the fear of unemployment and the feelings of isolation. The most impressive image of this poem is the image of the poet isolated and walking in the rain, seeing no one in the houses, having no hope and the image of the red flag in the rain. The image of the rain on the red flag was criticized as a treasonous image against the symbol of nation, its Communist red flag. Tran Dan's *Certainly We Win* was thought to be too critical of the new regime in the North, and a voice against the larger Vietnamese struggle for national independence and unification.<sup>140</sup> Tran Dan had to explain himself before the Lao Dong Party for his position against their war policy.<sup>141</sup>

Some Vietnamese writers also directly wrote articles to demand the right to uncensored expression, asking for individual freedom in literature activities and criticized the Party's policies against free thought. For example, Truong Tuu wrote articles titled *The Cult of Personality in the Leaders of the Literature-Arts Section* and *The Literary Arts and Politics* where he criticized the leaders of these departments for being too controlling. The Lao Dong Party leaders understood that the artists had a very powerful spiritual role in the struggle for national independence and unification. However, they were afraid that if the poems depicting the tragedy of the war and dissent of the Party's policies spread in society, the psychology of soldiers and civilians would be adversely affected. The Politburo considered Tran Dan's, Truong

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Sy Tien, "Nghe si san khau," [The Artists], *Bon "Nhan van-Giai pham" truoc toa an du luan* [The Group "Humanism-Arts" before Public Opinions] (Hanoi: NXB Su That, 1959), 294.

<sup>141</sup> Tran Dan, "Những lời thú nhận bước đầu" [The confession], *Văn Nghệ* [The Arts Magazines], no. 12 (May 25<sup>th</sup> 1958).

Tuu's and his friends' works to be voices of dissent that could potentially persuade people to follow the path of the "decadent bourgeois," who cared only for their own welfare and pleasure. In 1959, the article "The Rat-Hole Nhan Van Giai Pham" was published to bring public attention and criticism to the group of Truong Tuu and Tran Dan, going as far as to call them societal parasites.<sup>142</sup> Although Tran Dan, Truong Tuu and their group Nhan Van Giai Pham were genuinely talented poets, writers and artists, Tran Dan's poem *Certainly We Win* and works of Nhan Van Giai Pham were felt to be too radically anti-war for the Party. It feared that behind the intellectual voices criticizing communism was a larger scheme to fight against the Party's policies and finding new directions for Vietnam. In 1956, their suspicions were confirmed when the artists took the opportunity of Khrushchev criticizing Stalin in the Soviet Union to criticize the Lao Dong Party in several artistic works of literature.<sup>143</sup> Those artists acted as representatives of the voices of individualist culture, emphasizing happiness in material life and freedom of expression. During times of war, knowing that their party was still young and had made some mistakes already with the land reform, Ho Chi Minh and the Lao Dong Party needed an optimistic and devoted public for the struggle of national unification. It was simply too dangerous to emphasize the sadness and disappointment of society in literal works at this time, for its bad influence on the spirit of the public, which might cause irreparable damage to the revolution. However, Tran Dan, Truong Tuu and other members of Nhan Van Giai Pham group were a small fraction of Vietnamese intellectuals. The greater part of the intellectual community wholeheartedly supported Ho Chi Minh and the Party's policies, especially the famous writers To Huu, Xuan Dieu, Nguyen Tuan, Hoai Thanh, The Lu.<sup>144</sup>

The Vietnamese belief system of ancestor worship and collective culture helped them throughout history to maintain a close political society that relied on collective agreement and unity to sustain itself. This is exemplified by a famous general in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Tran Hung Dao, who gave advice to Emperor Tran Anh Tong about the root belief behind the people's struggle for national independence: "The whole army should be united, having only one heart like father and sons in a family. We should

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<sup>142</sup> "Cái ổ chuột 'Nhân văn Giai phẩm' bị vạch trần trước ánh sáng của dư luận" "*The Rat-Hole 'Nhan Van Giai Pham' was exposed in the light of public*", in *Bon "Nhan van-Giai pham" truoac toa an du luan* (Hanoi: NXB Sự Thật, 1959), 309- 310.

<sup>143</sup> To Huu, "Nhìn lại 3 năm phá hoại của nhóm 'Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm'," [Look back after 3 years of destruction of the Group 'Humanalim-arts'], *Bon Nhan Van- Giai Pham truoac toa an du luan*, (Hanoi: NXB Su That, 1959).

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

treat people kindly, gaining the hearts and minds of people, so we can guarantee deep roots in building our nation.”<sup>145</sup> National hero Nguyen Trai expressed a similar sentiment in the 15th century, proclaiming: “A just cause always wins against tyranny; compassion is the virtue to embrace in place of violence.”<sup>146</sup> Nguyen Trai also emphasized the power of a just cause in the traditional Vietnamese People’s War: “With a superior strategy and a humane policy to gain the hearts and minds of people, we will defeat the enemy without using violence.”<sup>147</sup> After Vietnam defeated Ming invasion attempts in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, Vietnamese national hero Nguyen Trai wrote the poem *Ode To Chi Linh* to express the Vietnamese desire of living in peace:

Thinking of the future of the country,  
We released one hundred thousands prisoners of war,  
Resuming the friendly ties,  
Putting aside the fire of war forever;  
Preserving the nation is the best policy  
To maintain peace for the people.<sup>148</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, in *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí* (History of Vietnam in every field including geology, biography, military, law, culture, education, financial and diplomacy), historian Phan Huy Chu wrote: the essence Vietnamese traditional foreign policy was “peaceful reconciliation” with foreign countries and defending national independence, sovereignty and territory.<sup>149</sup> President Ho Chi Minh and the Lao Dong Party learned the lessons of the past to develop the power of Vietnamese patriotism and search for peace in Vietnam. Communism fit with many aspects of the traditional Vietnamese society and the sense of collective responsibility to both ancestors and future generations. Therefore, the Party capitalized and disseminated artistic representations, which spread the patriotic message of self-sacrifice and silenced those who criticized it during the Vietnam War. A united front in the war against the U.S. and South Vietnam was critical to maintaining morale and defeating the will of

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<sup>145</sup> Ngo Sy Lien, *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu 4* [The Complete Annals of Viet Nam 4] (published in Han-old Chinese language 1697) (trans. into Vietnamese) (Hanoi: Social Science publisher, 1993), 210, (my own translation from Vietnamese to English).

<sup>146</sup> Nguyen Trai, *Binh Ngo Dai Cao* [Proclamation of Victory] (15<sup>th</sup> Century). Quoted in Nguyen Luong Bich, *Nguyễn Trãi đánh giặc cứu nước* [Nguyễn Trãi fighting the enemy for national salvation] (Hanoi: People Military publisher, 1973), 75 (my own translation).

<sup>147</sup> Nguyen Trai, *Binh Ngo Dai Cao*. Quoted in Nguyen Thuy Linh, “Ngoại giao ‘tâm công’ Hồ Chí Minh kế thừa và phát triển truyền thống ngoại giao dân tộc” [Strategy of gaining hearts and minds of Ho Chi Minh: lessons from Vietnamese traditional diplomacy], <http://tapchidantoc.ubdt.gov.vn/2013-11-08/69ebcf8041bf73bbb4fcbff3cdfbf57-cema.htm> (my own translation).

<sup>148</sup> Quoted in Nguyen Duy Nien, *Ho Chi Minh Thought on Diplomacy* (Hanoi: The World Publishers, 2008), 46-47.

<sup>149</sup> Quoted in Ibid. 46.

American forces to occupy the country. As the result, they just only accepted to talk with the U.S. once they knew the aggressive American will of fighting in Vietnam was defeated, and all initiatives of negotiations between Hanoi and Washington directly or indirectly from 1965 to 1968 failed.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> “Nghị quyết 12 của Ban Chấp Hành Trung Ương Đảng Lao Động” [The Resolution of The 12<sup>th</sup> Plenum of Politburo of Lao Dong Party] (December 21<sup>st</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> 1965], [http://dangcongsan.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co\\_id=30577&cn\\_id=175468](http://dangcongsan.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co_id=30577&cn_id=175468).

## CHAPTER 3. THE COLD WAR AND THE U.S. SEARCH PEACE FOR VIETNAM

### 3.1 Harry S. Truman's and Dwight D. Eisenhower's Administrations

Vietnam's relationship with America did not start out so poorly. In fact, President Ho Chi Minh recalled the 1776 U.S. Declaration of Independence when he read the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's Declaration of Independence on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1945 at Ba Dinh Square: "All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.' This immortal statement appeared in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776."<sup>151</sup>

After World War II, President Ho Chi Minh asked President Truman for help in Vietnam's fight against the French colonialists many times, but the U.S. refused.<sup>152</sup> At this time, there were ongoing debates about colonialism and Communism in Vietnam in the White House.<sup>153</sup> "By early 1947, moreover, the Truman administration had drawn conclusions about Ho's revolution that would determine American policy in Vietnam for the next decades."<sup>154</sup> At last, with the fear of losing China to Communism, the U.S. decided to support the French to fight against Ho Chi Minh's nationalistic Communist government.<sup>155</sup> In May 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson spoke with European leaders about their shared concerns: "From our viewpoint, the Soviet Union possesses a position of domination in China which it is using to threaten Indochina, push into British Malaya, stir up trouble in the Philippines, and now start trouble in Indonesia."<sup>156</sup> Dean Acheson and the Truman administration believed in the free economy of capitalism, which led America to fear the Communist expansion and influence of the Soviet Union and newly Communist

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<sup>151</sup> Ho Chi Minh, "Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam"-1945, in *Ho Chi Minh selected writings*, (Hanoi: Foreign Languages publishing house, 1977), 53.

<sup>152</sup> Ngo Vuong Anh, "Thư chủ tịch Hồ Chí Minh gửi chủ tịch Truman" [President Ho Chi Minh' letters to President Truman], <http://vietnamnet.vn/vn/thoi-su/thu-chu-tich-ho-chi-minh-gui-tong-thong-truman-133287.html>.

<sup>153</sup> <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v06/d33>. Department of State Policy Statement on Indochina, September 27<sup>th</sup> 1948.

<sup>154</sup> George Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam: 1950-1975* (John Wiley and Sons Inc, 1979), 8.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Quoted in Melvyn P. Leffer, "The Emergence of American Grand Strategy, 1945-1952," in Melvyn P. Leffer and Odd Arne Westad, *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, volume 1, (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 83.

China in the world.<sup>157</sup> Acheson determined the nature of American policy after World War II and he was “a cold warrior.”<sup>158</sup> According to Robert McMahon, Acheson sought to contain the Soviet Union not because he thought of “the emergence of the Soviet threat as primarily ideological in character” but because he feared “the power, the potential power and reach of the Soviet Union.”<sup>159</sup> The U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson played an important role in shaping U.S. Cold War policy. His target was “to employ the U.S. power to serve a purpose: to fashion the international environment in which the American way of life could prosper and individual freedom could survive.”<sup>160</sup> In 1950, the aftermath of losing China to Communism as well as the threat of the Communist Soviet Union advancing in Europe made Americans decide to support the French in Indochina.<sup>161</sup> According to George Herring: “Ho’s well-organized guerrillas had already scored major gains against France, and with increased Soviet and Chinese backing might be able to force French withdrawal, removing the last military bulwark between China and the rest of Southeast Asia. Indochina was in the ‘most immediate danger,’ the State Department concluded, and was therefore ‘the most strategically important area of Southeast Asia.’”<sup>162</sup> Important events relating to Communist China and Communist Russia in Vietnam made the U.S. decide to get involved in Vietnam: “On January 18, 1950, the Chinese Communist Government announced its recognition of the Ho Chi Minh movement as the legal Government of Vietnam, while on January 30, 1950, the Soviet Government, while maintaining diplomatic relations with France, similarly announced its recognition.”<sup>163</sup> The U.S. feared the expansion of communism in Vietnam and Asia. On February 27<sup>th</sup> 1950, the Department of State reported to the National Security Council on the position of the United States with respect to Indochina. This document shows that the U.S. policy in Indochina was not merely with the small country, but a part of a larger U.S. containment policy in Southeast Asia and the world:

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<sup>157</sup> Robert McMahon, *Dean Acheson and the creation of an American World Order*, (Washington D.C.: Potomac Book, 2009).

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>160</sup> Melvyn P. Leffer, “Introduction,” in *Dean Acheson and the Creation of an American World Order*, by Robert McMahon (Washington D.C.: Potomac Book, 2009), x.

<sup>161</sup> Herring, *America’s longest war*, 10.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>163</sup> “Report to the National Security by The Department of State”, NSC 64 Note by The Executive Secretary to the National Security Council on The Position of the United States with Respect to Indochina, February 27<sup>th</sup> 1950. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v06/d480>.



Indochina is the area most immediately threatened. It is also the only area adjacent to Communist China, which contains a large European army, which along with native troops is now in an armed conflict with the forces of Communist aggression. A decision to contain Communist expansion at the border of Indochina must be considered as a part of a wider study to prevent Communist aggression into other parts of Southeast Asia.<sup>164</sup>

The document also indicates that the Communist forces in Vietnam was a nationalist movement with the charismatic leader Ho Chi Minh at the center: “A large segment of the Indochinese nationalist movement was seized in 1945 by Ho Chi Minh, a Vietnamese who under various aliases has served as a communist agent for thirty years. He has attracted non-communist as well as communist elements to his support.”<sup>165</sup> As a large supporter of the French forces in Indochina, the U.S. wanted France to build a non-communist Vietnamese government to contain Communism in the area:

The Department of State has pointed out to the French Government that it was and is necessary to establish and support governments in Indochina particularly in Vietnam, under leaders who are capable of attracting to their causes the non-communist nationalist followers who had drifted to the Ho Chi Minh communist movement in the absence of any non-communist nationalist movement around which to plan their aspirations.<sup>166</sup>

The U.S. State Department emphasized the important role of Vietnam in the U.S. containment policy in the Cold War: “It is important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Indochina is a key area of Southeast Asia and is under immediate threat.”<sup>167</sup> The U.S. prepared a program to “protect U.S. security interests in Indochina.”<sup>168</sup> After this report, CIA began working in Indochina and then the U.S. Embassy was officially established in Saigon in 1952.<sup>169</sup> On May 1<sup>st</sup> 1950, President Truman “quietly approved the allocation of \$10 million for military items, thus making the first crucial decision regarding American military involvement in

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Jean-Marc LePage, PhD and Elie Tenenbaum, “The ‘unquiet allies’, French and American Relations during the first Indochina War, 1950-1954” - a presentation to the Department of State’s Office of the Historian Conference on the American Experience in Southeast Asia 1946-1975 on 30 September 2010. *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol.55, No. 3 (Extracts, September 2011): 26.

Vietnam.”<sup>170</sup> In December 1950, the U.S. and France made an agreement in Saigon about the fate of Indochina. This event marked the official beginning of U.S. backing of the French in fighting Ho Chi Minh’s government in Vietnam.<sup>171</sup> “By early 1952, the ‘domino theory’ was firmly rooted as the principle behind American foreign policy.”<sup>172</sup> The United States decided that, “in the absence of large scale Chinese Communist intervention in Indochina,” it should “provide increased aid on a high priority basis for the French Union forces” in order to “maintain progress in the restoration of internal security against the Viet Minh” and “defend Indochina against Chinese Communist aggression.”<sup>173</sup> The U.S. increased its efforts in supporting the French to fight against Ho Chi Minh’s revolution. According to Patti:

The United States was irrevocably committed to support a French puppet regime in a war against Vietnamese nationalists and to protect French colonial interests in Southeast Asia in a developing tragedy that was Vietnam. American assistance, which began modestly with \$10 million in 1950, exceeded \$1 billion in fiscal year 1954 alone, at which time, it accounted for 78 percent of the cost of the French war burden.<sup>174</sup>

Although the U.S. had helped the French, they later faced many difficulties in Vietnam and their war efforts were a disaster in Indochina. While the French were experiencing a crisis in Indochina, the American Republicans attacked the Truman administration for its supposedly soft policies towards Communism.<sup>175</sup>

On April 4<sup>th</sup> 1954, President Eisenhower wrote in a letter to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill about his fear of Communism in Vietnam if the French lost, stipulating that the U.S. would have to increase aid to the French to fight against Ho Chi Minh’s Communist government. Eisenhower wrote: “It is no solution simply to urge the French to intensify their efforts. And if they do not see it through and Indochina passes into the hands of the Communism the ultimate effect on our and your global strategic position with the consequent shift in the power ratios throughout Asia

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<sup>170</sup> Archimedes L.A. Patti, *Why Vietnam? Prelude to America’s Albatross* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1982), 390.

<sup>171</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Vietnam Embassy in Soviet Union, “Báo cáo về chính sách đối ngoại của Hoa Kỳ” [The Report about U.S. Foreign Affairs], April 15<sup>th</sup> 1964, File: The Section of Foreign Affairs of The Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party (1958- 1990), Archive of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party. See also “Mutual Defense Assistance: Indochina-Agreement Between the United States of America and Cambodia, France, Laos, and Vietnam,” *The American Journal of International Law* 48, no. 3 (1954): 133-37.

<sup>172</sup> Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 20.

<sup>173</sup> “Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary (Lay)”, Washington, June 25<sup>th</sup> 1952, NSC 124/2-June 25, (1952), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v12p1/d36>.

<sup>174</sup> Patti, *Why Vietnam*, 390.

<sup>175</sup> Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 23.

and the Pacific could be disastrous and, I know, unacceptable to you and me.”<sup>176</sup> Eisenhower suggested to call on other nations to support the French in the war against Communism in Asia: “To bring greater moral and material resources to support of the French effort is through the establishment of a new, ad hoc grouping or coalition composed of nations which have a vital concern in checking of Communist expansion in the area.”<sup>177</sup> Eisenhower was deeply impacted by the rise of Fascism in Europe that led to the slaughter of World War II.<sup>178</sup> He thought Communism was as dangerous as fascism because both political systems featured dictatorships with aggressive expansionist tendencies and worked to increase their international allies. As a result, President Eisenhower wanted the U.S. and other nations to “learn something from the past” to cooperate against international Communist.<sup>179</sup> The President wrote that: “If I may refer again to history; we failed to halt Hirohito, Mussolini and Hitler by not acting in unity and in time.”<sup>180</sup>

During the Dien Bien Phu crisis, the White House planned to create an international organization in Asia and Pacific to contain Communism (SEATO).<sup>181</sup> By 1954, the U.S. decided not to engage in the diplomatic efforts at Geneva after the war between France and Vietnam had wound down, which later gave the American government an excuse not to honor the agreement. The Geneva Accord (the final Declaration of Geneva on Indochina) temporarily divided Vietnam into northern and southern zones, which were to be reunited by general elections under international supervision in July 1956.<sup>182</sup> Knowing that Ho Chi Minh would win a national election in Vietnam, the U.S. supported the Diem regime in its decision not to hold unifying elections in 1956.<sup>183</sup> President Eisenhower later admitted that, “I have never talked or corresponded with a person knowledgeable on Indochinese affairs who did not agree that, had elections been held in the time of the fighting, possibly 80 percent of the

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<sup>176</sup> Extracts from “Letter from President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Churchill”, April 4<sup>th</sup> 1954, Box 194, Vietnam Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2013), 74.

<sup>182</sup> Nguyen Thi Viet Nga, *Cuộc kháng chiến chống Mỹ cứu nước của Việt Nam* [The Resistance war against America for National Salvation of Viet Nam] (Hanoi: Social Sciences Publisher, 2015).

<sup>183</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, “The Inevitable Tragedy. The United States embroilment in Vietnam,” *Leidschrift* 19, (September 2004): 65.

population would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh.”<sup>184</sup> According to Edward Cuddy:

In short, a ‘South Vietnam’ was not supposed to exist only one nation forced from two ‘zones’. After announcing its support for the Accords, Washington secretly planned to sabotage them amid the reports that elections would sweep the Communist revolution hero, Ho Chi Minh, to a landslide victory. To preempt Geneva’s ‘disaster,’ warned the National Security Council, the Administration should try to ‘prevent a Communist victory through all Vietnamese elections’ and ‘support a friendly noncommunist South Vietnam.’<sup>185</sup>

In September 1954, at Manila, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was established including the United States, Great Britain, France, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan to contain Communism in Southeast Asia and protect South Vietnam as an independent nation.<sup>186</sup> On May 13<sup>th</sup> 1957, in a meeting with the Mayor of New York Robert F. Wagner, Jr. and President Ngo Dinh Diem, similar statements to those expressed by American officials on the strategic importance of South Vietnam were given: “With regard to security, the frontiers of the United States do not stop at the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts, but extend into Southeast Asia, to the Ben Hai river, which partitions Vietnam at the 17th parallel, and forms the threatened border of the Free World, which we all cherish.”<sup>187</sup> According to David Anderson, “The Eisenhower years were a time of deepening American commitment to South Vietnam premised on superficial assumptions about the government in Saigon, its future prospects, and the importance of its survival to U.S. global strategic interests.”<sup>188</sup> At that time, in South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem “emerged as the key figure in the efforts to establish the authority and power of the SVN.”<sup>189</sup> Eisenhower supported the Diem government “in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state” to contain Communism.<sup>190</sup> The President believed that the American mission in South Vietnam was a “humanitarian effort” and hoped the Ngo Dinh Diem government

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<sup>184</sup> “For Eisenhower’s view on the popularity of Ho Chi Minh,” see Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change, 1953-56* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Compnay, Inc., 1963), 372, <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam/ddeho.htm>.

<sup>185</sup> Edward Cuddy, “Vietnam: Mr. Johnson’s War or Mr. Eisenhower,” *The Review of Politics* 65, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 354.

<sup>186</sup> “Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) 1954”, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/seato>.

<sup>187</sup> Address By President Ngo Dinh Diem, May 13<sup>th</sup> 1957, Folder 07, Box 15, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2321507006>.

<sup>188</sup> Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 200.

<sup>189</sup> Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2013), 84.

<sup>190</sup> “Letter from President Eisenhower to President Diem”, October 1, 1954, Box 194, Vietnam Country File, NSF, LBJL.

would be strong enough to “discourage any who might wish to impose foreign ideology” on the Vietnamese.<sup>191</sup> Eisenhower criticized what he saw as Hanoi’s scheme to “destroy” the freedom of Vietnam.<sup>192</sup> For him, Communism was too dangerous an experiment for Vietnam and the rest of the free world so that he promised to assist South Vietnam to fight against “communist imperialism.”<sup>193</sup>

According to Robert A. Divine, “the real purpose” of the policy pursued by the President Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, was “to remove the French and allow the United States, through the regime of Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, to become a barrier to further communist advancement in Southeast Asia.”<sup>194</sup> Edward Cuddy also wrote:

Most treacherous was the notion that would become the central rationale for America’s war: that North Vietnam started it, and America’s cause was to preserve an independent South Vietnam against Hanoi’s aggression. Hidden in the ideological fog was the fact that Saigon’s very existence—a violation of Geneva and affront to Vietnamese nationalism—was for a provocation for a war.<sup>195</sup>

President Eisenhower had sparked the ember of war. Moreover, “it was Diem’s corrupt, ruthless regime—not Hanoi’s aggression—that actually set off the revolt.”<sup>196</sup> Eisenhower decided to support South Vietnam because he feared the expansion of Communist China and the Soviet Union.<sup>197</sup> He said the rise of China and the Soviet Union was a “risk to American lives and resources in the future,” because “of the Soviet-Chinese military power and their drive to dominate the world... That power continues to grow in armament, in nuclear capability, in economic base. The Communist goal of conquering the world never changed.”<sup>198</sup> Convinced of his point of view, the President led the U.S. into a war that could not be finished under his term, leaving this difficult legacy for his successors to handle.

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> “Letter from President Eisenhower to President Diem,” October 26<sup>th</sup> 1960, Box 194, Vietnam Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>194</sup> Robert A. Divine, “Vietnam: an Episode in the Cold War” in *Vietnam: The Early Decision*, ed. Gardner and Gittinger (Austin: University of Texas press, 1997), 15.

<sup>195</sup> Cuddy, “Vietnam: Mr. Johnson’s War or Mr. Eisenhower,” 355.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 356.

See also, Ho Chi Minh city Education Publisher and Ho Chi Minh city University of Education, *Việt Nam những chặng đường lịch sử* 1954-1975; 1975-2005, [Vietnam: history 1954-1975; 1975-2005] (Ho Chi Minh city: Education Publisher, 2005).

<sup>197</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Special Message to the Congress on Mutual Security Programs,” May 21<sup>st</sup> 1957. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=11041>

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

### 3.2 The John F. Kennedy Administration

The next president, John Fitzgerald Kennedy was born into the now-famous Kennedy family in Boston on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1917. His father, Joseph Kennedy (1888-1969), was a prominent American businessman and political figure. Joseph Kennedy was the American Ambassador to London from 1938 until late 1940. John F. Kennedy was raised in a rich family free of economic difficulties, but heavy with family tragedies. When he was in the Navy, his brother died as a soldier in World War II and his sister died in a flying accident. He himself was not a healthy boy, and suffered several hospitalizations during his high school and college years.<sup>199</sup> These difficulties early in life may have given him an enhanced sense of empathy and a desire to make the world a better place.

As a young man, John F. Kennedy had been very interested in international relations. He studied at Harvard University, especially in the area of international politics. When he was 23 years old, his senior thesis titled *Why England Slept* was published as a book and well received. The book outlines the ways in which, and the reasons why England had not been prepared for the Second World War. The book not only spoke about England, but also called for Americans to face the reality of a changed world, and for America to break out of its isolationism.<sup>200</sup> The book had been published in 1940 before Pearl Harbor was attacked, but in it, Kennedy forecast that war would soon approach American shores.<sup>201</sup>

Throughout his 1960 presidential campaign, Kennedy had blamed the Republicans for the missile gap, for losing Cuba to the Communists, and for the decline in American prestige throughout the world. He declared, “I believe that we can check the Communist advance, that we can turn it back, and that we can, in this century, provide for the ultimate victory of freedom over slavery.”<sup>202</sup> In his inaugural address on January 20<sup>th</sup> 1961, said he believed that the United States had been chosen for a special mission, and given “the role of defending freedom” to remake the world in its own image, while making it secure for American economic and political interests. He

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<sup>199</sup> Hugh Brogan, *Kennedy* (Vietnamese edition translated by Thai Ha) (Hanoi: Intellectual Publisher, 2008), 49.

See also Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Greenwich: Fawcett Publications Crest Book, 1965), 80.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> “Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy,” City Hall, Providence, Rhode Island, November 7<sup>th</sup> 1960, [https://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/JFK-Speeches/Providence-RI\\_19601107.aspx](https://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/JFK-Speeches/Providence-RI_19601107.aspx)

further stated that “the energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.”<sup>203</sup> It was clear that he passionately believed in the cause of spreading democracy for the betterment of both America and of the international situation.

President Kennedy understood the important role of Vietnam on the political world stage long before he became president. On June 1<sup>st</sup> 1956, as a Senator and a member of the American Friends of Vietnam, Kennedy had presented a long speech on Vietnam at a luncheon in the Hotel Willard, Washington D.C. This group was formed by State Department’s officials, Catholic clerics like Cardinal Francis Spellman, the archbishop of New York, politicians including Democratic Senators Mike Mansfield of Montana and Kennedy, , as well as Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas to advance “the standing of the Diem government inside the United States.”<sup>204</sup> This speech expressed Kennedy’s vision of the future of Vietnam and its relations to the U.S. and the free world. It shows the role of Kennedy as well as of the Democratic Party in supporting South Vietnam as an independent and democratic country and an ally of the U.S in Asia. First, Kennedy spoke of his understanding that the Cold War among the great powers was to gain the hearts and minds of the third world, so therefore Vietnam played a very important role in American foreign policy: “Vietnam represents the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, the keystone to the arch, the finger in the dike.”<sup>205</sup> Second, Kennedy emphasized: “the rising prestige and influence of Communist China in Asia are unchallengeable facts” so that the U.S. could not fail in the “experiment” of democracy in Asia. Kennedy feared that if the U.S. failed, the Vietnamese as well as other Asian nations would not believe in the value of democracy. Third, Kennedy considered Vietnam a “test of American responsibility and determination in Asia.” Because of his great understanding of the history of international relations, Kennedy knew that: “As French influence in the political, economic and military spheres has declined in Vietnam, American influence has steadily grown.” Vietnam was eighty years under the control of French Colonialists; and was becoming familiar with Western civilization. Kennedy thought

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<sup>203</sup> “Inaugural Address,” January 20<sup>th</sup> 1961, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/BqXIEM9F4024ntFI7SVAjA.aspx>.

<sup>204</sup> Robert D. Schulzinger, *A time for war: The United States and Vietnam 1941-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 78.

<sup>205</sup> Senator John F. Kennedy speeches at the conference on Vietnam Luncheon in the Hotel Willard, Washington D.C. June 1<sup>st</sup> 1956, [https://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/JFK-Speeches/Vietnam-Conference-Washington-DC\\_19560601.aspx](https://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/JFK-Speeches/Vietnam-Conference-Washington-DC_19560601.aspx)

the U.S. must have a responsibility to “little Vietnam” as “the parents” or “godparents.” Kennedy believed that Vietnam was “the offspring” of the U.S. and therefore, it “cannot abandon it, cannot ignore its needs.” Kennedy was also aware that the U.S. “prestige in Asia will sink” if Vietnam falls to Communism. Fourth, Kennedy talked about the mutual benefits entailed when Americans became involved in Vietnam: “America’s stake in Vietnam, in her strength and in her security, is a very selfish one- for it can be measured, in the last analysis, in terms of American lives, American dollars.” Furthermore, Kennedy strongly believed that American support for Vietnam was not only good for Vietnam and for America but also for “the security of freedom everywhere.”

Kennedy knew that Communists were using their own methods to attract the Vietnamese people to their cause: “The Communists offer them another kind of revolution, glittering and seductive in its superficial appeal.” Kennedy said what kind of action the U.S. must take: “We should not attempt to buy the friendship of the Vietnamese. Nor can we win their hearts by making them dependent upon our handouts. What we must offer them is a revolution-a political, economic and social revolution far superior to anything the Communists can offer-far more peaceful, far more democratic and far more locally controlled.” To achieve such a success in the relationship between America and Vietnam, Kennedy said that: “such a Revolution will require much from the United States and much from Vietnam.” Kennedy spoke about the details of what the U.S. could do to shape the future for Vietnam:

We must supply capital to replace that drained by the centuries of colonial exploitation; technicians to train those handicapped by deliberate policies of illiteracy; guidance to assist a nation taking those first feeble steps toward the complexities of a republican form of government.<sup>206</sup>

Kennedy saw that because Vietnam had been in misery for centuries under the rule of French Colonialism, it was in the danger of turning power over to the Communists. Therefore, the U.S. would help Vietnam to enter “a new era-an era of pride and independence, and era of democratic and economic grow.”<sup>207</sup> This speech was very important because Kennedy imagined a way to build an independent Vietnam through peaceful measures for the better future of Vietnam, America and the world. Long before becoming president of the United States, as a senator, John F. Kennedy and The American Friends of Vietnam played an important role in supporting Ngo Dinh

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.



Diem's government. He hoped to build a democratic government in South Vietnam. However, Ngo Dinh Diem's government was a dictatorship in which the power belonged to the Ngo family.

Since becoming president, Kennedy tried his best to keep his promise to build up Vietnam as a nation independent from communism. According to Melvyn P. Leffer:

By the time Kennedy assumed the presidency in January 1961, psychological factors like prestige and credibility shaped American attitudes and policies. This was particularly so because the Americans believed they were immersed in a worldwide ideological struggle with the Kremlin to gain influence in the Third World, where nationalist liberation movements were pulsating and new nations were forming.<sup>208</sup>

Kennedy strongly believed in the good will of America in his support of the Republic of South Vietnam. On December 14<sup>th</sup> 1961, he sent a letter to President Ngo Dinh Diem affirming the determination of the U.S to help South Vietnam: "The United States, like the Republic of Vietnam, remains devoted to the cause of peace and our primary purpose is to help your people maintain their independence."<sup>209</sup> David L. Anderson concluded that Kennedy was "so deeply embedded in U.S. global strategy" that he deepened America's involvement in Vietnam.<sup>210</sup> In a press conference on July 17<sup>th</sup> 1963, when the battlefield situation was desperate, Kennedy stated he was unwilling to lose in Vietnam: "We are not going to withdraw from that effort. In my opinion, for us to withdraw would mean a collapse not only of South Vietnam, but also of Southeast Asia. So we are going to stay here."<sup>211</sup> Publicly, the President not only confirmed the American determination to stay in South Vietnam, but also refused all initiatives for peace put forth. In August 1963, when Ngo Dinh Diem was very unpopular, French President Charles de Gaulle publicly called for a reunified Vietnam free of "outside interference" with the a neutralization proposal.<sup>212</sup>

However, the U.S. refused De Gaulle's "neutralization" proposal. On September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1963, in a televised interview, Kennedy said to Walter Cronkite: "I don't agree with those who say we should withdraw [...] I think anything General de Gaulle says should be listened to, and we listened [...] It doesn't do any good to say: Well, why

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<sup>208</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, "The Inevitable Tragedy": 67-68.

<sup>209</sup> "Letter from President Kennedy to President Diem," December 14<sup>th</sup> 1961. Box 194, Vietnam Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>210</sup> Anderson, Shadow, 44. Quoted in Cuddy, "Vietnam: Mr. Johnson's War or Mr. Eisenhower?" 360.

<sup>211</sup> Press Conference, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1963, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKWHA-205.aspx>

<sup>212</sup> Yuko Torikata, "Reexamining De Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 31, No. 5 (November 2007): 918.

don't we all just go home and leave the world to those who are our enemies.”<sup>213</sup> Secretly, Kennedy had a plan to withdraw troops from Vietnam: “By early 1963, however, a disillusioned Kennedy was speaking privately of his plans to withdraw from Vietnam-but only after 1964.”<sup>214</sup>

On October 5<sup>th</sup> 1963, after considering the report on South Vietnam by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and General Maxwell Taylor, President Kennedy agreed with the plan to withdraw but he “directed that no formal announcement be made of the implementation of plans to withdraw 1000 U.S. military personnel by the end of 1963.”<sup>215</sup> Leffler concluded:

New evidence, for example, suggests that Kennedy remained extremely reluctant to deploy combat troops to Vietnam and that he pondered retrenchment and withdrawal at the time of his assassination. In other words, the cult of manliness and the sense of moral superiority did not stifle reflection and reassessment. In fact, Kennedy's successful handling of the Cuban missile crisis afforded him the self-confidence to reconsider the American commitment to Indochina.<sup>216</sup>

Ngo Dinh Diem government's unpopularity in Vietnam as well as his unwillingness to follow American advice increased the frustration with him in the U.S.<sup>217</sup> Although John F. Kennedy supported Diem to become president of South Vietnam, he himself and his administration did back Vietnamese generals to move Diem away.<sup>218</sup>

Publicly, President Kennedy showed a determination to contain Communism all over the world because of the Americans fear of the Communist expansion. On November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1963 at Fort Worth-Texas, President Kennedy stated:

Without the United States, South Vietnam would collapse overnight. Without the United States, the SEATO alliance would collapse overnight. Without the United States, the CENTO alliance would collapse overnight. Without the United States there would be no NATO. And gradually Europe would drift into neutralism and indifference. Without the efforts of the United States in the Alliance for Progress, the Communist advance onto the mainland of South America would long ago have taken place.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Transcript of Broadcast With Walter Cronkite Inaugurating a CBS Television News Program, September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1963, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9388#ixzz1dm8UCT8A>

<sup>214</sup> Cuddy, “Vietnam: Mr. Johnson's War or Mr. Eisenhower.” 360.

<sup>215</sup> “National Security Action Memorandum 263 to Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, The Joint Chiefs of Staff-subject: South Vietnam,” October 11<sup>th</sup> 1963, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/w6LJoSnW4UehkaH9Ip5IAA.aspx>.

<sup>216</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, “The Inevitable tragedy. The United States embroilment in Vietnam,” 71. See also, R. Dalleck, *An unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963* (Boston, 2013), 709-11.

<sup>217</sup> Robert D.Schulzinger, *A time for war: The United States and Vietnam 1941-1975*, 113.

<sup>218</sup> Robert D.Schulzinger, *A time for war: The United States and Vietnam 1941-1975*, 119-122.

<sup>219</sup> President Kennedy Remarks at the Breakfast of the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Texas, November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1963, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9538>.

However, President Kennedy could not fulfill his plan of the withdrawal in Vietnam because on the same day, November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1963 in Dallas, Texas, he was assassinated and the Vietnam problem entered a new phase of turmoil.

### **3.3 Lyndon B. Johnson's Administration Stays the Course**

Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson assumed the Presidency of the United States after President John F. Kennedy died. According to Fredrik Logevall, Johnson “inherited a difficult problem from John F. Kennedy and his choices were few and difficult.”<sup>220</sup> President Johnson was often “cautious and skeptical” about the importance of the Communists in Vietnam to American security but he was not “dovish.”<sup>221</sup>

Johnson always believed that his policy for Vietnam had a noble character. He always believed that Americans had come to Vietnam to help the Vietnamese, save American values, and keep peace in the world.

Publicly, until 1968, Johnson was an advocate of staying in South Vietnam to contain Communism for the sake of American values and world peace. His view of the roles and responsibilities of the President was expressed in solemn terms: “Every president has known that our people look to the city, to this (White House)-not to follow but to lead, not to listen but to teach, not only to obey their will but to help design their purpose. The presidency is not just a center of action and administration. It is, perhaps most importantly, the wellspring of leadership.”<sup>222</sup> For Lyndon B. Johnson, the nation was because of the people, for the people. He understood that Americans did not want to send their children to a far-away country to fight and possibly die but they also did not want to “lose in war.”<sup>223</sup> The question is, what was really behind his commitment to Vietnam? According to Logevall, Johnson decided to escalate the war in Vietnam because he feared losing the credibility of America, the credibility of his own Party, and his personal credibility as president if America lost the war.<sup>224</sup> Logevall explained: “Johnson worried about the harm that failure in Vietnam could do to his domestic agenda, even more, he feared the personal

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<sup>220</sup> Fredrik Logevall, “Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 34, no.1 (Mar. 2004): 102.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remark at the White House Festival of Arts,” 14<sup>th</sup> June 1965, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=27035>.

<sup>223</sup> Logevall, “Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam”: 102.

<sup>224</sup> Logevall, “Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam”: 110. See also, Fredrik Logevall. *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California, 1999.

humiliation he imagined would inevitably accompany a defeat.”<sup>225</sup> Johnson “declared already in late 1963 that he would not be the President who lost Vietnam.”<sup>226</sup> During his presidency, Johnson always talked about American policy as a “commitment to strength, steadfastness and selfless sacrifice to keep us free and the world at peace.”<sup>227</sup> As a Commander-in-Chief, Johnson wrote to the Armed Forces about the mission of the American army in the world:

As you stand your guard for freedom and peace, you may know that the policies and purposes of your country are unchanged and unchangeable in seeking honorable peace, the friendship and alliance of free nations, and the building of a responsible world free of the causes of hatred, division, oppression, and human despair. Praying to be worthy of God’s guidance, let us rededicate ourselves to the continuing tasks before us remembering always that the price of our liberty is eternal vigilance.<sup>228</sup>

Johnson believed in the sacred mission of the American forces in the world and would honor these commitments. On November 27<sup>th</sup> 1963, he said before a Joint Session of Congress that: “This Nation will keep its commitments from South Vietnam to West Berlin.”<sup>229</sup> Johnson compared South Vietnam with West Berlin because both had symbolic meanings as battlegrounds of the free world that America had promised to protect.

In Johnson’s vision, America had come to Vietnam not to seek territory but for the greater goals of peace and prosperity. He dreamed about a world with no boundaries. On January 1<sup>st</sup> 1964, the president talked about the purpose of Americans in South Vietnam, linking it with his domestic program of the “Great Society,” where everyone could enjoy freedom, justice and human welfare: “Under your leadership, your people may win a victory—a victory for freedom and justice and human welfare in Vietnam.”<sup>230</sup> In this message to Chairman of Military Revolutionary Council in South Vietnam, Johnson also identified the enemy of South Vietnam as the same as the enemy of the Great Society, Johnson’s domestic programs for the elimination of

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<sup>225</sup> Fredrik Logevall, “Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam”: 110.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Message to the Members of the Armed Forces,” November 25<sup>th</sup> 1963, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2653>.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address before a Joint Session of the Congress,” November 27<sup>th</sup> 1963, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25988>.

<sup>230</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “New Year’s message to Chairman of Military Revolutionary Council in South Vietnam,” January 1<sup>st</sup> 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26154>.

poverty and racial injustice, which was “enslavement, brutality, and material misery.”<sup>231</sup>

Johnson never wanted a war, but he would fight one if necessary. In January 1964, Johnson expressed his reluctance to fight a war in Vietnam.<sup>232</sup> On February 21<sup>st</sup> 1964, he gave a speech that confirmed America’s promise to help South Vietnam at the University of California: “For 10 years our country has been committed to the support of their freedom, and that commitment we will continue to honor.”<sup>233</sup> He understood the difficulty in this struggle, which was described as a “contest” and a “deeply dangerous game.”<sup>234</sup> He explained: “The contest in which South Vietnam is now engaged is first and foremost a contest to be won by the government and the people of that country for themselves. But those engaged in external direction and supply would do well to be reminded and to remember that this type of aggression is a deeply dangerous game.”<sup>235</sup> On March 15<sup>th</sup> 1964, President Johnson explained the phrase in a television interview of ABC News: “I said it was dangerous game to try to supply arms and become an aggressor and deprive people of their freedom, and that is true, whether it is in Vietnam or whether it is elsewhere in the hemisphere.”<sup>236</sup> President Johnson and his administration understood the nature of the war in Vietnam as a “contest” to gain hearts and minds of people there, but the involvement of guns and troops made it an extremely risky game.<sup>237</sup> The Vietnam War may have been a part of the Cold War context but it was not particularly “cold.” It became a bloody war because it was not only a piece of the Cold War but seen by the Vietnamese as a sacred, patriotic war for national independence and unification.

Similar to Kennedy, Johnson expressed that the purpose of American policy was to be not only good for America, but also the world. He made a conscious effort to continue in the direction Kennedy had laid out:

The first priority was to try to display to the world that we could have continuity and transition, that the program of President Kennedy would be carried on, that there was no need for them to be disturbed and fearful that our

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of Union,” January 8<sup>th</sup> 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26787>.

<sup>233</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks at the 96 Charter Day Observance of University of California at Los Angeles,” February 21<sup>st</sup> 1964. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26079>.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, Transcript of Television and Radio Interview Conducted by Representatives of Major Broadcast Service, March 15<sup>th</sup> 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26108>.

<sup>237</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks at the 96 Charter Day Observance of University of California at Los Angeles.”

constitutional system had been endangered [...] we must work together for the good of all America and the world.<sup>238</sup>

In this message, Johnson reconfirmed the good will of America and called for solidarity to fulfill the plan of building a better world. Lyndon Johnson said that the U.S. foreign policy was also selfless in its pursuit of the cause of freedom: “American’s selfless purpose around the world is to try to help other nations find in their future the same kind of inspiration that was born in a struggling young republic 175 years ago.”<sup>239</sup> On April 20<sup>th</sup> 1964, Johnson reaffirmed Kennedy’s words: “We seek to add no territory to our domination, no satellites in our orbit, no slavish followers to our policies.”<sup>240</sup> He expressed his opinion that all free nations depend on the freedom of others, image the security of South Vietnam and America: “Our freedom depends upon the freedom of others, that our own protection requires that we help protect others, that we draw increased strength from the strength of others.”<sup>241</sup> Rhetoric aside, was the Lyndon Johnson administration’s policy toward Vietnam motivated by selflessness or geopolitics strategy?

In reality, Johnson did not want to be involved in Vietnam, but he was trapped in a dilemma. Many times, he exposed his inner anxieties with his close friends and advisors about the difficulties American had to face in Vietnam. According to Michael Hunt, Johnson had deep knowledge about the Vietnam problem and was “wrestling with them”<sup>242</sup> On May 27<sup>th</sup> 1964, in a conversation with Senator Richard Russell, a Georgia Democrat, Johnson shared his skepticism about Vietnam. He feared Americans becoming stuck in Vietnam as they had in Korea, saying, “We’re getting into another Korea.”<sup>243</sup> He feared that America could not win this war because the Chinese Communists were involved and that the American army moral was weak when they fought “10000 miles away from home.”<sup>244</sup> Johnson concluded in desperation: “What in the hell is Vietnam worth to me? What is Laos worth to me?

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<sup>238</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, Transcript of Television and Radio Interview Conductive by Representatives of Major Broadcast Services.

<sup>239</sup> “Remarks Upon Accepting the Big Brother of the Year Award,” March 25, 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26131>.

<sup>240</sup> “Remarks on Foreign Affairs at the Associated Press Luncheon in New York City,” April 20<sup>th</sup> 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26168>.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> “Lyndon B. Johnson and the Vietnam dilemma,” <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/prestapes/d2.html>.

<sup>243</sup> “On May 27, 1964, Johnson called his trusted friend Senator Richard Russell, a Georgia Democrat and chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee.” Lyndon B. Johnson, the Vietnam dilemma, <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/prestapes/d2.html>.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

What is it worth to this country?”<sup>245</sup> It was not easy for him to quit the war because he was scared of being attacked by hawkish Republicans for the appearance of softness of will and betraying the American commitment to South Vietnam. He had to admit that: “It’s damned easy to get in a war but it’s gonna be awfully hard to ever extricate yourself if you get in.”<sup>246</sup> He could not abandon Vietnam because he was afraid of being labeled a loser. He said: “Of course, if you start running from the Communists, they may just chase you right into your own kitchen.”<sup>247</sup> He and his advisors had real doubts about the motivations of staying in Vietnam, but they did not want to withdraw outright. Johnson was recorded saying to his National Security advisors: “I’m confronted. I don’t believe the American people ever want me to run (from Vietnam). If I lose it, I think they’ll say I’ve lost. I’ve pulled in. At the same time, I don’t want to commit us to the war.”<sup>248</sup> Although he did not want to hurt the Vietnamese, he could not stop supporting South Vietnam because he needed to keep the promises of previous American presidents. On June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1964, Johnson expressed America’s long term good intentions in staying in Vietnam: “In the case of Vietnam, our commitment today is just the same as the commitment made by President Eisenhower to President Diem in 1954, a commitment to help these people to help themselves.”<sup>249</sup> Johnson continually criticized the Communists as those in the wrong, in contrast to America’s noble intentions:

It is others, not we, who have brought terror to small countries and peaceful peasants. It is others, not we, who have preached and practiced the use of force to establish dictatorial control over their neighbors. It is others, not we, who have refused to honor international agreements. The United States cannot fail to do its full share to meet the challenge which is posed by those who disturb the peace of Southeast Asia, but the purpose of America will not change. We stand for peace.<sup>250</sup>

In the news conference on July 24<sup>th</sup> 1964, President Johnson reconfirmed the American determination to help South Vietnam.<sup>251</sup> However, when he called on Americans to join the war for the sake of freedom in Vietnam, there was always the

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> “Telephone Conversation Between President Johnson and the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), Washington, May 27<sup>th</sup> 1964, 11:24 a.m.”, in *Taking Charge: the Johnson White House tapes, 1963-1964*, ed. Michael R. Beschloss (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 372.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Quoted in Ibid, 401.

<sup>249</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, The President’s News Conference, June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26286>.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> The President News Conference of July 24<sup>th</sup> 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26286>.

more important target of projecting America's power, primarily intending to fulfill the American superpower dreams of creating a free world wherever it chose: "We in America have only one policy, only one purpose, and one pursuit, and that is victory for freedom."<sup>252</sup> The question remained who in Vietnam qualified for "freedom," in the American democratic sense of the word.

After the events of the Gulf of Tonkin, on August 4<sup>th</sup> 1964, Johnson told the American people that he, "immediately requested the Congress to pass a resolution making it clear that our Government is united in its determination to take all necessary measures in support of freedom and in defense of peace in Southeast Asia."<sup>253</sup> Shortly after the incident, on August 12<sup>th</sup> 1964, he pointed out that American policy in Vietnam was a part of its policy for shaping the world order. He said America would help South Vietnam to maintain independence and freedom and assured the public of America's determination to stand by South Vietnam to fight against Communism: "The United States cannot and must not and will not turn aside and allow the freedom of a brave people to be handed over to Communist tyranny."<sup>254</sup>

During the electoral campaign for the presidency in 1964, Johnson gave some insight into his complicated emotions on the matter, where he was determined to protect South Vietnam, but at the same, he did not want to send American boys to the war. He believed that the citizens of Vietnam had to fight to gain their own freedom.<sup>255</sup> He believed in America playing a leading role in shaping the world order not only through strength of arms but also through the strength of their morals: "The true strength of Americans lies in the moral might of our cause. It lives in the righteousness in the hearts of the people."<sup>256</sup> On September 25<sup>th</sup> 1964, he reiterated his unwillingness to further escalate the war in Vietnam: "We don't want our American boys to do the fighting for Asia boys. We don't want to get involved in a nation with 700 million people and get tied down in a land war in Asia."<sup>257</sup> Nonetheless, Johnson said America

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<sup>252</sup> "Toasts of the President and President Tsiranana on July 27, 1964," <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26397>.

<sup>253</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "Radio and Television Report to the American people following renewal aggression in the Gulf of Tonkin," August 4, 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26418>.

<sup>254</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks in New York City before American Bar Association," August 12<sup>th</sup> 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26434>

<sup>255</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks at a Barbecue in Stonewall, Texas," August 29<sup>th</sup> 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26434>.

<sup>256</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks in Oklahoma City at the Opening of State Fair," September 25<sup>th</sup> 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26529>.

<sup>257</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks in Oklahoma City at the Dedication of the Eufaula Dam," September 25<sup>th</sup> 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26528>.



would stand by South Vietnam in the struggle: “So we are not going to the North and drop bombs at this stage of the game, and we are not going to the South and run out and leave it for the Communists to take over.”<sup>258</sup> In Johnson’s eyes, the philosophy of freedom was much more advantageous to its followers than the philosophy of Communism:

Here is our difference with the Communists—and our strength. They would use their skills to forge new chains of tyranny. We would use ours to free men from the bonds of the past. The Communists are hard at work to dominate the less-developed nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Their allies are the ancient enemies of mankind: tyranny, poverty, ignorance and disease. If freedom is to prevail, we must do more than meet the immediate threat to Free World security, whether in Southeast Asia or elsewhere. We must look beyond to the long range needs of the developing nation.<sup>259</sup>

With this rhetoric, Johnson pointed out the moral reasons for America to come to Vietnam as a generous friend in a common cause in the effort of helping the developing nation. On October 27<sup>th</sup> 1964, in his “Remarks at the Civic Center Arena in Pittsburg,” he called on the American citizens to vote for him as a peace candidate: “Now, don’t sit around here and wait until they starting playing a patriotic song and you go to packing up your boy’s suitcase.”<sup>260</sup> Johnson explained the rhetoric of patriotism as a root of war and deaths.

On January 20<sup>th</sup> 1965, after winning the election, Johnson gave his inaugural speech, which emphasized the American dream as a dream for people everywhere: “Our own freedom and growth have never been the final goal of the American dream. We were never meant to be an oasis of liberty and abundance in the worldwide desert of disappointed dreams. Our Nation was created to help strike away the chains of ignorance and misery and tyranny wherever they keep man less than God means him to be.”<sup>261</sup> He believed that America had been given the mission to shape the world’s order through the will of God. Similarly to the Vietnamese who were fighting a sacred war to regain control of their homeland, Johnson believed it was America’s sacred duty as free and powerful nation help South Vietnam against Communism.

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<sup>258</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks in Manchester to the Members of the New Hampshire Weekly Newspaper Editors Association,” September 28<sup>th</sup> 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26540>.

<sup>259</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Television Address to the American People,” October 7<sup>th</sup> 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26574>.

<sup>260</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks at the Civic Center Arena in Pittsburg, October 27<sup>th</sup> 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26674>.

<sup>261</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Inaugural,” January 20<sup>th</sup> 1965, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26985>.

Part of the explanation for Johnson's belief in the sanctity of what America was pursuing in South Vietnam laid in his faith in the wisdom of America's Founding Fathers, that all men were created equal. On March 26<sup>th</sup> 1965, in televised remarks after the announcement of the arrests of members of the Ku Klux Klan, he compared the problem of racism in America to the civil problems in Vietnam. In America, Johnson said they protested against racists while in Vietnam people were waging a similar fight against Communism. They used terrorist methods to achieve their goals. He said: "We will not be intimidated by the terrorists of the Ku Klux Klan any more than we will be intimidated by the terrorists in North Vietnam."<sup>262</sup>

On March 15<sup>th</sup> 1965, in the special message to the Congress titled "The American Promise," Johnson confirmed his belief in the American values of freedom and equality and opposed any system that operated through prejudice. It is clear that Johnson used his personal faith, philosophy and patriotism to deliver an impassioned defense of South Vietnam to the American public.<sup>263</sup>

While the American bombing campaign in the North, code-named Operation Rolling Thunder, was extensive, it did not succeed, but the Johnson administration was still determined to stay in South Vietnam. On April 7<sup>th</sup> 1965, Johnson gave a speech at John Hopkins University "Peace without conquest."<sup>264</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson spoke clearly about the desire of everyone to persuade North Vietnam to talk, instead of war: "They want what their neighbors also desire: food for their hunger, health for their bodies, a chance to learn; progress for their country; and an end to the bondage of material misery. And they would find all these things far more readily in peaceful association with others than in the endless course of battle."<sup>265</sup> Johnson offered a program for Vietnamese development: "The vast Mekong River can provide food and water and power on a scale to dwarf even our own TVA. The wonder of modern medicine can be spread through villages where thousands die every year for lack of care. Schools can be established to train people in the skills that are needed to manage the process of development."<sup>266</sup> Johnson's program related to President Roosevelt's

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<sup>262</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "Televised Remarks announcing the arrest of members of the Ku Klux Klan," <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26836>.

<sup>263</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "The special message to the Congress: The American Promise," March 15<sup>th</sup> 1965, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26805>.

<sup>264</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "Peace without conquest," April 7<sup>th</sup> 1965, John Hopkins University, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26877>.

<sup>265</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "Peace without conquest," April 7<sup>th</sup> 1965. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26877>.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

New Deal in the 1930s. These policy ideas come from the theory of equality. Johnson thought America had a responsibility to share its own wealth with the people in the world: “We should not allow people to go hungry and wear rags while our own warehouses overflow with an abundance of wheat and corn, rice and cotton.”<sup>267</sup> Johnson gave this speech to gain supports for his policy in Vietnam.

Three days after the famous speech at John Hopkins University, Johnson reminded the American youth to join the cause of defending freedom: “In times past America has asked her young to shoulder arms and to fight for freedom on many fields and many forests throughout the world. And I would remind all the world that they never failed.”<sup>268</sup> On May 7<sup>th</sup> 1965, President Johnson called for American military aid for South Vietnam because he feared the increasing attacks from North Vietnam: “When freedom is in danger we must stand up to that danger. When we are attacked we must fight.”<sup>269</sup> He always remembered that a great and powerful nation bore the responsibility to help a weak nation when needed, something he learned from his Christian education: “We are in the rich nation in the world of misery. We are the white nation in a colored world. The treasured values of our civilization tell us it is right—morally right—that we should help others.”<sup>270</sup> He also feared that “the lessons of experience and wisdom tell us that if we fail to help now, then someday the tides of unrest will be surging along our own coasts. In fact, they are already there.”<sup>271</sup> On May 13<sup>th</sup> 1965, Johnson addressed the American duty to protect South Vietnam came out of the goodwill of their nation’s principles, not to invade Vietnam but to fight against Chinese expansionism. He criticized what he saw as the Chinese political scheme to dominate all of Asia: “Communist China apparently desires the war to continue whatever the cost to their allies. Their target is not merely South Vietnam, it is Asia.”<sup>272</sup> Johnson stated that America entered Vietnam in the name of “the moral value of our [American] civilization.”<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> “Remarks at dedication of the Gary Job Corps Center, San Marco, Texas,” April 10<sup>th</sup> 1965, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26884>.

<sup>269</sup> “Special message to the Congress requesting additional appropriations for Military needs in Vietnam,” May 4<sup>th</sup> 1965, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26940>.

<sup>270</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks Broadcast on the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of V-E Day,” May 7<sup>th</sup> 1965, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26947>.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address to Members of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists: The Challenge of Human Need in Viet-Nam,” May 13<sup>th</sup> 1965, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26959>.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

Johnson emphasized again the moral reasons why he was determined to defend the freedom of South Vietnam at the commencement exercises of the National Cathedral School on June 1<sup>st</sup> 1965:

Concerned as I am with the future of freedom of America, concerned as I am with the world that my daughter shall know, I would commit the American nation to face up to its obligation to be with the world's people on their march toward the life that all God's children should know on this earth. This is neither a political commitment nor even an economic commitment that we alone must make. This is a moral commitment that we have made and that we must keep in all that we do.<sup>274</sup>

He stated again the larger American purpose in its domestic and foreign policies, including the American policy towards Vietnam. On July 14<sup>th</sup> 1965, he expressed his commitment in Southeast Asia as the same as previous presidents despite the criticism they faced: "Three Presidents President Eisenhower, President Kennedy and your present president have made a commitment in the name of the people of the United States, and our national honor is at stake in Southeast Asia."<sup>275</sup>

However, the beautiful rhetoric of the American presidents did not have any bearing on the reality of the situation in Vietnam. America and South Vietnam were against the power of Vietnamese collective culture and patriotism, of which there could be no favorable end. The patriotic Communist Ho Chi Minh was directing the Communist forces in Vietnam, and he was strong and determined to fight against any foreign powers for the goals of national independence, unification and Communism. Step-by-step, Johnson was forced to escalate the war to meet his self-defined aims for American foreign policy. Logevall summarized the important events leading up to the American increase in their military involvement in Vietnam: "In late July 1965, following several days of meetings among top civilian and military officials, Johnson approved the immediate deployment of an additional 50,000 U.S. troops and privately agreed to send another 50,000 before the end of the year"<sup>276</sup>

Johnson understood the nature of the war: "It is guided by North Vietnam and spurred on by Communist China."<sup>277</sup> Ho Chi Minh and his Lao Dong Party had

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<sup>274</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks at the Commencement Exercises of the National Cathedral School," June 1<sup>st</sup> 1965, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=27006>.

<sup>275</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association," July 14<sup>th</sup> 1965, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=27082>.

<sup>276</sup> Fredrik Logevall, "Lyndon B. Johnson and Vietnam," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Mar. 2004): 101.

<sup>277</sup> "Toward peace with honor," Press Conference Statement by the President, The White House, July 28, 1965, Box 194, Vietnam Country File, NSF, LBJL.

defeated the French in Dien Bien Phu in 1954. With the material support of China, they continued fighting to defeat the American presence in Vietnam. Johnson said that the target of the war for the North Vietnamese was: “to conquer the South, to defeat American power and to extend the Asiatic domination of Communism.”<sup>278</sup> In fact, Vietnam was prepared for the war against America since 1946. The Second Indochina War (1946-1954) was the resistance war of Vietnam with the support of China against the French with whose support was from America. After France surrendered, Vietnam continued to fight against America in Vietnam for national independence, unification and communism.

President Johnson was foremost preoccupied with the role of Communist China causing a domino effect of Communism spreading throughout Vietnam and then the rest of Asia. He said he was afraid of, “an Asia so threatened by Communist domination that it would imperil the security of the United States itself.”<sup>279</sup> He believed that in the post WWII world, the security of the United States depended not only on the security of its territory but also on the security of its power, influence, and its credibility. Johnson thought that the triumph of Communism in Asia would cancel out American influence in the world: “If we are driven from the fields in Vietnam, then no nation can ever again have the same confidence in American promises, or in American protection.” Johnson considered America as the “guardian of the gate” of the free world.<sup>280</sup> Many world leaders shared in the fear of Chinese Communist expansionism and in the importance of retaining Vietnam through the methods of the Johnson administration.<sup>281</sup> The Prime Minister of Japan Eisaku Sato supported American policy in Asia and feared “the future of the world would be in serious jeopardy” if America lost South Vietnam.<sup>282</sup> President Ferdinand Emmanuel Edralin Marcos Sr. of the Philippines addressed the issue similarly: “It is to the selfish national interest of the Philippines that the United States maintain its presence in Asia. The alternative is very difficult to contemplate.”<sup>283</sup> Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore expressed his approval on television: “I feel the fate of Asia-South and Southeast Asia will be decided in the next few years by what happens out in

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> “Judgments on importance of Vietnam shared by Asian leaders,” Box 197, Vietnam, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., “Prime Minister Sato of Japan reporting on extension trip throughout Southeast Asia,” National Press Club, November 14, 1967.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., “President Marcos of the Philippines,” State of National address, January 27-1967.

Vietnam.”<sup>284</sup> President Park Chung-hee of South Korea confirmed his allegiance to American policy in the region by stating: “All members of the Free World must render appropriate support to the defense of Free Vietnam.”<sup>285</sup> Malaysian Foreign Minister Rahman directly condemned the scheme of Chinese Communist’ expansionism, which he had seen first-hand:

Since early last year, Peking has repeatedly threatened Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore with so called People’s Wars to be launched by local Communist movements against the three countries. We [do] not oppose the Communist system in Mainland China, so long it confines itself within its own borders. But we call upon the People’s Republic of China to keep its hands off our region and to adopt a policy of peaceful co-existence towards its fellow-Asians in Southeast Asia.<sup>286</sup>

The leaders of Thailand, New Zealand, Australian also expressed that they agreed with the American policy of containment of Communism being exercised in Vietnam. On July 7<sup>th</sup> 1966, at London, Prime Minister Harold Holt talked about the danger of the war in South Vietnam for the peace of Asia.<sup>287</sup> On July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1966, Prime Minister Keithe Holyoake of New Zealand expressed the opinion against Communist aggression in South Vietnam.<sup>288</sup> On November 14<sup>th</sup> 1967, Government of Thailand announced the country would send an additional 10000 troops to South Vietnam.<sup>289</sup>

Asian Governments throughout the Southeastern region in the 1960’s confirmed strongly their support of the U.S. military pressure in Asia to prevent the expansionism of Chinese Communists.

Additionally, the U.S. was determined to stay in Vietnam because of the lessons of appeasement it had learned from the past with Hitler, especially the Munich Agreement, which had given territorial concessions to the dictator in the hope of peace: “We did not choose to be the guardians at the gate, but there is no one else. Nor would surrender in Vietnam will bring peace. We learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite of aggression.”<sup>290</sup> Johnson remembered that he had inherited those obligations from Kennedy. He was preoccupied with, “how to keep an

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid., “Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore,” television interview, July 5<sup>th</sup> 1967.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., “President Park of Korea,” State of the Nation address, January 18<sup>th</sup> 1966.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., “Malaysian Foreign Minister Rahman,” Foreign Correspondent’s Association, June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1966.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., “Prime Minister Holt of Australia; London, July 7, 1966.”

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., “Prime Minister Holyoake of New Zealand, July 23, 1966”

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., “Announcement of Government of Thailand in connection with commitment of an additional 10000 troops to South Vietnam, November 14<sup>th</sup> 1967.

<sup>290</sup> “Toward peace with honor,” Press Conference Statement by the President, The White House, July 28, 1965, Box 194, Vietnam Country File, NSF, LBJL, Austin-Texas-U.S.

agreement that I did not initiate. I inherited it but an agreement to help a small nation remain independent, free of aggression the nation of South Vietnam.”<sup>291</sup>

From 1965 to 1967, Johnson called many times for negotiations but Hanoi refused because American power in South Vietnam was still very strong.<sup>292</sup> Hanoi believed that if North Vietnam went to the talks, it would have to accept the conditions of the U.S. and could lose South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh government was also very determined to fight against the U.S. and South Vietnam until the end because they feared that if Hanoi lost South Vietnam to America, America would invade the North to attack Communist China:

Thoroughly in the whole American foreign policy in this region was anti-China ideology. The United States did not abandon megalomania to return this continent [Asia], therefore the U.S. clinging to Southeast Asia was a critical stage in the strategy of U.S. aggression toward the Far East. On the other hand, the U.S. considered China was the source of revolutionary movements in this area. In order to suppress the revolutionary movements, the U.S. wanted China not to interfere in Southeast Asia. As a result, since Kennedy took office, the U.S. plotted against China in all areas, military, political, and economically.<sup>293</sup>

In fact, the document from the Vietnam National Archive in Ho Chi Minh City tells that South Vietnam wanted to secretly prepare for attacking the North when it was strong enough.<sup>294</sup> Ho Chi Minh's Government had a strong system of spies, for example Pham Xuan An.<sup>295</sup> Hanoi had reason to fear that South Vietnam would ask America to support them to attack North Vietnam in the future. A North Vietnamese document states their concern that the ideological battle the U.S. was fighting against Communism would not cease with Vietnam:

The U.S. and other imperialist countries were united in the struggle against Communism, anti-China and anti-North Vietnam, suppressing the national liberation movements, attracting patriotic countries into the Western orbit and protecting the system of capitalism in Southeast Asia. Especially with the

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<sup>291</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks to International Platform Association Upon Receiving the Association’s Annual Award,” August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1965, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=27126>.

<sup>292</sup> “Negotiations book White House,” Box 139, Vietnam, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>293</sup> Department of Western Europe and The U.S., Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Mỹ và khu vực Đông Nam Á” [The U.S. and Southeast Asia], File: The reports of Department of Foreign Affairs of Central Committee of Vietnamese Communist Party, Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnamese Embassy in Russia about American political situations, American policies and American foreign relations 1961-1965; 1968-1970; 1973, File: Department of Central Committee of Vietnam Communist Party, Archival of Central Committee of Vietnam Communist Party, Hanoi, Vietnam.

<sup>294</sup> File: the positions of South Vietnam on Geneva Accord, July 1965, File: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of South Vietnam, File: Prime Minister, Vietnam National Archive III.

<sup>295</sup> Thomas A. Bass, *The spy who loved us: the Vietnam War and Pham Xuan An's dangerous game* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009).

Vietnam problem, they were unanimously against the proper implementation of the Geneva Treaty, against the peaceful unification of Vietnam.<sup>296</sup> North Vietnam understood the relevance of the domino theory in American policy during the Vietnam War.

In the view of the North Vietnamese government, the main target of the U.S. was to make Southeast Asia become a bastion from which to attack Chinese Communists.<sup>297</sup> The North Vietnamese had analyzed that the U.S. policies against China were restrained at that time because China was on the rise, but foresaw that the main characteristic of the U.S. policy in Asia was to prevent the influence of Chinese Communists in the areas.<sup>298</sup>

Johnson was also very determined to fight against North Vietnam and protect South Vietnam as an independent country for American moral values along with the country's ideological fight against Communism. As the number of American soldiers and casualties increased in South Vietnam, Johnson's strategic foreign policy would sound heartless if it wasn't linked with the greater American values of freedom, liberty and the responsibilities of the powerful. On January 12<sup>th</sup> 1966, he gave his State of the Union speech: "Tonight, as so many nights before, the American Nation is asked to sacrifice the blood of its children and the fruits of its labor for the love of its freedom."<sup>299</sup> On April 21<sup>st</sup> 1966, Johnson again expressed his gratitude to the young American soldiers in Vietnam: "How brave the young are, and how great is our debt to them, and how endless is the sacrifice that we call upon them to make for us."<sup>300</sup> On August 14<sup>th</sup> 1966, he declared his pride at what American youth was doing for the world: "They know why they are there. They know that more than just the future of a small country is being determined now by their devotion. They know that on their sacrifice the peace of Southeast Asia-and indeed the security of much of the world will be built."<sup>301</sup> Honoring the commitments that America had made to South Vietnam, its allies and as the leader of the democratic world against Communism, Johnson was

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<sup>296</sup> Department of Western Europe and The U.S., Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Mỹ và khu vực Đông Nam Á" [The U.S. and Southeast Asia], (my own translation).

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "The annual message to the congress of the State of the Union," January 12<sup>th</sup> 1966, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=28015>.

<sup>300</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks upon presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumous) to the Father of Milton L. Olive III," April 21<sup>st</sup> 1966, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=27552>.

<sup>301</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks to the Press at the LBJ ranch following a report on Vietnam by General Westmoreland," August 14<sup>th</sup> 1966, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=27774>.



able to build support for the Vietnam War. More difficult however, was his task of convincing the Americans sacrificing their lives or the lives of their children.

Since Johnson had escalated the war in Vietnam with a large numbers of troops, and as more American boys were dying on foreign soil, anti-war movements and dissidence increased.<sup>302</sup> More and more Americans were becoming skeptical and raised the question, ‘why Vietnam?’ President Johnson understood the difficulty of the situation, he said: “A lot of people are asking tonight, ‘Why are we in Vietnam?’”<sup>303</sup> He understood the pain of Americans because they were losing not only billions of dollars but also because “their sons and their brothers and their fathers are dying out there. Others are suffering wounds that they will carry the rests of their lives.”<sup>304</sup> He gave many reasons to the difficult question of Vietnam: “We have a treaty there that we must honor. We signed a contract that we must observe. We want to protect this little nation, South Vietnam, from being gobbled up by the Communists. And we need to prevent disorder in Vietnam from spilling over into all of Asia.”<sup>305</sup> Johnson understood that those reasons could not convince the American people why their boys had to die in a foreign country: “But those answers, as valid as they are, do not really adequately tell a mother or a wife why her son or her husband has gone and given his life on the soil of Vietnam.”<sup>306</sup>

Johnson pointed out the most important reason that America was very determined to stay in Vietnam was the fear of America itself being attacked: “It is the answer General Eisenhower gave every young captain, I think that sheds light on the conflict in Vietnam tonight. If we didn’t, someone like us would have to fight for us some other day closer to home or maybe here at home, itself.”<sup>307</sup> Johnson condemned the Communists for aggressiveness and violence threatening the peace of the world: “That is true as long as men in this world refuse to live in peace. That is true as long as they try to make might right. That is true as long as they try by force to take over little countries, small countries. That is true as long as violence is their way of imposing their will on others.”<sup>308</sup> Then he reminded the soldiers of the intergenerational duty

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<sup>302</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks at a Groundbreaking Ceremony for an Industrial Site in Pryor, Oklahoma,” August 26<sup>th</sup> 1966, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=27811>.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

Americans had to stop aggressors, not only to protect the peace of the world but also to protect American civilization: “Someone is going to have to convince them they are wrong. And if we don’t – the next generation will. I do not know that if we win in Vietnam there will never be another Communist effort to gobble up another free country. But I do know that if we fail in Vietnam, they will have a good precedent for trying to gobble up a lot more territory.”<sup>309</sup> Johnson described the threat of Communist expansion as the main reason why “we are in Vietnam tonight... Our men are out there fighting because, as General Eisenhower said, we hope others after us will not have to do our fighting for us”<sup>310</sup> President Johnson took pride in the patriotism showed by American soldiers in Vietnam, and praised their farsighted vision. On October 13<sup>th</sup> 1966, he stated: “They do not shrink from their responsibility because they knew that their country keeps their promises. And I am proud to tell you, as their Commander in Chief, that there never was a patriotic, able or better equipped man who put on the uniform than the American servicemen in Vietnam.”<sup>311</sup> On October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1966, Johnson reassured American people and the U.S. allies about the good will in the purpose of the war in Vietnam: “We shall fight for freedom in Vietnam – knowing that as we do, we fight not just for freedom and liberty in Vietnam, but we fight for Australia, in New Zealand, in Hawaii, in the United States of America, and freedom and liberty whenever men cherish it.”<sup>312</sup>

On October 26<sup>th</sup> 1966, President Johnson visited Cam Ranh in South Vietnam. Johnson was eager to meet with the members of Armed Forces. He used the occasion to talk about the moral mission of the American soldiers in Vietnam: “You know what you are fighting against a vicious and illegal aggression across this little nation’s frontier. You know what you are fighting for: to give Vietnamese people a chance to build the kind of nation that they want, free from terror, free from intimidation, free from fear.”<sup>313</sup> Johnson was also conscious about the anti-war movement and critical voices coming from inside his nation, but he was determined to fight in South Vietnam

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks in the Rodney Square, Wilmington, Delaware,” October 13<sup>th</sup> 1966, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=27921>.

<sup>312</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks at Townsville Upon departing from Australia,” October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1966, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=27956>.

<sup>313</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks to the members of Armed Forces at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam,” October 26<sup>th</sup> 1966, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=27962>.

because “freedom and the Nation’s security are in danger.”<sup>314</sup> Johnson tried to convey that the ideals of freedom and the moral values of American civilization were the purpose of the war in Vietnam. He reassured both the troops and the public of that fact as often as he could, stating that these very principles were at stake. He quoted the letter of a widow of fallen soldier who had died in Vietnam, which read: “At least the soldier knows why he is here, even me we are here because we actually believe that our country is good enough to fight for, and even if necessary, die for.”<sup>315</sup> Since December 1965, Johnson had stepped up his campaign to explain why they were determined to stay in Vietnam.

However, 1965 was a time when the military situation of the U.S. forces in Vietnam was worse. On December 18<sup>th</sup> 1965, the U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara told with President Johnson: “the military solution to the problem is not certain.”<sup>316</sup> Johnson asked: “You mean that no matter what we do in the military field, you think there is no sure victory.” McNamara replied: “That’s right.”<sup>317</sup> In December 1965, Johnson chose Walt Rostow as his National Security Adviser. Walt Rostow described as “the most hawkish of all civilians in the administration [...] ensured that Johnson would continue to think of the Vietnam War as a prizefight that could be won if he slugged his opponent with sufficient force then handed him a towel to throw in.”<sup>318</sup>

Johnson opened a campaign code named PINTA to search for peace in Vietnam in the winter of 1965-1966 but the peace initiative failed. Both Hanoi and Washington were determined to protect their own positions in the war. From 1965 to 1968, there were a lot of peace initiatives for Vietnam but none achieved any result because both sides were ready to “pay any price” for ultimate triumph.<sup>319</sup> After the initiatives failed, “President Johnson decided to use greater force” in mid-January 1967.<sup>320</sup> *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War* explains that: “The President’s decision to use greater force may also have been a response to increasing public support for stronger

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Johnson quoted from the letter of a widow of Vietnam Veteran in Johnson’s Remark: Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks at a Reception for a group of Veterans of the War in Vietnam,” December 15<sup>th</sup> 1966, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=28066>.

<sup>316</sup> Typed Transcript, December 18<sup>th</sup> 1965, Johnson Papers, Meeting Notes File, Box 2. Quoted in Lloyd C. Gardner, *Pay any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, 1995), 278.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Kissinger: 1923-1968: the Idealist* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), clxxxi

<sup>319</sup> Quoted in Lloyd C. Gardner, *Pay any Price*.

<sup>320</sup> *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships*, Part IV, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 557.

military action and to the need to achieve greater progress before the 1968 Presidential and Congressional campaign.”<sup>321</sup> On March 15<sup>th</sup> 1967, Johnson expressed his continuing determination to stay in Vietnam: “This generation of Americans is making its imprint on history. It is making it in the fierce hills and the sweltering jungles of Vietnam.”<sup>322</sup> He assured the American public of the benefits of staying the course in Vietnam, even as the war dragged on and with greater expense, stating:

If we were prepared to stay the course in Vietnam, we could help to lay the cornerstone for a diverse and independent Asia, full of promise and resolute in the course of peaceful economic development for her long-suffering peoples. But if we faltered, the forces of chaos would scent victory and decades of strife and aggression would stretch endlessly before us. The choice was clear. We would stay the course. And we will stay the course. We must not we shall not we will not fail.<sup>323</sup>

Washington seriously wanted to negotiate with North Vietnam to end the war and keep South Vietnam independent from Communism and suspend hostilities. In the summer of 1967, Johnson administration was very skeptical about “an overwhelming military victory” for the U.S: “If we are winning, we are not winning quickly. It has become a question of the will to persist on either side rather than of the attainment of an overwhelming military victory.”<sup>324</sup>

The *Negotiations Book*, written in 1968 by U.S. national security advisor Walt Whitman Rostow, describes the peace initiatives put forth for a settlement in Vietnam.<sup>325</sup> However, it was not until 1968 that Washington seriously considered resorting to peace talks as a solution to the Vietnam problem. On August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1965, Executive Secretary of Department of State Benjamin H. Read sent U.S. National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy the files on negotiating initiatives on Vietnam.<sup>326</sup> According to George Herring, “the Pentagon study open with the 1964-1965 missions of Canadian diplomat J. Blair Seaborn to Hanoi, the first American attempt to communicate with North Vietnam through a third party.”<sup>327</sup> From June 1964 to June 1965, Seaborn came to Hanoi five times to talk with Hanoi’s leaders.<sup>328</sup> In the

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “The Speech to the Tennessee Legislature,” March 15<sup>th</sup> 1967. Quoted in *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 607.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Johnson Library, Warnke Papers, McNaughton Files, “6/8/67 - This paper to be seen by McNaughton only.” *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 705.

<sup>325</sup> Rostow, *The Negotiations Book*, Vietnam File, NSF, Box 139, LBJL.

<sup>326</sup> *Negotiating initiatives on Vietnam*, August 1965, Vietnam File, NSF, Box 197, LBJL.

<sup>327</sup> Herring, *The secret diplomacy of the Vietnam War*, 4-5.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 5.

conversation with Seaborn in June 1964, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong made clear that Hanoi did not want to shut the door to negotiations:

We want national reunification through a peaceful solution, without external pressure. We want negotiations at a round table. They must be sincere in the negotiations. We are in no hurry. We are willing to talk, but we will wait till South Vietnam is ready. I see that is difficult to accept for America. I see America will continue to support South Vietnam. America will send more military men. I feel hurt when I see the war will keep happening and escalating. Vietnamese people will continue to fight and will certainly win.<sup>329</sup>

It seemed clear that Hanoi “regarded negotiations primarily as a means of offering the United States a face-saving exit from Vietnam.”<sup>330</sup> In Hanoi’s view, South Vietnam belonged to Vietnam, and was not a country independent from the North. Prime Minister Pham Van Dong was very confident that all Vietnamese people from the North to the South would fight against America until they would ultimately win. He told with Seaborn that: “You are a Westerner, you cannot understand the Vietnamese patriotic power when the Vietnamese people are determined to fight for national independence and freedom. The resistance struggle of the Vietnamese people in South Vietnam is amazing, beyond imagination. They even surprised us.”<sup>331</sup> The Prime Minister warned: “If the U.S. escalates the war in South Vietnam, it will be a very cruel war until the end and the U.S. can never win at any price.”<sup>332</sup> The North Vietnamese position was articulated clearly by Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, and was relayed back to the American leaders, convincing them of the need to continue fighting.

Shortly afterwards, the Gulf of Tonkin incidents occurred (August 1964) resulting in “the first American strikes against North Vietnam,” which made Hanoi leaders angry.<sup>333</sup> In his second visit to Hanoi, on August 13th, Seaborn met Pham Van Dong to deliver a message from the United States. However, Pham Van Dong was so angry about the new American policies that Seaborn had to say: “Mr. Prime Minister, can I use the old saying about not shooting the messenger.”<sup>334</sup> Pham Van Dong criticized the American policies of intervention in Vietnam as excessive: “We tried our

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<sup>329</sup> Quoted in Luu Van Loi-Nguyen Anh Vu, *The secret contacts between Vietnam and the U.S. before Paris peace talks*, 22 (my own translation).

<sup>330</sup> Herring, *The secret diplomacy of the Vietnam War*, 5.

<sup>331</sup> Quoted in Luu Van Loi- Nguyen Anh Vu, *The secret contacts between Vietnam and the U.S. before Paris peace talks*, 23 (my own translation).

<sup>332</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>333</sup> Quoted in Herring, *The secret diplomacy of the Vietnam War*, 5.

<sup>334</sup> Quoted in Luu Van Loi-Nguyen Anh Vu, *The secret contacts between Vietnam and the U.S. before Paris peace talks*, 29.

best to keep peace, but the United States did not approve the Geneva accords and invaded South Vietnam. Now the United States is in stalemate, and wants to expand the war in the North Vietnam. That is miscalculation. If American wants a war, we have to defend ourselves. If the war happens, the world will support us because our struggle is the patriotic war.”<sup>335</sup> The Prime Minister said that America had made a miscalculation: “If the USA is thinking of a new Korean war it should realize that the conditions are not the same [...] If the war comes to North Vietnam, it will come to the whole of Southeast Asia, with unforeseeable consequences.”<sup>336</sup> According to George Herring, “as much as peace terms were discussed with Seaborn, it is evident that the two sides were far apart from the outset.”<sup>337</sup> Seaborn’s missions to Hanoi become “an additional reason, if one were needed, for subsequent American escalation of the war.”<sup>338</sup> The particular American probe for peace in Vietnam had ended almost before it began.

Nevertheless, Johnson decided to pursue other channels to find a peaceful settlement to the escalating hostilities in Vietnam. In August 1964, Washington asked the United Nations Security Council to directly search for peace possibilities in Vietnam but “North Vietnam replied on August 19<sup>th</sup> that the question did not lie within the competence of the Security Council and that any decision reached on the issue would be considered null and void by North Vietnamese authorities.”<sup>339</sup>

Following this attempt, on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1965, the Seventeen Non-Aligned nations were the next international coalition to call for a peaceful solution in Vietnam. On April 7<sup>th</sup> 1965 at Johns Hopkins University, Johnson signaled that Washington wanted to talk with North Vietnam.<sup>340</sup> The following day, on April 8<sup>th</sup> 1965, he replied to the Seventeen Non-Aligned nations that: “when conditions have been created in which the people of South Vietnam can determine their own future free from external interference, the United States will be ready and eager to withdraw its forces from South Vietnam.”<sup>341</sup> On April 19<sup>th</sup> 1965, Hanoi sent its refusal to talk and criticized the Washington scheme as a “smokescreen to cover up the US imperialists’ military

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<sup>335</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>337</sup> Herring, *The secret diplomacy of the Vietnam War*, 5.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>339</sup> *Negotiating initiatives on Vietnam* (1965), Box 197, Vietnam, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*

adventures in Vietnam.”<sup>342</sup> The UN Secretary General U Thant continued to make an effort searching for peace in Vietnam throughout April 1965, indicating “his readiness to visit certain capitals, including Hanoi and Peking, to discuss the prospects for a peaceful settlement in Vietnam.”<sup>343</sup> Although Washington supported U Thant’s efforts, North Vietnam did not welcome the United Nation’s involvement in Vietnam. “On April 1<sup>st</sup>: *Peking’s People’s Daily* said that if U Thant were undertaking the trip in his capacity as Secretary General, ‘we should like to tell him in all seriousness to spare himself this trouble’ since ‘the Vietnam question has nothing to do with the United Nations.’”<sup>344</sup> Prime Minister Pham Van Dong said that North Vietnam was not ready to let the UN intervene in Vietnam on April 8th 1965.<sup>345</sup>

In May 1965, Washington “suspended its bombing operations against North Vietnam for five days and 20 hours” and called for talks with North Vietnam.<sup>346</sup> However the message that the cessation of hostilities was supposed to send was not well received in North Vietnam:

On May 18<sup>th</sup> 1965 Hanoi Radio broadcast a North Vietnam Foreign Ministry statement which called the bombing pause a ‘trick’ meant ‘to cover up the United States extremely dangerous acts of intensifying the war in Vietnam... and to deceive world public opinion.’<sup>347</sup>

The negotiation positions of the U.S. and North Vietnam were too far apart for a short halt of artillery attacks to bring about much change. America did not accept North Vietnam’s conditions for a talk and prepared for the war escalation. At the same time, North Vietnam was determined to fight against America until the ultimate victory and was only willing to talk after the American “aggressive will” had been defeated.<sup>348</sup>

The U.S. was determined to protect South Vietnam as an independent country and to avoid a third world war and to protect American moral values. On September 29<sup>th</sup> 1967, in a speech in San Antonio, President Johnson said that he feared that a third world war might happen if Southeast Asia fell to the Communists: “Your American President cannot tell you with certainty that a Southeast Asia dominated by

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> “Nghị Quyết 12 của ban chấp hành Trung Ương Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam” [The Resolution of 12<sup>th</sup> Plenum of Politburo of Lao Dong Party], 21<sup>st</sup> -27<sup>th</sup> December 1965 (my own translation), [http://dangcongsan.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co\\_id=30577&cn\\_id=175468](http://dangcongsan.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co_id=30577&cn_id=175468).

Communist power would bring a third world war much closer to terrible reality. One could hope that this would not be so.”<sup>349</sup> Johnson emphasized that: “in this tragic century”, Americans “are greatly reducing the chances of a much larger war perhaps a nuclear war.”<sup>350</sup> The President was confident that what he was doing in Vietnam as a noble cause for the future: “I would rather stand in Vietnam in our time, and by meeting this danger now and facing up to it, thereby reduce the danger for our children and for our grandchildren.”<sup>351</sup> He stood by these words until 1968 and was determined to stay in South Vietnam and could not accept the conditions of North Vietnam to talk. North Vietnam stated its Four Points for Settlement in South Vietnam in 1965, of which the U.S. could not accept. This was due to point number three, the acceptance of which they felt “would be tantamount to the abandonment of the basic objective of our policy in Vietnam—the freedom of South Vietnam from attack and the right for South Vietnam to decide its political future.”<sup>352</sup> Point number 3 of Vietnam’s four points demands that “the internal affairs of South Vietnam must be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves, in accordance with the program of the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation, without any foreign interference.”<sup>353</sup> America did not accept it because the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation was a communist organization. This gives some insight into why all peace initiatives from 1965 to 1968 failed.

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<sup>349</sup> President Johnson, “San Antonio,” September 29<sup>th</sup> 1967, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28460>.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> State Department, “Why not negotiation?” in “Briefing Book on Vietnam”, February 1968, Box 263, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.



## CHAPTER 4. THE AMERICAN ASSESSMENT OF NORTH VIETNAM'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS NEGOTIATIONS

### 4.1 Hanoi's Position

Since 1954, America had supported South Vietnam as an independent country. After ten years of involvement in Vietnam, America realized it was going to be very tough to outright win in Vietnam. In 1964, the U.S. began searching for peace in Vietnam to achieve the goals there without a military victory. In August 1965, the U.S. Department of State sent a file of negotiating initiatives on Vietnam to National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy.<sup>354</sup> America assessed the attitudes toward starting negotiations of Hanoi, the National Liberation Front, the Soviet Union and China. They found “the overriding goal of the DRV leaders remains the one which first led them to take up arms against the French almost three decades ago that of bringing all Vietnam under their control.” And that was fighting against the perceived imperialists and to reunite all of Vietnam: This report shows that the Americans had insight into the inner psychology of the DRV leaders. Furthermore, “the key DRV leaders” such as President Ho Chi Minh, General Vo Nguyen Giap had “longstanding bonds with the USSR,” which shaped their alliances and ideology. The report also demonstrated an understanding of the balance between Hanoi and Beijing.<sup>355</sup>

Although China was the largest supporter of Hanoi in the war, the DRV leaders felt “the traditional Vietnamese resentment of Chinese domination.” America demonstrated its understanding that Hanoi was the decision maker in Hanoi—with Beijing being an ally in the war: “Hanoi is playing its own game and not that of the Chinese.”<sup>356</sup> Logically, America thought that North Vietnam might want to talk before the war escalated because it did not want to deepen its dependence on Chinese support: “if it appears that the intensity of the conflict will increase, and since the question of additional Chinese assistance undoubtedly will arise, the DRV may be even more receptive to counter-proposals at the present time, before the war escalates

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<sup>354</sup> Department of State Executive Secretariat, From Benjamin H. Read Executive Secretary for Mr. McGeorge Bundy The White House, “Negotiating initiatives on Vietnam,” August 1965, Box 197, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>355</sup> “*Hanoi position on Vietnam*,” in “Negotiating initiatives on Vietnam,” Box 197, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

much further.” America wished to talk with Hanoi because it could potentially prevent the Chinese Communist’s expansion in Southeast Asia: “If a peaceful solution could be found without Chinese participation or involvement, this would strain the DRV relations with Communist China for years to come. The spread of Chinese influence in Southeast Asia would be slowed considerably and the prospect of a Chinese Communist inspired takeover in the area would become more remote.” This indicates that the U.S. policy that was being formed towards Vietnam was part of the U.S. policy towards China. The report concluded that America thought Hanoi had signaled its willingness to hold discussions with the U.S. However, Hanoi was against holding public talks with the U.S. “for fear of exhibiting weakness.” The U.S. was not sure about Hanoi’s preconditions for talks.<sup>357</sup>

The report demonstrated that Washington understood that the most important person in Vietnam was President Ho Chi Minh: “President of the DRV and the Chairman of Dang Lao Dong (DLD, Worker Party), Ho Chi Minh has been the dominant figure of Worker Party since the formation of the DRV after World War II.”<sup>358</sup> This was not going to change in the near future, for although he was old, he remained the most powerful man in Vietnam: “For some years it has been predicted that the 74 year-old will relinquish his active leadership to younger officials of the DRV, but there is no indication thus far that he has done so.” Similarly Washington had gauged the true relationship between Ho Chi Minh and China and the Soviet Union in the Sino-Soviet split. Ho Chi Minh had tried to keep his country independent and objective in the split between the two Socialist Powers: “Ho has tried to steer an independent course and to remain on the best possible terms with both Chinese Communists and the Soviets.” He was in support of the strategy China employed, to pay any price to win the war in Vietnam rather than pursue a policy of détente like the Soviet Union. However, Ho Chi Minh also needed the Soviet Union to stand by Vietnam because they feared Chinese domination: “as a Vietnamese nationalist he is worried about Chinese domination and regards Soviet support both as beneficial to the DRV and as insurance against excessive Chinese influence.”<sup>359</sup> It is clear that Washington understood the biographical role important events had played in Ho Chi Minh’s life and in his policy. As a young man, he had been a patriot; then becoming a

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<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> “Democratic Republic of Vietnam,” Ho Chi Minh, CIA’s document, 1967, Box 86, Vietnam, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

patriotic Communist, entailing his support for international Communism. Ho Chi Minh had widely traveled Europe, Africa and America, and lived in London, Paris, Moscow and China:

Ho Chi Minh was the youngest son of minor government official who was dismissed from his post in 1910 for revolutionary activities. The young Ho, reportedly a superior student, attended Quoc Hoc School in Hue, and in 1910-1911, already a rebel against French colonialism, left Saigon as a cabin boy in French merchant ship.<sup>360</sup>

This document shows that Ho Chi Minh belonged to the Vietnamese group fighting against French colonialists and for patriotism and communism.

America had gathered that Ho Chi Minh was a patriotic communist, but questioned (or rejected) the notion that he was patriot first, and a communist second. A CIA document pointed out: “The widely held view of President Ho Chi Minh as primarily a nationalist leader, whose Communism is secondary, is not shared by Ho Chi Minh himself. For more than 50 years—Ho will be 77 on May 19—he has never disguised his over-riding belief in Communism as a philosophy and a doctrine.”<sup>361</sup> A Ho Chi Minh speech was quoted in the CIA file which sought to settle the controversy over his political allegiances:

In the beginning it was patriotism and not Communism which induced me to believe in Lenin and the Third International. But little by little, progressive step-by-step in the course of the struggle and combining theoretical studies of Marxism-Leninism with practical activities, I came to realize that Socialism and Communism alone are capable of emancipating workers and downtrodden people all over the world.<sup>362</sup>

Beyond Ho’s personality evaluation, the report showed that Washington also had no illusions about Hanoi’s strategy of fighting a long war until the Americans gave up their position in Vietnam, stating: “The Vietnamese still appear convinced that if they sustain the struggle they will in the long run prevail.”<sup>363</sup> American decision-makers had been informed that continuing the U.S. bombardment did not change Hanoi’s determination in their struggle: “A review of all available evidence strongly suggests that the pressures applied to North Vietnam thus far have not changed Hanoi’s determination to prosecute the war in South Vietnam.”<sup>364</sup> Hanoi’s determination to

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<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> “Ho Chi Minh: A Nationalist or Communist,” Box 86, Vietnam, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> “Intelligence Memorandum: Hanoi’s View of the War,” December 14<sup>th</sup> 1965, Box 86, Vietnam, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

wait it out was also strategically clear: “Hanoi apparently calculated that it can support sufficient forces in South Vietnam, and endure air attacks in North Vietnam, long enough to test the U.S. resolve to fight a bitter, unpopular and inconclusive war in the inhospitable terrain.”<sup>365</sup>

The balance of power between China, North Vietnam and the USSR was a question of great importance to American policy makers, which explains why their reporting goes into detail on the relationship between all three. The relationship between Hanoi and the Soviet Union stood to show that Hanoi received support from the Soviet Union but Hanoi did not faithfully believe in the Soviet Union’s leaders because, “the Soviets are still on good terms with the West; they show signs of preferring a negotiated settlement to the risks of the local war.”<sup>366</sup> The Soviet strategy in ending the war was also similar to the Americans and was deemed not in the best interest of a united Vietnam. The investigation also showed the relationship between Hanoi and China:

While the Chinese are a powerful ally at this moment and their views are given considerable weight in Hanoi, these views do not outweigh all others. If the North Vietnamese decide on other grounds to fight on, they can count on Chinese support. If the other factors seem to them of greater weight, the Chinese would have to accept Hanoi’s decision or increase the risk of a war with the U.S. from which the USSR would almost certainly abstain.<sup>367</sup>

## **4.2 National Front for Liberation of South Vietnam**

American government documents show that the U.S. understood the nature of the NFLSV: “The National Front for liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSV) is ostensibly a democratic and independent organization. In reality, it was established and receives its overall guidance from North Vietnam.”<sup>368</sup> In order to gain the hearts and minds of all people regardless of “social, ethnic, religious and professional group,” the DRV leaders “have set out in the Front’s name a program of broad political and economic objectives which can be accepted by the majority of the people in the South.”<sup>369</sup> The most important goal of the NFLSV was to become the only official representative for Vietnamese people in South Vietnam. The NFLSV had offices in many countries, including Cuba (1962), Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Algeria, Indonesia, and the

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> “The organization, activities, and objectives of the Communist Front in the South Vietnam,” Intelligence memorandum, Central intelligence agency, Directorate of Intelligence, September 26<sup>th</sup> 1966. Box 157, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

United Arab Emirates (mid 1964), China (September 1964), the Soviet Union (April 1965), Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania (late 1965) and North Korea (1966).<sup>370</sup> The NFLSV argued that they must have an official position in negotiations for ending the war: “In a major policy statement of March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1965, the Front asserted for the first time that it must have ‘decisive voice in any negotiations’ to end the Vietnam War.”<sup>371</sup> The opinion of the NFLSV was that: “negotiations must be based on the principles of neutrality and independence for South Vietnam and the ultimate withdrawal of United States military forces.”<sup>372</sup>

### **4.3 The Chinese Communist Position on Vietnam**

America understood the goals of Communist China in Vietnam. The first was to destroy the power of the West specifically the United States in Southeast Asia. The second was to increase the influence of China in this area. Washington considered that “Peking sees the Vietnam struggle as an opportunity to demonstrate the correctness of its claim that the United States is a paper tiger.” It feared “a major international war” could happen when the Chinese government called for an international movement for a “war of liberation.” Washington saw the Chinese as a very dangerous factor if they chose to support violence for a “Communist takeover of South Vietnam” to “vindicate Peking’s ideological commitment to armed struggle as the correct path to revolution, strengthen its hand in the Sino-Soviet dispute, and enhance Peking’s international prestige.” After the United States began its bombardment of North Vietnam, “the Chinese have become convinced that one such risk is that they might be brought under direct U.S. bombardment.” Therefore, the Communist Chinese leaders attacked the U.S. peace initiatives as “a plot” and China would increase its involvement in Vietnam to “minimize the risk of such an attack” from the U.S.<sup>373</sup> Vietnam had become a place to test the willpower of the U.S. and China. Hanoi wanted to win the war against the U.S. and South Vietnam and to unify whole Vietnam under Hanoi control. Hanoi was on the same line with China but was always suspicious of Chinese expansionism.

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> “NFLSV position on negotiations,” Box 197, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>373</sup> “Chinese position on Vietnam,” Box 197, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

#### **4.4 The Soviet Position on Vietnam**

Although Moscow was far removed from Vietnam, it was interested in Vietnam as “an increasingly important foreign policy area vis-à-vis its relations with the Communist and non-Communist worlds.” Washington understood the reason the Russians had “re-entered” Vietnam after February 1964. They hoped to enhance the Soviet Union’s prestige in “the Communist world” in the atmosphere of post-Sino-Soviet split and “in anticipation of a Vietnamese Communist victory, for which they would hope to claim some credit.” The report also showed that Moscow had supported negotiations between Washington and Hanoi to end the war earlier because the Soviets did neither desired a new conflict between Washington and Moscow nor the increase of Chinese influence on Hanoi. Nonetheless, the Soviet leaders had always supported Hanoi’s decisions. Moscow was playing a quiet game by supporting the DRV’s official negotiating position and providing economic aid to the DRV, “in order to preserve their credit with the North Vietnamese, to maintain some influence over the developing situation in the area vis-à-vis the Chinese, to maintain their ideological position in support of national liberation movements, and to act as deterrent to further the U.S. moves against the DRV.”<sup>374</sup>

Altogether, this shows that American policy makers understood that the DRV leaders were hard at work keeping a balance in the Sino-Soviet split, in order to best gain the support of both powers for their war of liberation. China and the Soviet Union were competing with each other to “preserve their credit with the North Vietnamese” so that North Vietnam was able to benefit from the split between two countries and receive more aid to fight against the U.S. and South Vietnam.<sup>375</sup>

#### **4.5 The UN and the War in Vietnam**

After the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964, the U.S. “raised” the Vietnam problem in the Security Council of the United Nations. Thereafter, the President of the Security Council wanted Hanoi and Washington to meet and solve the problem, “either through participation in the Security Council discussions or by other means.” On August 12<sup>th</sup> 1965, North Vietnam received the message from the Chinese Foreign Minister that “the United Nations had no right” to interfere with the Vietnam problem.

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<sup>374</sup> “Soviet position on Vietnam,” Box 197, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>375</sup> Quoted in Ibid.

Following this, on August 19<sup>th</sup> 1965, North Vietnam stated that “the war in Vietnam does not lie within the competence of the Security Council and that any Security Council decision would be considered null and void by North Vietnam.”<sup>376</sup>

On March 31<sup>st</sup> 1965, U Thant had called all parties in Vietnam to temporarily stop the fighting for three months to negotiate a peaceful solution. The Secretary General fulfilled one of their preconditions by supporting the NFLSV as an independent party in the peace talks. His peace proposal for Vietnam was also supported by Moscow, although, “they did not, however, make their endorsement public.”<sup>377</sup> This meant that although the Soviet Union always supported talks between Washington and Hanoi, they desired not to come into direct conflict with Hanoi over the negotiations initiatives. Moscow respected Hanoi’s decision not to lose their credit with the North Vietnamese. On April 8<sup>th</sup> 1965, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong responded negatively: “any approach tending to secure UN intervention in the Vietnam situation is... not appropriate.”<sup>378</sup> On April 12<sup>th</sup> 1965, Beijing expressed that “the Vietnam question has nothing to do with the UN” and that they did not welcome the Secretary’s plan of trip to Beijing to discuss the Vietnam problem.<sup>379</sup> The firm attitude against the negotiating initiatives of Hanoi and Beijing made the U.S. more determined in their strategy to win the war militarily in Vietnam. The U.S. continued to escalate hostilities in Vietnam, with such new solutions as expending “control North Vietnam infiltration through Laos” and “cessation or reduction in Viet Cong military activity near South Vietnam” and increasing military aid for South Vietnam.<sup>380</sup> At the same time, the U.S. had not given up on its backup plan to negotiate with North Vietnam to achieve their goals of keeping South Vietnam an independent country and protecting American values through peaceful means. However, they were not happy to negotiate with a regime that they considered illegitimate and dangerous as the Communist NFLSV. American Ambassador Goldberg was authorized to tell U Thant:

...We do not wish to commit ourselves formally but consider it useful for U Thant to test Soviet receptivity. Although difficulties might be caused regarding other unrecognized regimes, we can see certain advantages,

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<sup>376</sup> “The UN and the War in Vietnam, 1965,” Box 197, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

particularly the possibility of bringing North Vietnam under UN jurisdiction and thereby increasingly the prospects for peace efforts through the UN.<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid.



## CHAPTER 5. INTERNATIONAL SEARCH FOR PEACE IN VIETNAM

### 5.1 Yugoslav Efforts to Achieve a Vietnam Solution

The next effort for peace negotiations, known as the Yugoslav effort began on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1965, when the Prime Minister of Yugoslavia Tito sent a letter to President Johnson “urging immediate negotiations on Vietnam without either side imposing conditions.”<sup>382</sup> On March 12<sup>th</sup> 1965, in a response to Tito, President Johnson sent a response indicating his determination to protect the American demands: South Vietnam must remain an independent country and “stating that there would be no bar to a peaceful settlement if Hanoi ceased ‘aggression against South Vietnam.’”<sup>383</sup> In an appeal signed on March 15<sup>th</sup> 1965 in Belgrade, 17 nations, which included Afghanistan, Algeria, Cyprus, Ceylon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, India, Iraq, Kenya, Nepal, Syria, Tunisia, UAR, Uganda, Yugoslav, and Zambia “blamed ‘foreign intervention in various forms’ for the aggravation of the situation in Vietnam” and again called for negotiations without conditions.<sup>384</sup> President Johnson responded to that appeal in the speech at Johns Hopkins University in April 7<sup>th</sup> 1965, where he agreed to negotiate with North Vietnam.<sup>385</sup> Beijing and Hanoi were determined to protect the opinion that South Vietnam was a part of Vietnam, which America had invaded so that they refused to negotiate with the United States. The Soviet Union did not respond “formally.”<sup>386</sup>

This declaration was not only addressed to the United States, China and North Vietnam but also to the UK, France, Russia, Communist China, Poland, Canada and the National Liberation Front. “The UK publicly welcomed the appeal in general terms, but the British government has not formally relayed the message because it has been pursuing various initiatives, closely relating to the 17-nation appeal.”<sup>387</sup> Moscow kept its silence on the appeal because it did not want to lose credit with North Vietnam after the Sino-Soviet split.

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<sup>382</sup> “Yugoslav efforts to achieve a Vietnam solution,” Box 197, Country File, NSF, LBJL

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> “17 nations non-aligned appeal,” Box 197, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>385</sup> “Yugoslav efforts to achieve a Vietnam solution,” Box 197, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

## 5.2 Indonesian Effort for a Vietnam Solution

About the Indonesian peace effort for Vietnam, *Negotiating initiatives* writes that in 1964, Indonesia wanted to be an intermediary between Hanoi and Washington to solve the Vietnam problem. A DRV Foreign Ministry official responded that Hanoi would welcome Indonesia peace initiative. However after knowing that “Canadian ICC [the International Control Commission in Vietnam] representative’s views on the acceptability to the United States of a possible shift of the demilitarized zone southward to a point below Da Nang,” Indonesia did not continue its plan to become a bridge for a peace talk between two countries.<sup>388</sup> During this time, President Sukarno of Indonesia had a close relationship with Ho Chi Minh. That perhaps was the reason why Indonesia did not want to choose between him and the International Control Commission in Vietnam (ICC) so Indonesia was not invited to continue its role of mediator in the Vietnam War.<sup>389</sup>

## 5.3 The Gordon Walker Mission on Vietnam

Prime Minister Harold Wilson and his Labour Government desired to change the British policy towards the Vietnam problem in a way different from the previous government. According to Sylvia Ellis, “the British Government did nothing between 1961 and 1963 to stop the United States on its path to the tragedy in Vietnam. The new Labour Government could, of course, have changed direction on the issue.”<sup>390</sup> The latter tried its best to raise its voice to end the war in Vietnam. At the May Day celebration in Manchester in 1954, Leader of Opposition in the British Parliament Harold Wilson expressed his opinion about the American policy toward Communism in Asia: “The Government should not further subordinate British policy to American. A settlement in Asia is imperiled by the lunatic fringe in the American Senate who want a holy crusade against Communism [...] Asia is in revolution and the British must learn to march on the side of the peoples in that revolution and not on the side of

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<sup>388</sup> “Indonesia effort for a Vietnam solution,” *Negotiating initiatives* (1965), Box 197, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>389</sup> Kieu Mai Son, “Chu Tich Ho Chi Minh va Tong Thong Sukarno: Nguoi ban chi tinh, nguoi anh em ket nghĩa” [President Ho Chi Minh and President Sukarno: close friends and brothers], <http://cand.com.vn/Phong-su-tu-lieu/Chu-tich-Ho-Chi-Minh-va-Tong-thong-Sukarno-Nguoi-ban-chi-tinh-nguoi-anh-em-ket-nghia-161224/>.

<sup>390</sup> Sylvia Ellis, *Britain, America and Vietnam* (Westport: Praeger Publisher, 2004), 7.

their oppressors.”<sup>391</sup> In June 1964, Wilson asked Prime Minister Douglas Home to stop his support of the American war in North Vietnam.<sup>392</sup>

On March 1965, the British Government intended to dispatch Former British Foreign Secretary Patrick Gordon Walker to Hanoi and Peking to probe a chance of peace for Vietnam. The U.S. welcomed this initiative and “the British subsequently announced the trip.” However, Communist China expressed that it did not welcome Gordon Walker because “the British government had failed to fulfill its responsibility as a co-Chairman of the Geneva Conference.” North Vietnam simply refused to issue a visa for Walker to visit Vietnam, stating: “The Foreign Ministry official has alleged that the British were not behaving in a neutral fashion and said that this circumstance made discussion with Gordon Walker inappropriate.”<sup>393</sup> North Vietnam seemed very suspicious regarding the British because they had been America’s traditional ally. Moreover, North Vietnam condemned the British Prime Minister for publicly supporting American actions after the Gulf of Tonkin incidents.<sup>394</sup> However, a Vietnamese Foreign Ministry official signaled that the door for talks was still open.<sup>395</sup>

#### **5.4 Radhakrishnan Proposal**

On April 24<sup>th</sup> 1965, as a member of ICC, Indian President Radhakrishnan had a proposal for peace in Vietnam. In this proposal, he suggested: “policing of the boundary between North and South by an Afro-Asia force.” Prime Minister Shastri disagreed with Radhakrishnan because he felt that “he had gone too far in his criticism of the U.S. bombing in North Vietnam.” By early May, the Government of India (GOI) confirmed that President Radhakrishnan’s proposal was the new GOI policy. The free world generally viewed the GOI proposal favorably. Other leaders such as President of Egypt Gamal Adel Nasser, President of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah, President of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito, and Prime Minister of Laos Souvanna Phouma supported the proposal and “the UAR and Ghana volunteered troops for the Afro [Africa]–Asia force.” The Soviet Union again did not comment on the proposal

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>393</sup> The Gordon Walker mission on Vietnam,” Box 197, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>394</sup> Nguyen Van Sao, “Chinh Sach cua Anh doi voi Cac nuoc Xa Hoi Chu Nghia, dac biet la Lien Xo, Trung Quoc va Vietnam” [The British policy toward Socialist countries, especially with Soviet Union, China and Vietnam] September 15<sup>th</sup> 1970.

Department of Foreign Affairs of Central Committee of Lao Dong Party 1054-1991. The Archival of Central Committee of Vietnamese Communist Party, Hanoi, Vietnam. (Documents in Vietnamese).

<sup>395</sup> “The Gordon Walker mission on Vietnam,” Box 197, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

publicly. But Radhakrishnan's proposal was criticized by both Beijing and Hanoi. "Radio Hanoi announced on May 6 that the DRV had informed the Indian Consul General that the proposal for an Afro-Asian force was 'at complete variance with the spirit and basic principles' of the 1954 Geneva Accords, and ran counter to India's status as Chairman of the ICC in Vietnam." Beijing considered the GOI policy "a new plot to use the Afro-Asian countries to serve the U.S. aggression against Vietnam." On May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1965, the DRV's Consul General in New Delhi "announced that the DRV's 'disapproval' of the border force provision, and that it would not permit any international organization other than the ICC to intervene in Vietnam." In late May 1965, Prime Minister Shastri visited Moscow in hopes of salvaging the idea, but the proposal of Radhakrishnan was not among the topics of discussions.<sup>396</sup>

## 5.5 Commonwealth Initiative

About Prime Minister Wilson's Commonwealth Initiative, Sylvia Ellis wrote: "Wilson's next peace gambit—or gimmick, as his critics called—was the larger and grander Commonwealth peace mission." He planned to organize a Commonwealth Prime Minister's conference in London for a week beginning June 17 and he would take this chance to "play world statesman."<sup>397</sup> According to the *Negotiating initiatives*, on June 17<sup>th</sup>, Wilson talked in Parliament about the conference's decision to plan sending missions abroad to search for peace in Vietnam. The Commonwealth Prime Minister's conference included the prime ministers of the United Kingdom, Ghana, Nigeria and Trinidad.<sup>398</sup>

On June 18<sup>th</sup> 1965, the Commonwealth's proposal for peace in Vietnam was sent to the Secretary General of the UN and the heads of the government of the Soviet Union, Communist China, North Vietnam, South Vietnam and the United States.<sup>399</sup> The United States reaction was supportive.<sup>400</sup> However, the proposal received negative responses from North Vietnam, Communist China and the Soviet Union. On June 21<sup>st</sup> 1965, "a Chinese commentary characterized Wilson as 'a nit-wit making trouble for himself.'"<sup>401</sup> On June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1965, Radio Hanoi quoted Chou En-lai's characterization of the initiatives as a "deceitful trick." The following day, the Soviet Union formally

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<sup>396</sup> "Radhakrishnan proposal," Box 197, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>397</sup> Sylvia Ellis, *Britain, America, and the Vietnam War*, 101.

<sup>398</sup> "Commonwealth Initiative," in *Negotiating initiatives*, Box 197, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>399</sup> Sylvia Ellis, *Britain, America, and the Vietnam War*, 106.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> "Commonwealth Initiative," Box 197, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

expressed that they did not support the Commonwealth's proposal for settlement in Vietnam. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of June, Communist China "formally rejected the proposal." The DRV waited until July 1<sup>st</sup> to send a broadcast of "specific commentary rejecting the mission." Although the Commonwealth mission for peace in Vietnam did not receive immediate positive responses, it made two subsequent missions in Hanoi: the David mission and Ghana official's meeting with Ho Chi Minh.<sup>402</sup>

According to Sylvia Ellis, the Commonwealth peace mission was "Wilson's most ambitious and most serious attempt to establish peace talks."<sup>403</sup> The Prime Minister made efforts to end the war for humanitarian and moral reasons, as well as "to help him deal with more immediate problems" regarding British domestic issues.<sup>404</sup> "First, such a high-profile initiative would have greatly eased his domestic political problems. Indeed, Richard Crossman, Minister of Housing and Local Government, immediately labeled it a 'stunt,' feeling it was 'designed to calm the left wing of the party.'"<sup>405</sup>

## 5.6 The Davis Mission

In January 1965, two North Vietnamese journalists in London indicated that Member of Parliament (M.P) Harold Davis would be welcomed in Hanoi if he wished to come.<sup>406</sup> With the permission of Wilson, David visited Hanoi from 9<sup>th</sup> July to 13<sup>th</sup> July 1965. When Davis first came to Hanoi, he could not meet the senior DRV leaders. Davis was welcomed by the Mat Tran To Quoc Vietnam [Fatherland Front] as a friend of the Vietnamese, not as an official of the Wilson Government.<sup>407</sup> Davis tried to persuade Vietnam to believe in Wilson's good will.<sup>408</sup> He said: "We seriously believe that people in the world are trying to encourage negotiations for peace because Vietnam's situation affects the world."<sup>409</sup> Davis expressed that "if the senior DRV leaders meet Prime Minister Wilson, the Prime Minister will recognize the DRV. If Prime Minister and Vietnam have common voices, President Johnson cannot reject it."<sup>410</sup> However, "members of the Fatherland Front attacked Wilson as a friend of

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<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Sylvia Ellis, *Britain, America, and the Vietnam War*, 107.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> "Davis mission," Box 197, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Luu Van Loi – Nguyen Anh Vu, *Secret Contacts between Vietnam and the United States before the Paris Peace talks*, 73.

<sup>409</sup> Quoted in Ibid. (my own translation.)

<sup>410</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 75 (my own translation).

Americans, and reiterated stock DRV demands for an end to U.S. bombings and a withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Vietnam.”<sup>411</sup> Beijing and Moscow knew about Davis’s trip to Hanoi but did not address it publicly.<sup>412</sup> Davis reported to Wilson that he successfully sent a peace message from the Commonwealth to Hanoi, and they would see what would come out of it.<sup>413</sup>

## **5.7 President Ho Chi Minh Meets the Messenger of President Nkrumah**

President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana was a famous politician in Africa and considered a friend of Vietnam. Ghana recognized the DRV once the U.S. started bombing North Vietnam in March 1965, and two countries established embassies in November 1965.<sup>414</sup> When Davis visited Vietnam, President Nkrumah sent a letter to President Ho Chi Minh: “I believed that a negotiation can be a solution to achieve Vietnamese goals in the Vietnamese struggle and sacrifices [...] It will be good not only for Vietnam but also for the peace of the world.”<sup>415</sup> In a letter to President Nkrumah, President Ho Chi Minh invited him to visit Vietnam. Nkrumah also wrote letters to Communist China to persuade them to negotiate peace for Vietnam on June 18th and June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1965, but China did not reply.<sup>416</sup> The Soviet Union told Ghana that Moscow supported the idea of negotiations between Hanoi and Washington but made no public announcement. The British, for their part, were “cautious and seem apprehensive that Nkrumah with his well-known leftish inclinations, may cause difficulties for the United States and the United Kingdom if his visit materializes.” On July 20<sup>th</sup> 1965, President Nkrumah sent a letter to President Johnson about his intention to accept Ho Chi Minh’s invitation to visit Hanoi.<sup>417</sup> Nkrumah sent Kwesi Armah, Ghana’s High Commissioner in London, to Vietnam immediately to prepare for his own trip to Vietnam.<sup>418</sup> On July 26<sup>th</sup> 1965, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh, received Armah, who confirmed that Ghana had always

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<sup>411</sup> “Davis mission,” Box 197, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> “Documents on the relations between Vietnam and Ghana,” [http://www.mofahcm.gov.vn/vi/mofa/cn\\_vakv/nr040819100948/nr040819115213/ns150421184148](http://www.mofahcm.gov.vn/vi/mofa/cn_vakv/nr040819100948/nr040819115213/ns150421184148)

<sup>415</sup> Quoted in Luu Van Loi-Nguyen Anh Vu, secret contacts between Vietnam and the United States before Paris peace talks, 75-76 (my own translation).

<sup>416</sup> “Ghanaian initiative on Vietnam,” Box 197, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> Luu Van Loi-Nguyen Anh Vu, Secret contacts between Vietnam and the United States, 77.

supported the Vietnamese struggle for national independence and unification.<sup>419</sup> On July 27<sup>th</sup> 1965, Ho Chi Minh met with Armah. The president condemned how Americans had betrayed the Geneva Accords and invaded Vietnam to make it become a colony of the U.S.<sup>420</sup> Ho Chi Minh criticized President Johnson peace's initiative as a "trick" because while talking about peace, the United States had escalated the war in Vietnam and bombing to North Vietnam.<sup>421</sup> Armah replied that:

In a game of chess between Vietnam and the U.S., we are indirectly involved... All people of Asia and Africa will fight against the U.S. invasions... No one can blame Vietnam for fighting for their own lives. We worry that the U.S. used toxins which made 30,000 people infected, killed 500,000 people, 800,000 people wounded, and 400,000 people imprisoned. We worry that the U.S. bombed villages, schools, and hospitals in North Vietnam. People of Africa and Asia will stand by the Vietnamese.<sup>422</sup>

Armah said that President Nkrumah joined the Commonwealth mission because he wanted to prevent the U.K from supporting the U.S. policy in Vietnam and gaining support of the 21 members for the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. He persuaded President Ho Chi Minh to probe the real goal of the U.S. negotiations. According to Armah the leaders of the world did not want the Vietnamese to shed blood anymore. However, Ho Chi Minh was very determined to protect the Vietnamese position. He did not consider South Vietnam an independent country, and the U.S. had invaded South Vietnam when President Johnson sent troops to South Vietnam and bombed North Vietnam. He compared the U.S. invasion of South Vietnam and the U.S. calls for peace initiatives to the image of the bandits coming to a village, killing the inhabitants and asking to talk. Ho Chi Minh condemned them as "insidious." Armah replied that he understood that Vietnam and Ghana and all Asian-African people would be side-by-side with Vietnam to fight until the ultimate victory. He delivered President Ho Chi Minh's letter to President Nkrumah. According to Armah, Ghana's Foreign Minister would come to Washington in August 1965 to deliver a letter from Nkrumah calling for a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam. But in February 1966, Nkrumah was overthrown by military men when he was on the way to Hanoi and his peace mission for Vietnam was subsequently never completed.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid. 79.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 85-88.

## **5.8 The Japanese Role as Intermediary on the Vietnam Question-The Miki Mission**

On July 14<sup>th</sup> 1965, the Japanese Minister for International Trade and Industry, Takeo Miki, “offered to send conservative Liberal Democratic Party representatives to Peking” to call for peace in Vietnam.<sup>424</sup> Takeo Miki wanted to send the U.S. peace message to Communist China and search for a solution to Vietnam’s problem. On July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1965, the Embassy in Tokyo “was authorized to tell Miki orally that since the Chinese Communists and DRV rebuffed all previous attempts to get them to negotiate, they did not feel justified in asking the LDP members to make a special effort.”<sup>425</sup>

## **5.9 The French opinion on a Vietnam Settlement**

The French supported the U.S. proposal for unconditional discussions with North Vietnam but also suggested that the U.S. “should accept the NFLSV as a separate entity” and the U.S. should cease bombing North Vietnam.<sup>426</sup> On April 14<sup>th</sup> 1965, General de Gaulle warned President Johnson about the dangers, should the U.S. escalate the war in Vietnam: “If the United States does not decide now to withdraw from Vietnam, the war will last ten years. And the war will never end without America losing face, unlike the Algerian war, which ended with France’s honor intact.”<sup>427</sup> General de Gaulle was enthusiastic to prepare French peace initiatives during the Vietnam War because France was confident of its knowledge on both Washington and Hanoi and “they were sure that France could wait for the right moment to mediate for Free World and the Communists.”<sup>428</sup> France understood that both Hanoi and Washington were determined to follow their war strategy but America would get tired and had to withdraw troops to end the war.

## **5.10 Why not Negotiations Now?**

Washington and Hanoi could not sit down together to talk about peace in Vietnam although there were many attempts at peace initiatives for Vietnam from 1964 to 1968. Both sides were so determined to protect their own positions on the Vietnam problem,

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<sup>424</sup> “Japanese role as intermediate on the Vietnam question-The Miki mission,” Box 197, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

<sup>426</sup> “French Attitude toward a Vietnam Settlement,” Box 197, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>427</sup> Peyrefitte, “C’était de Gaulle,” 2: 687; Yuko Torikata, “Reexamining de Gaulle’s Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol 31, No.5 (November 2017): 923

<sup>428</sup> Torikata, “Reexamining de Gaulle’s peace initiative on Vietnam War”: 925



to protect the moral values of their beliefs and their own civilizations. Additionally, They were very scared of becoming losers in the battle and losing face. They both feared the retribution of being attacked in the future if they surrendered.

The U.S. condemned Hanoi, saying that they must take the responsibility for the failures of so many peace initiatives because they refused to talk, leaving the U.S. no choice but to escalate the war and bomb North Vietnam to reduce Hanoi's support of South Vietnam guerillas.<sup>429</sup> On the other side, Hanoi condemned the U.S.'s aggressive will and considered American peace campaigns tricks, necessitated that Hanoi not negotiate. Many times, Hanoi had said that it had asked America to stop bombing North Vietnam unconditionally, along with all acts of war before talks could take place.<sup>430</sup>

On September 29<sup>th</sup> 1967, in a speech in San Antonio, President Johnson called for peace talks with North Vietnam. In the speech, he emphasized that the United States was "willing to stop all aerial and naval bombardment of North Vietnam when this will lead promptly to productive discussion. We, of course, assume that while discussions proceed, North Vietnam would not take advantage of the bombing cessation or limitation."<sup>431</sup> In a press conference on October 12<sup>th</sup> 1967, Secretary of State Rusk restated Johnson's desire for peace talks with Hanoi but he thought that the chance of negotiation was limited: "Hanoi has not abandoned its effort to seize South Vietnam by force." He condemned Hanoi's action, stating: "It would reflect a view in Hanoi that they can gamble upon the character of the? American people and of our allies in the Pacific."<sup>432</sup> On October 21<sup>st</sup> 1967, through Australian correspondent Wilfred Burchett, in response to President Johnson's San Antonio speech, Hanoi stated: "There is no possibility of any talks or even contacts between Hanoi and the U.S. government unless the bombardment and other acts of war against North Vietnam are definitively halted."<sup>433</sup> The official statement from Hanoi was from the speech of the First Secretary of the Communist North Vietnamese Lao Dong Party at the Kremlin on November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1967: "If the U.S. Government—the war provocateur and aggressor— wants to talk with the DRV, it must first of all stop definitively and

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<sup>429</sup> "Why not negotiations now?" Box 263, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>430</sup> "Stop the Bombings?" Box 263, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

unconditionally its bombing and other acts of war against the DRV.”<sup>434</sup> On November 7<sup>th</sup> 1967, in a London interview with *The Guardian*, North Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong restated: “They must stop unconditionally. No, we do not accept a condition of any kind, in whatever form they may be. The Vietnamese are a proud people. They will not negotiate under bombing or under threat of bombing.”<sup>435</sup>

On December 19<sup>th</sup> 1967, in an interview on television, President Johnson expressed the American determination to protect the U.S. positions on Vietnam<sup>436</sup>

On December 25<sup>th</sup> 1967, Hanoi replied to Washington through the daily newspaper of the Lao Dong Party *Nhan Dan*:

The present path followed by the Johnson clique is that of war escalation. To cover it up, Johnson had resorted to a series of peace swindles. He recently claimed that the demilitarized zone must be respected, that the unity of Vietnam as a whole must be a matter for peaceful adjustment and negotiations, that the political future of South Vietnam must be worked out by the people of South Vietnam, and the like. But Johnson did not utter a single word on what the world people are demanding, that is, to stop definitively and unconditionally the bombing and the other acts of war against North Vietnam, to withdraw the U.S. and satellite troops from South Vietnam, and to recognize the NFLSV as the only genuine representative of the South Vietnamese people. Johnson’s above claims are nothing but a worn-out trick aimed at dragging on the U.S.’s aggressive war on Vietnam.<sup>437</sup>

North Vietnam was firm in its words and intentions to fight until they had achieved victory and were only willing to talk when they saw the American will to fight had been defeated. In a speech at a reception for the Mongolian Party Government Delegation to Hanoi, Vice Premier Nguyen Duy Trinh expressed the North Vietnamese views on the U.S. negotiation initiatives and stated his government’s position for settlement in South Vietnam on December 29<sup>th</sup> 1967. The Vice Premier began by characterizing the U.S. as “imperialists” with “aggressive schemes” to invade Vietnam: “They have barbarously bombed Hanoi capital and Haiphong port city, feverishly sent more U.S. and satellite troops to South Vietnam, and at the same time threaten to expand the war to Cambodia and Laos. The actions of the U.S. in North Vietnam were viewed as so cruel and uncivilized that they were seen like the act of barbarian invasions. The Vice Premier condemned President Johnson’s call to peace in his San Antonio speech as a scheme to ‘intensify the war and cling to South

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> “Why not negotiations now?” Box 263, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>437</sup> Quoted in Ibid.

Vietnam.” He rejected the U.S. plan to “bring the Vietnam question before the Security Council of United Nations” and stated that the UN did not have any right to raise the council’s voices on Vietnam: “Whatever resolution on the Vietnam question is adopted by the U.N. Security Council is null and void.” In this speech, the Vice Premier confirmed the positions of North Vietnam about settlement in South Vietnam had already been expressed in “the four-points of the DRV Government and the political program of the NFLSV.” He also stated that “the U.S. government has unceasingly claimed that it wants to talk with Hanoi but it has received no response.” He finished by saying that the talks between Washington and Hanoi would only happen if America “stops unconditionally the bombing and other acts of war against the DRV.”<sup>438</sup>

Nguyen Duy Trinh's statement was of interest to the Americans because he said that “the DRV will hold talks with the United States on questions concerned.”<sup>439</sup> On January 4<sup>th</sup> 1968, Dean Rusk received many questions about this statement, and the Secretary of State said he was still “trying to finding out” what Hanoi had meant by that statement.<sup>440</sup> A principal spokesman for North Vietnam in Paris, Mai Van Bo, answered some questions about the statement in an interview on January 14<sup>th</sup> 1968. Mai Van Bo explained that “the cessation of all other acts of war” meant: “The cessation of any military action that violates the sovereignty and the territory of Democratic Republic of Vietnam.”<sup>441</sup> He continued to expand on the Vice Premier's speech, stating that: “talks will begin after a suitable time following the unconditional halting of the bombing and of all other act of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.”<sup>442</sup> He condemned the U.S. aggressive acts of war : “The U.S. attacked the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, a sovereign, independent country, without a valid reason and without a declaration of war. It constitutes a deliberate aggression and an act of defiance to all men, and to all peoples. Consequently the U.S. must put an end to its acts of aggression without laying down any conditions whatsoever.”<sup>443</sup> The Vice Premier Nguyen Duy Trinh’s statement signaled the beginning of a new chapter of

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<sup>438</sup> Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid.

<sup>443</sup> Quoted in Ibid.

negotiations between Hanoi and Washington in the near future. He saw that the time was ripe to negotiate with the U.S. in 1968 after the Tet offensive.

## **CHAPTER 6. PINTA-PEACE INITIATIVE BETWEEN VIETNAM AND THE UNITED STATES (DECEMBER 1965-FEBRUARY 1966)**

PINTA was a big effort of the Johnson administration to search for peace in Vietnam. In 1965, there were 300 high-level private talks for peace in Vietnam between the U.S. officials and friends. During the PINTA peace campaign, the U.S. administration sent five special Ambassadors to 34 countries to search for peace in Vietnam. From December 1965 to January 1966, President Johnson “communicated” with the leaders of nations and international organizations throughout the world, including Pope Paul VI, the North Atlantic Council of NATO, the Organization of American States, the Organization for African Unity and the International Committee of the Red Cross.<sup>444</sup>

In this campaign, America made efforts to “contact with North Vietnamese officials in one of the 22 capitals with which both countries maintain diplomatic relations.”<sup>445</sup> The U.S. sent messages calling for peace talks, but North Vietnam “issued an official statement calling the peace probe a ‘trick’ and demanding an ‘unconditional’ end of all acts of war against it.”<sup>446</sup>

The White House’s peace campaign, which, “include [d] the suspension of bombing” in North Vietnam (December 1965-January 1966) had two purposes: first, “to open the way for peace if possible,” and moreover, “to prove to men of good will in every country the good faith of the U.S. in its commitment to a peaceful settlement.”<sup>447</sup> The White House had prepared for the possibility of the rejection of the U.S. peace proposal by North Vietnam and warned that: “if this peace effort does not work, the prospect of more and heavier fighting is real, because the determination of the U.S. is unchanged.”<sup>448</sup> Additionally, the Johnson’s administration needed to make the American people believe that it was moving towards peace with honor in Vietnam. The analysis read:

This effort is the necessary peace punch to go with the military punch, which is coming in January. We face a big budget, larger reinforcements, and possibly

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<sup>444</sup> “Why not negotiate now?” Box 263, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> “Outline of U.S. Public Position during a Suspension of Bombing,” December 18<sup>th</sup> 1965, Box 145, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

other drastic measures in the field of taxes and controls. The President cannot ask the American people to join in united support of these hard measures until we have given complete proof of our determination to move toward peace, if possible.<sup>449</sup>

The main objective of the PINTA peace initiative therefore, was not to open the channels of communication with Hanoi, but a strategic move to increase the credibility of Johnson's administration in the U.S. and in the world. President Johnson admitted, "none of us has illusions that a suspension of bombing would be likely to lead to acceptable peace moves by Hanoi," but were merely to express the American desire for peace to win support of Americans and people in the world that would "create the conditions that will facilitate progress toward peace." Consequently, Johnson "decided to order the suspension of air attacks on NVN [North Vietnam] beginning December 22<sup>nd</sup> in order to permit opportunity for both Communist and friendly countries to exercise all diplomatic initiatives they can and will undertake."<sup>450</sup>

The President understood the sensitive nature of the matter when talking with South Vietnam and he assured that the U.S. would not abandon South Vietnam. In a letter to the American ambassador in South Vietnam, Johnson asked him to help South Vietnam understand that: "before entering into a new and more costly phase of the conflict requiring a much greater US effort we must satisfy our people and the world that all measures are being exhausted to bring about peace on a basis consistent with the objectives for which we are both fighting." He emphasized that: "Our stake is so large in this enterprise that we cannot permit the GVN [Government of Vietnam] to veto this essential measure."<sup>451</sup> The content of this document shows that the U.S. was the architect of the peace campaign as well as the strategy maker behind the further escalation of the war, and not the South Vietnam Government.

On December 18<sup>th</sup> 1965, the White House drew a detailed plan for the important events of the peace campaign. On December 21<sup>st</sup> 1965, Goldberg informed Secretary U Thant of the planned peace initiative and Ambassador Thompson or Secretary Rusk informed the Russian Ambassador Dobrynin. On the morning of December 22<sup>nd</sup>, Rusk sent a message to Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter and "the UK requested to deliver an oral message to Hanoi informing Hanoi of the suspension and a willingness of the

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> "Literally eyes only for [American] Ambassador [in South Vietnam] from President," December 1965, Box 145, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJ.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

UK to act as channel of communication and otherwise to hold itself in readiness to do anything possible that will move the situation toward peaceful solution.”<sup>452</sup> On the same day, “instructions were transmitted to U.S. Ambassadors in the following countries for delivery to the Chief of Government a personal messages from the President along lines attached draft: United Kingdom, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, Korea, Canada, India, Japan, and Philippines.”<sup>453</sup> That evening on December 22<sup>nd</sup> P.M., the suspension of bombing began (December 23 A.M. Saigon time). On December 26<sup>th</sup> Vice President Hubert Humphrey would visit Japan, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand and India. Governor Averell Harriman came to European capitals to discuss about peace initiative.<sup>454</sup>

In a draft statement to Russian Ambassador Dobrynin, President Johnson emphasized that the American objective in Vietnam was peace: “I am hopeful that we do hold in common view a desire to see peace restored in that unhappy land; to see the killing and the terrorism ended and the long suffering people of this area given the opportunity to devote their lives to peaceful pursuits in which we stand ready to assist them.”<sup>455</sup>

In the draft telegram to U.S. Ambassadors in selected capitals, Johnson expressed his desire to send peace messages to the Chiefs of Governments: “In all its actions in Vietnam, my Government has aimed from the first for peaceful settlement. These new actions are a part of this same policy and purpose. It is my hope that the climate that should result will make it possible for your Government to take initiatives of its own in furtherance of the objective of a peaceful settlement.”<sup>456</sup>

On December 29<sup>th</sup> 1965, the president wrote a secret letter to the leaders of many international nations to explain the U.S. proposal for a negotiation initiative. In the letter to Prime Minister Wilson, Johnson explained the reason to attempt a peace initiative was in response to the call for peace from Communist countries:

I have been giving every possible thought to the ways and means by which we might bring about peace in Vietnam. For sometimes the Soviet Union and some Eastern European governments have hinted that the major impediment to any diplomatic initiatives on their part was our bombing of North Vietnam and

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<sup>452</sup> “Scenario,” December 18<sup>th</sup> 1965, Box 145, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> “Draft circular telegram to U.S. Ambassadors in selected capitals,” Box 145, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

they have implied that if the bombing were suspended for a while they might be prepared to make efforts to bring Hanoi into line.<sup>457</sup>

Although President Johnson doubted the assurance of any specific action following a suspension of bombing, he wanted to “test the seriousness of these Communist hints to see if some progress toward peace could be made.” He surmised that the U.S. proposal for peace would finally pass the call for peace to Hanoi directly through the U.S. ambassador in Rangoon, as well as sending Ambassador Goldberg to Rome and Ambassador Harriman to Warsaw for secondary channels of communication. Frankly, President Johnson said that he had “no great hope that anything useful will come out of this” as well as fearing serious provocation, so he did not make “commitments publicly or privately that would limit the U.S. to still have freedom of action.”<sup>458</sup> In a letter to President de Gaulle on the same day, Johnson wrote in similar comments that the U.S. did not believe that the bombing halt could make Hanoi move to negotiations: “While I am skeptical that much will come of this, I nevertheless stood down the bombing of North Vietnam since Christmas Eve.” Throughout the cession of hostilities, the U.S. still thought of the resumption of military action in Vietnam: “We shall, of course, continue our air, ground, and sea operations in South Vietnam and some reconnaissance of North Vietnam.”<sup>459</sup> The president also sent a letter to Pope Paul VI, which emphasized Washington’s desire for peace:

He [Goldberg] will express this gratitude not only on my behalf but that of the American people. I know it is shared by all mankind. I thank you also for all the continuing efforts you are making in the furtherance of peace in Southeast Asia. I can assure you, on my part, that I will never cease my exertions until an honorable peace has been achieved in that troubled part of the world.<sup>460</sup>

On December 29<sup>th</sup> 1965, Secretary of State Rusk held a press conference offering a new U.S. formulation of the 14 negotiation points (which he had personally drafted), in which he asked the North Vietnamese to respond constructively to the pause.<sup>461</sup> With the formulation of the 14 Points, the U.S. sent its message of peace for Vietnam into the world. The points were more generous than any peace offer the U.S. had previously extended. The intention of the points was clearly to bring Hanoi to the negotiating table, suggesting either the U.S.’s

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<sup>457</sup> “The letter to Prime Minister Wilson from President Johnson (December 29<sup>th</sup> 1965),” Box 150, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> “The President Johnson’ letter to President De Gaulle from President Johnson (December 29<sup>th</sup> 1965),” Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>460</sup> “Telegram Department of State,” Following is to be prepared for delivery by Ambassador Goldberg to the Pope from the President, (December 29<sup>th</sup> 1965), Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>461</sup> “Info of Press conference on December 29<sup>th</sup> 1965,” Box 150, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.



recognition of the Geneva Agreements, which it had so far ignored, or an unconditional negotiation. However, when it came to Hanoi's Four Points, it was suggested that they "could be discussed" along with points others might wish to propose. This indicated that the negotiations would not necessarily accept any solution from Vietnamese representatives, as those that had already been proposed by that side were still not accepted. Additionally, the U.S. offered home-turf negotiations in Asia, with Viet Cong representation, and the possibility of aid money for Vietnam's reconstruction. Also unprecedented was its abandonment of their permanent military presence in South Vietnam and Asia. However, point 14, essentially "passed the buck" to the North Vietnamese, handing to them the responsibility of responding to America's first move of suspended bombing. Other than proposing their willingness to talk, the only action on the military side they had taken to support their word was a temporary suspension of a bombing campaign on North Vietnam as a step towards peace. For officials in Vietnam, this was an underwhelming proposal.

## **6.1 International Reaction**

The U.S. received support from all the members of the Organization of American States (OAS) for their peace initiative between December 1965 and January 1966. Secretary Rusk wrote:

All reports received thus far from Latin America are favorable. President Leoni [Raúl Leoni, President of Venezuela] thought a joint OAS resolution appealing for a peaceful solution might be helpful. President Illia of Argentina speculated a joint or separate declaration by Latin American Presidents in support US effort might be useful. President Frei of Chile is understood to be considering issuance of a statement supporting peaceful settlement.<sup>462</sup>

President Diaz Ordaz of Mexico was "sympathetic with the search for peace and would likely support a limited Mexican role in bringing contending forces to the conference table." The Latin American states hoped "to urge USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia to use their influence to get Hanoi to the conference table."<sup>463</sup>

On December 29<sup>th</sup> 1965, Henry Alfred Byroade, the American ambassador to Burma called the DRV Consul General Vu Huu Binh to say that he wanted to hand him an aide-memoire from the U.S government. In the afternoon, Byroade himself

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<sup>462</sup> "From Secretary of State Rusk for Ambassador," January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>463</sup> "From American Embassy Mexican to Secretary of State," January 4<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

drove a car to the Vietnamese Embassy in Burma, and “Vu received me [Byroad] with a smile and ready handshake.” Byroade told Vu that he was “grateful for the opportunity to see him personally as the U.S government wished him to convey a message directly to him for transmittal to his government.” He then handed Vu an aide-memoire calling attention to the bombing suspension that had begun on December 24<sup>th</sup> 1965, and expressing the hope that the DRV would respond.<sup>464</sup> The text that the U.S. sent to the DRV Charge in Rangoon read as follows:

As you are no doubt aware, there has been no bombing in North Vietnam since December 24 although some reconnaissance flights have continued. No decision has been made regarding a resumption of bombing and unless there is a major provocation we would hope that the recent stand-down, which is in its fifth day, could extend beyond New Year. If your government will now reciprocate by making a serious contribution toward peace, it would obviously have a favorable effect on the possibility of further extending the suspension.<sup>465</sup>

Vu Huu Binh promised to send this aide-memoire immediately to Hanoi and “keep the matter confidential.”<sup>466</sup>

On December 29<sup>th</sup> 1965, Secretary of State Dean Rusk sent a report to the White House on the global response to the peace offensive.<sup>467</sup> It indicated approval for the PINTA peace initiative was at its “highest level” from Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Greece and Thailand. The report states that: “We have urged all these governments to hold our intentions closely.” The U.S. also talked with Soviet, Polish, and Hungarian representatives while waiting for Hanoi’s response and the possibility of a “major provocation,” but was determined to not negotiate with the NLF, and sent them no message. This meant that America recognized the South Vietnamese Government as the only representative of the South Vietnamese. Ambassador Byroade met with the DRV representative in Rangoon to inform him about the peace initiative, while the U.S. “also informed U Thant and the Indians.” Harriman went to Warsaw to talk with their Minister of Foreign Affairs Rapacki, and would go on to visit Budapest and Belgrade to “make strong the record of diplomatic activity” between the U.S. and the socialist countries. The U.S. made an

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<sup>464</sup> “Telegram From the Embassy in Burma to the Department of State, Rangoon,” December 29, 1965, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v03/d265>.

<sup>465</sup> “Following is the text delivered to the DRV REP Rangoon,” December 31<sup>st</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

<sup>467</sup> “From SECSTATE WASHDC to White House,” December 29<sup>th</sup> 1965, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

“essential diplomatic effort” to receive responses from Hanoi, although the “only direct contact with the DRV has been made by Byroade” in Rangoon.<sup>468</sup>

President Johnson dispatched Ambassador Goldberg to Rome to meet the Pope.<sup>469</sup> On December 30<sup>th</sup> 1965, Ambassador Goldberg met the Pope, who supported the American search for peace in Vietnam. While the Pope received a negative response from President Ho Chi Minh, South Vietnam reacted positively to the U.S. initiative. According to Goldberg’s report of the meeting, the “Pope plans to pursue his efforts for peace intensively through his own channels. He expressed himself as highly gratified with U.S. action, and sent communication to President Johnson characterizing U.S. action as a desirable and constructive move.”<sup>470</sup>

On December 30<sup>th</sup> 1965, the Secretary of State sent Goldberg and his chargé a note that stated, “We do not wish to encourage the French to take any initiative concerning Vietnam.”<sup>471</sup> The reason for omitting the French was later explained, as they were “not likely to play a helpful role.”<sup>472</sup> America knew that de Gaulle did not support American military involvement in Vietnam. On December 31<sup>st</sup> 1965, in a discussion with American officials, President de Gaulle expressed his opinion on the U.S. peace initiative for Vietnam that it was a campaign to win the supports: “[it] could have a good and constructive effect upon world opinion and would strengthen the position of the United States in the eyes of nations troubled as to its intentions.” However, he was skeptical about the success of the bombing pause: “he did not believe that the bombing pause would lead to unconditional negotiations at Geneva or in any other forum.” De Gaulle thought that there was only one solution to the Vietnam problem, which was the withdrawal of U.S. forces. He emphasized his solution “did not mean that American troops had to be withdrawn immediately but he stressed that withdrawal had to be agreed upon in principle before the negotiations commenced if Hanoi was to be brought to the bargaining table.” The French president also pointed out the determination behind the Chinese involvement in the Vietnam War: “Red China had no interest in any peaceful accommodation in that area of the world.” He indicated

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<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid.

<sup>470</sup> “From AMEBASSY to SECSTATE WASHDC,” December 31<sup>st</sup> 1965, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>471</sup> “From SECSTATE WASHDC to AMEBASSY Paris,” December 30<sup>th</sup> 1965, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>472</sup> The Under Secretary of State, “Memorandum for the President: Subject: Proposal for New Vietnam Initiative,” January 5<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 145, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

especially that the U.S. should appreciate “Hanoi’s determination to unite the country along its lines and to eliminate American influence in the area.”<sup>473</sup>

On December 31<sup>st</sup> 1965, President Johnson sent a peace message to the heads of the governments around the world in connection with Governor Williams’s visit.<sup>474</sup> He expressed the seriousness with which Washington was searching to find peace for Vietnam, which read: “I do not wish to leave any stone unturned in the search for peace and I have concluded that I should test the seriousness of these suggestions to see if some progress toward peace could be made.”<sup>475</sup> The President also indicated that Washington had prepared this initiative carefully when it sent American officials to meet the leaders of the world: “in furtherance of this initiative I have sent Ambassador Goldberg to Rome to see the Pope and have also sent Ambassador Harriman to Warsaw Belgrade and New Delhi to see what can be developed there.”<sup>476</sup>

On December 31<sup>st</sup> 1965, Ambassador Goldberg presented a report to NATO permanent Representatives (PERMREP) to gain support for the American plan. He told that the origin of the peace campaign was the international calls for peace in Vietnam including from the Soviet Union, the UN, Pope Paul VI, the Soviet Bloc as well as non-aligned countries. Goldberg emphasized the bombing pause was motivated by the serious desire for peace from the U.S. and other governments: “the bombing pause is not, repeat, not a propaganda stunt. It responds to the views of many governments and individuals that if bombings were suspended, North Vietnam would come to Geneva or some other forum and negotiate.” Goldberg talked about the good will of the ongoing mission of the U.S. in Vietnam: “the U.S. has no, repeat, no territorial ambitions or desire to keep troops there. We would welcome international machinery which would supervise peace arrangements and elections and enable the U.S. to withdraw.” At the end of the meeting, the Netherlands Permanent Representative in NATO Henry N. Boon said on the behalf of the group: “He appreciated the gravity of the decisions the U.S. would face if there continues to be no repeat no response, and joined the U.S. in hoping there will be response.”<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> “From AMEMBASSY Paris signed McBride for Secretary, undersecretary and department pass LBJ ranch,” December 31<sup>st</sup> 1965, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>474</sup> “From SECSTATE WASHDC to AMEMBASSY RABAT, AMEMBASSY ALGIERS, AMEMBASSY TUNIS,” December 31<sup>st</sup> 1965, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.

On January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1966, a U.S. official had a conversation with Leif Belfrage, the Undersecretary of State of the Swedish Foreign Ministry. Belfrage asked if the U.S. peace initiative was a “peace ultimatum.” The U.S. embassy official answered: “no question ultimatum but it was unalterably plain that U.S. would do everything possible meet its commitment the South Vietnam. However, if other side wanted peace, now was the obvious opportunity.” The Undersecretary wondered whether Hanoi was “split on negotiations.” His government “understood Ho himself in favor of negotiations but is opposed by other cabinet ministers. Belfrage hastily added that he was basing this observation on economist article.” Belfrage also pointed out that: “the U.S. would do well to continue stressing that it has no ambitions for bases or permanent military presence in Southeast Asia. He thought CHICOMS [Chinese Communists] might be more tractable if they could be convinced on this point.” The Swedish Undersecretary of State supported the U.S. peace offensive and said he would inform the foreign ministry and the Prime Minister of Sweden.<sup>478</sup>

On January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1966, during Governor William’s trip to Tunis, Washington expressed its fear of Chinese Communists expansionism: “CHICOMS want domination in Asia and reproach even the Russians for being lukewarm.” Washington pointed out their perception of the Chinese scheme: “the Chinese insist on humiliating and defeating the U.S. and count on U.S. opinion and pressure from U.S. allies to cause U.S. withdraw.” Washington understood that China did not dare to fight “against” the U.S. but worried that the “underdeveloped world would be gobbled up if CHICOMS were allowed to get at it.” Washington insisted that America was not arrogant of their power but knew its “limits” and really was in fear of Chinese Communist expansion. The document states: “World leaders must know what our limits are. Even Russians understand the gravity of the Chinese menace.” Washington admitted to the fact that “CHICOMS won prestige in Korea by fighting the U.S. and U.N. to a standstill and now U.S. public opinion puts up with this. No one wants to use an atomic bomb and the CHICOMS make this reluctance work for them.” The U.S. pointed out that the real power, which was causing negotiation initiatives to fail in Vietnam was China, not the North Vietnamese. Consequently, Washington urged: “the U.S. must hold on. North Vietnamese, helped by Russians and some socialist countries could settle for neutral Vietnam.” Washington feared that world peace would be

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<sup>478</sup> “Following sent action SECSTATE priority 544 from Stockholm,” January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

threatened if Vietnam fell to Communist China: “But not one which could be satellized by China and thus transform the balance not only in Asia but in Africa. CHICOMS believe their present tactic will win, that the U.S., just as France, will yield.”<sup>479</sup>

In agreement with this opinion was Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba, who condemned Chinese Communists not only for intervening in Vietnam but also for humiliating India. President Bourguiba said: “It would be most grave if China were to prove that they can count on U.S. public opinion and the U.S. allies undermining U.S. determination.” Washington confirmed to Tunisia “A just and honorable peace, even if this involved greater sacrifice and use of greater measures. U.S. also determined that the peace, once obtained would not be dominated by Chinese.” Washington feared Chinese Communists as much as they had feared Hitler: “It was in fact a question not only of Vietnam or Southeast Asia but as with Hitler, a question of domination of the world, this time by Communists. This had been announced by Lin Piao as clearly as Hitler had done in *Mein Kampf*.” President Bourguiba expressed his support for Washington and said “he was convinced Chinese leaders are power-mad and had said so officially. U.S. must when necessary, resist its own allies.”<sup>480</sup>

On January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1966, U.S. officials met with Prime Minister of Bulgaria Todor Zhivkov. He “expressed appreciation for President Johnson’s initiative and informed him about the situation to seek his views.” The Bulgarian Prime Minister said that although he “cannot speak for the DRV GOVT [the DRV government], which is a victim of aggression, but saluted all steps and intentions which lead the way to peaceful solution.” The U.S. official indicated that the French Ambassador had said: “the DRV Ambassador is spreading word here that the American initiative is only a smoke screen and should not be believed.”<sup>481</sup>

Continuing his tour on January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1966, Governor Harriman met President of Kenyan Jomo Kenyatta at Mombasa for “an hour and a half talk.” Kenyatta expressed his support for President Johnson’s peace campaign and the Fourteen Point Position of the U.S. for settlement for South Vietnam. He believed in the seriousness of Johnson’s desire for peace. He said that the government of Kenya “recognized that the U.S. had

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<sup>479</sup> “From SECSTATE WASHDC, INFO WHITE HOUSE, Following from AMEBASSY Tunis,” January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> “From SECSTATE WASHDC to White House: Following from AMLEGATION Sofia sent action SECSTATE 399,” January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1966, signed David, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

commitments to SVN [South Vietnam] and was seeking an honorable peace from a position of strength. The stand down of bombing clearly indicates that the U.S. wants peace.” He confirmed that “most people of the world want peace and only lunatics want to solve problems by military means” and hoped that North Vietnam would respond positively. The president said that he would support the U.S. negotiation and planned a “GOK [Government of Kenya] mission departing for Moscow on January 4<sup>th</sup>” to talk with Russians and “find a way” to “directly” communicate with Hanoi. In the conversation with the Emperor of Kenya, Harriman also indicated that the U.S. had received huge support from the ICC (International Control Committee) and the governments of Poland and Algeria. The government of Algeria had “expressed its intention” to contact Hanoi to talk about the U.S. position in Vietnam.<sup>482</sup>

That same day, January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1966, U.S. officials told the President of Honduras Oswaldo López Arellano about President Johnson’s peace offensive and Lopez “was deeply grateful for this information.”<sup>483</sup> Those countries supported American policy in Vietnam because they were traditional American allies.

On January 4<sup>th</sup> 1966, a “Statement by Spokesman of the DRV Foreign Ministry on so-called peace efforts made recently by the United States” was broadcast in English on Hanoi VNA international service.<sup>484</sup> It condemned the U.S. peace initiative as “a large scale deceptive campaign.” Hanoi strongly criticized “the U.S. policy of aggression in Vietnam” and said that it did not accept the South Vietnamese government, calling them “the puppet regime.”<sup>485</sup> They made it clear that they did not believe in the honesty of the U.S. peace initiatives, pointing out: “The U.S. authorities talk about peace in complete contradiction with their war schemes and acts. While making a noise about its peace efforts, the United States is making feverish preparations to double the U.S. military strength in Vietnam.” The north Vietnamese leadership thought the main target of the U.S. peace initiative was not talking about peace but “a mere attempt to appease public opinion at home and abroad [...] to create a pretext for making new steps in implementation of its scheme to intensify and expand the war.” Hanoi was determined to protect the opinion that the South Vietnam

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<sup>482</sup> “From American Embassy Nairobi to Secretary of State Rusk,” January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>483</sup> “From AMAMBASSY Tegucigalpa to SECSTATE WASHDC,” January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>484</sup> Herring, *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War*, 131.

<sup>485</sup> Quoted in Ibid.

Government was not representative of the South Vietnamese people, therefore: “The U.S. government has no right to send troops to invade South Vietnam and to launch air attacks on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.” Consequently, Hanoi said that their condition for peace talks was the U.S. immediately end, not halt, its activities of war: “U.S. imperialist aggression is the deep root and the immediate cause of the serious situation now prevailing in Vietnam. By ending the aggression, peace will immediately be restored in this country.”<sup>486</sup> The message closed by praising the patriotism of its fighters and concluded:

So long as the U.S. imperialists still pursue the war of the aggression against Vietnam, still use U.S. and satellite troops to invade South Vietnam, and launch air attacks on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the people in both zones of Vietnam, fearing no sacrifices, will resolutely carry the resistance war through to the end and fulfill their sacred duty of defending the sovereignty of the fatherland and the independence of the nation and contributing to the defense of world peace.<sup>487</sup>

According to the report from the American embassy in Moscow on January 4<sup>th</sup> 1966, the negative comments on Johnson’s peace initiatives appeared in Paris media:

*Izvestiya*, Paris correspondent at *Volodin* quoted the Paris *Presse intransigeant*’s exegesis of De Gaulle’s end of year TV speech as ‘warning to America’ not to count on French backing for conflicts which France does not support. This particularly noteworthy, according Volodin, because it well know that this newspaper closely connected with French foreign policy circles and because this warning coincided with ‘lightening visit’ Goldberg to France. Entire U.S. effort, *Izvestiya* states, has evoked skeptical reaction both in France and other countries. Which, according *Le Monde*, believe this campaign has ‘more of an advertising than a practical character.’ *Le Monde* quoted further as stating there no doubt this U.S. effort will accomplish only an intensification of military action in Vietnam.<sup>488</sup>

This document shows the relationship between the Soviet Union and France in supporting North Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

Similarly, on January 5<sup>th</sup> 1966, the *Pravda New York correspondent* commented on the U.S. peace initiative as a propagandistic aim for American War’s escalation in Vietnam:

Noisy advertisement of so-called *peace offensive* is to show that President has not spared any effort to achieve peace and, in this manner, to prepare soil for greater U.S. efforts Vietnam. As additional evidence this thesis, *Pravda* cited alleged fact that defense stocks have not fallen as result peace offensive. Also

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<sup>486</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>488</sup> “From AMEBASSY Moscow to Secretary of State,” January 4<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.



asserted that primary purpose Vice President recent trip, especially in Seoul, was to convince host Governments to increase forces of 'interventionists' in South Vietnam. From all this Pravda correspondent concluded it understandable that press 'skeptical about trip of whole team Washington emissaries to various corners of world. Equally understandable are direct hints that all this resembles propagandistic preparation for new step in widening continuing aggression U.S. in Vietnam.'<sup>489</sup>

As further evidence of the American campaign, on January 5<sup>th</sup> 1966, American ambassador David D. Newsom met the Libyan Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmad Bishti to talk about how President Johnson was "seeking peace in Vietnam."<sup>490</sup> On January 5<sup>th</sup> 1966, Rusk sent instructions to Ambassador J. Graham Parsons for his next conversation with the Prime Minister of Sweden. The Secretary of State reaffirmed the U.S. sincerity in the peace initiative for protecting South Vietnam as an independent country through negotiations. He also urged Sweden to support the "South Vietnamese people to choose their government and their future."<sup>491</sup>

On January 6<sup>th</sup> 1966, Ambassador Kohler sent Rusk a message that the day before the Soviet newspaper *Izvestiya* had summarized the DRV Foreign Ministry Jan 4<sup>th</sup> 1966 Statement which was "most scornful of the treatment the U.S. peace offensive which has yet appeared Soviet Press as well as the first direct mention of the U.S. bombing pause which had previously only been hinted at." The Ambassador wrote: "*Izvestiya* reported TASS [the Soviet news agency] Hanoi item that a large group of U.S. planes had repeatedly encroached on DRV airspace 'with provative [provocative] aims' on January 3<sup>rd</sup>."<sup>492</sup>

On January 7<sup>th</sup> 1966, Harriman "had an hour meeting with Prime Minister Sato, Foreign Minister Shiina, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hashimoto and other officials." Harriman summarized the important events of President Johnson's peace initiative and afterwards, Prime Minister Sato said: "Indeed the U.S. peace offensive in the past few weeks has stimulated world public opinion. [...] The U.S. is succeeding in bringing the non-aligned countries to your side. You have given excitement and stimulation to the whole world." The Prime Minister then promised to make every effort to support

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<sup>489</sup> "From AMEBASSY Tripoli to SESTATE WASHDC," January 5<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>490</sup> "From AMEBASSY Moscow to SESTATE WASHDC," January 4<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>491</sup> "From SECSTATE WASHDC for Ambassador: please see the Prime Minister and make following comments to him about your recent conversation," January 5<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>492</sup> "From AMEBASSY Moscow to SESTATE WASHDC," January 6<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

the U.S. peace initiative. Sato said he would dispatch his officials to Moscow, Peking and Cairo to send peace messages to Vietnam from the U.S. Harriman then talked about the attitudes of other socialist countries he visited, which all wanted peace for Vietnam because “if Hanoi does not accept this opportunity, war might escalate and involve other Communist countries.”<sup>493</sup>

W. Averell Harriman had a discussion on the search for peace in Vietnam and U.S.-Chinese-Communist relations in Tokyo. He summarized the U.S. position on the settlement of South Vietnam, which convinced the leaders of Japan of the President’s position and without doubt to “his sincerity.” In his conversations with guests, some asked about the sincerity of President Johnson’s peace initiative. Harriman answered: “How could they think that the President of the United States would want to continue a jungle war in Southeast Asia? It was the only political issue causing the President trouble at home, with American youth fighting half way around the world.”<sup>494</sup> Former Foreign Minister Zentaro Kosaka of Japan raised the point that “some persons denounced the cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam as a plot, on the grounds that the U.S. is simultaneously strengthening its forces in South Vietnam and preparing for intensification of hostilities on the pretext of North Vietnam’s rejection of negotiations.” Harriman answered that North Vietnam was just as aggressive: “North Vietnam’s regular soldiers were killing Americans in South Vietnam and the situation was as much a case of direct aggression as the Korean War had been, although it took a less conspicuous form.” In the conversations in Tokyo, Harriman responded to the argument of Russian Premier Minister Kosygin that “the South Vietnamese government was an American puppet” to which he expressed his disagreement. Harriman compared Saigon to Paris during the Marshall Plan period, adding “and the government there had changed almost as often as that of Saigon.” He concluded that South Vietnam was in a period of transition as it awoke to the idea of democracy: “The South Vietnamese people were just coming to realize they could express their own political opinions. The great differences among various groups of them made it politically very difficult to get a government with full popular support.” Mr. Sugihara asked about the opinions of “the countries represented on the International Control Commission” on the settlement in South Vietnam. Harriman said

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<sup>493</sup> “From AMEBASSY Tokyo to SESTATE WASHDC,” January 7<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>494</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation, the Residence, Search for Peace in Vietnam; U.S./Chinese Communist Relations,” January 7<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

that he had “visited Poland and India and Mr. McGeorge Bundy had visited Canada” and that: “each had different relationships with Peking, Hanoi and Moscow and had offered to do in its own way what it thought useful.” He added: “The Soviet Union and the United Kingdom as co-chairmen of the 1954 Geneva Conference in a sense had senior authority on the International Control Commission. He felt sure that the United Kingdom was willing to work as part of a team if the USSR thought it useful, but there has been no agreement so far.” Mr. Katsumata asked what America thought about the news that Hanoi denounced the peace initiative as “a deceitful gesture.” Harriman replied that: “The U.S. attitude is to wait and see what happens and not to take the hard line so far as the final statement. We hoped that the other side would reverse its position from what the statements indicated.”<sup>495</sup> This Harriman’s discussion in Tokyo shows that Washington tried to prove its sincerity of desiring peace to gain supports of its allies such as Japan. Washington also understood that it was not easy to achieve peace in Vietnam because Hanoi gained supports of Peking and Soviet Union to fight until its triumph.

Raising the question of dissent, Harriman “recalled Hanoi and Peking had in the past said such things as the U.S. people would rise up against the government, demonstrations would force the President to change his position, and they hoped the U.S. people would regain their freedom.” Hanoi had seriously been applying that strategy in the Vietnam War and was succeeding to make the war unpopular among pacifists worldwide. At the time of Harriman’s conversation in Japan, Washington was still very determined to protect South Vietnam and American values, but facing rising domestic skepticism, so the Governor commented that Hanoi and Peking “had taken signs of dissenting opinion in the U.S. too seriously. The President, in fact, had overwhelming support for his actions.”<sup>496</sup> The Harriman’s discussion in Tokyo shows that America understood the role of media in Vietnam War and PINTA was an American campaign to win the supports for American policy rather than a serious peace talk initiative.

Answering a question about the National Liberation Front, Harriman said that: “We didn’t really know what Viet Cong looked like. They were people without faces.” In response to a question about the role of the National Liberation Front as a representative of the South Vietnamese people in the negotiations, the Governor said:

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<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

“There were problems involved and we had left our position somewhat open. We had said that we were ready to sit down with the government concerned, but we did not regard the National Liberation Front as a government. We made it clear that they could be part of the North Vietnam delegation or there were other ways for them to have their view heard.” In support of the American position, he added: “Kosygin had suggested a number of times that the U.S. negotiate certain points with North Vietnam but it had never suggested negotiating with the Viet Cong.” Mr. Shibuya asked about the possibility of total war between the U.S. and China, to which Harriman answered: “the U.S. had no intention of invading North Vietnam, but we didn’t know what Chinese Communists might do.” He recalled the true threat made by China: “The Chinese had spurred North Vietnam on and had made vicious statements about what they would do to Americans if they landed on Chinese soil.” Although Harriman did not see that the Chinese “demonstrated interest in taking action,” the Governor said it was dangerous if the Chinese should send “volunteers to North Vietnam” and “he could not say what U.S. reaction would be.” Mr. Takita asked: “Would it not be useful to bring the Chinese Communists into an open forum and subject them to the force of the world?” However, Ambassador Edwin O. Reischauer was afraid that the Chinese would not join the UN. The Ambassador commented that: “the extreme conditions that they had been posing recently, such as demanding that the United Nations reverse its action calling them and the North Korean aggressors in the Korean war, suggested that they were not, in fact, very eager to join at the present time.”<sup>497</sup> The document shows that not only America but also many Japanese feared the Chinese efforts in increasing of its influences in Asia. However it was really hard to prevent it because PRC was reluctant to become a member of the UN to solve the Vietnam problem. China and its ally the North Koreans were determined to protect their own powers in the area. Governor Harriman feared that Chinese Communism could expand not only in Asia but also in the rest of the world. Harriman expanded on their deepest fears about Red China, stating:

The U.S. felt that Vietnam was a test of the Communist Chinese policy of exporting revolution. We were defending the principle that one country cannot be allowed to impose its will on another by armed force. We took literally Lin Piao’s statement that the tactics used in Vietnam were the model for the rest of the world. The Communists were actually trying to use the same tactics in

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<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

seven Latin American countries. If the tactics succeeded in Vietnam, they would be applied elsewhere.<sup>498</sup>

He finally expressed the American determination to stay in Vietnam: “The U.S. would not pull out, because this principle was at stake, and they could not force us out.”<sup>499</sup> Harriman’s speech emphasized the reason the U.S. involvement in Vietnam was to prevent the influences of Chinese Communists in the world.

On January 9<sup>th</sup> 1966, in a conversation with Libyan Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmad Bishti, Ambassador Newsom emphasized the difficulty with the Vietnam situation in President Johnson’s effort for peace. Newsom said that the U.S. fear of the Viet Cong was a of a great and unprecedented kind of enemy: “Viet Cong was a small, although vocal minority, that as a political grouping, was actively encouraged and heavily supported from the outside. The VC [Viet Cong] controls people and it does so only by means of terror. [...] No significant anti-government group has ever joined forces with the VC.” The Ambassador added that the U.S. urged other nations to support the U.S. in defending South Vietnam from the Communists because the situation in Vietnam affected the world peace. Bishti “indicated the GOL [Government of Libya] strongly welcomes U.S. peace moves and hopes current efforts will bear fruit.”<sup>500</sup>

On January 10<sup>th</sup> 1966, Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Jozef Winiewicz visited with the Foreign Minister of Sweden Torsten Nilsson in Stockholm. The Swede “listened most attentively” and “was impressed” at the “sincerity of the President’s efforts for peace in Vietnam.” In the conversation, Winiewicz “told that in response to Harriman’s presentation, the Poles counseled for U.S. peace offensive first, no ultimatum second, Patience third, total discretion.” The Vice Minister added: “the U.S. actions the last ten years had ‘pierced the barrier of trust.’” He warned that the “Communists are now dominated by latter” Viet Cong (NLF) and the “U.S. underestimates the extent of their popular support of Viet Cong.” According to the Swedish records, “Pole [Poland] took the initiative in attacking peace moves as

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<sup>498</sup> Ibid.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

<sup>500</sup> “From AMEBASSY Tripoli to SESTATE WASHDC,” January 11<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

valueless and insincere.” However Sweden defended the peace initiative as “sincere” and a “serious political move.”<sup>501</sup>

By January 12<sup>th</sup> 1966, the possibility of Hanoi’s accepting to talk was so limited that Washington thought about “convening the Security Council on Vietnam in event of peace offensive”, regarding which Washington asked London. “Jackling (UK) said that London was reacting negatively to the idea.” However, they “saw real benefits in keeping steady pressure on Hanoi for NEGOS [negotiations] after failure of peace offensive and renewal of full scale hostilities.”<sup>502</sup>

More from the Socialist side of responses came on January 13<sup>th</sup> 1966, when Vice President Hubert Humphrey and Secretary of State Dean Rusk accompanied by Ambassador Chester Bliss Bowles had “an hour and half” talk with Soviet Premier Kosygin. According to Rusk, the Russian was not interested in talking about the Vietnam problem: “he did not go into any details about the specific points of settlement. He made it clear that he had no mandate from Hanoi, that he did not represent Hanoi, and that he was not messenger for Hanoi or for us.” The premier criticized American policy in escalating the war in Vietnam and expressed that “this was an indigenous Vietnamese affair” and both the Soviet Union and U.S. “should stay out of it.” Kosygin compared Vietnam to Korea and Germany as “divided states.” Furthermore, he considered it too dangerous to use force to solve problem: “the attempt to use force in any of these nations divided across demarcation lines was just as serious a threat to the peace as aggression across established national frontiers.” Premier Kosygin condemned the U.S. peace campaign as “an ultimatum” because the U.S. did not have any right to be in Vietnam.<sup>503</sup> Rusk seemed angry and expressed himself “frankly” to the Premier:

The Governments of the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania and others have been telling US for months that there was no possibility of taking steps towards peace while the bombs were falling in the North. I recounted that we had asked for months for some hint or indication or suggestion of what would happen if we stopped the bombing but had received no answer at all except that Gromyko had said ‘stop and see,’ and that Hungary

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<sup>501</sup> “From AMEMBASSY Stockholm to SECSTATE,” January 14<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>502</sup> “From USUN New York to SECSTATE WASHDC,” January 12<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>503</sup> “Eyes only for President and acting secretary from Secretary,” January 13<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

had said, with Soviet knowledge, that they were convinced that ‘something good’ would happen.<sup>504</sup>

He also blamed Hanoi for “continuing to infiltrate and [Hanoi] could count [upon] the considerable numbers of trucks moving the South.”<sup>505</sup> The Soviet delegation was in Vietnam in January 1966, “headed by Alexander Shelepin, a member of the Soviet Politburo and Secretary of the Central Committee.”<sup>506</sup> The Secretary said that the Premier did not give any indication of or any information about Shelepin’s trip to Vietnam. At discussion in Tashkent with President of Pakistan Muhammad Ayub Khan, Kosygin said that the USSR would “increase support efforts to match those of the US in South Vietnam and will [would] do everything possible to aid North Vietnam.”<sup>507</sup> This shows that the Soviet Union was determined to support North Vietnam. The Vietnam War was not a local war, but an international war and a complicated one.

Contrary to this kind of discussion, the Prime Minister of Australia Menzies totally supported the American policy in Vietnam:

Menzies stated that Harriman visit timely, useful and handled just right. He and the cabinet majority approved completely the present U.S. policies not to take dangerous action in NVN but urged maximum pressure to smash VC in South even at cost of more casualties. He approves of the pause and hopes it will be played to get maximum benefit of the world opinion. He asked Harriman to report to President Australia in order to move toward greater troop contribution, but the commitment must await talks with Healey in Canberra [at the end of] end January.<sup>508</sup>

On January 13<sup>th</sup> 1966, Harriman talked with the Prime Minister of Laos Souvanna Phouma about the progress of the U.S. peace efforts. “Souvanna agreed on the necessity to continue to press Hanoi for negotiations but felt the CHICOMS would make every effort to frustrate political settlement. He felt the CHICOMS must be stopped before they develop an effective nuclear force. He said the Liberation Front helped get its grip on people by ‘authority of fear.’”<sup>509</sup> Souvanna talked about the trip

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<sup>504</sup> Ibid.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid.

<sup>506</sup> Ilya V. Gaiduck, “Peacemaking or troubleshooting? The Soviet Role in Peace Initiatives during the Vietnam War,” in *The Search for Peace in Vietnam*, ed. Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger (Texas A&M University Press), 268.

<sup>507</sup> “US Vietnam Peace initiative discussion at Tashkent,” January 13<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>508</sup> “From AMEBASSY New Delhi to SECSTATE WASHDC,” January 12<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

of the Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry of Poland Jerzy Michalowski to Hanoi. Michalowski had afterwards “made two points: that Hanoi considered the ‘peace offensive’ as an ultimatum to accept the US position or be belted; and it would be ‘useful’ for US to accept the ‘principle’ of the DRV’s Four Points as means of opening discussion.”<sup>510</sup>

President of Egypt Nasser also expressed support for the U.S. peace initiative: “Nasser had informed the GOE [Government of Egypt] he was pursuing the matter with Moscow and Hanoi directly and wanted support.”<sup>511</sup>

On January 14<sup>th</sup> 1966, Ambassador Goldberg and Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin had a conversation about Vietnam in a private dinner at Washington. Ambassador Dobrynin “privately thought” President Johnson’s peace offensive was good.<sup>512</sup> Ambassador Dobrynin indicated that in Premier Kosygin eyes, “Hanoi was not a puppet of the CHICOMS.”<sup>513</sup> In this conversation, Dobrynin emphasized that the Soviet Union’s decision on Vietnam depended on Hanoi’s attitude: “About SC [Security Council] meeting on Vietnam if the present peace offensive fails, Dobrynin said SOV [Soviet] attitude would be determined by Hanoi’s reaction. He added if leaders in Hanoi were unresponsive to peace initiative they would undoubtedly oppose the UN SC consideration of Vietnam and in that event SOVS [the Soviets] would vigorously oppose the U.S. in SC on this issue.”<sup>514</sup> In the split between the China and Soviet Union, Russia did not want to risk to losing Vietnam.

On January 15<sup>th</sup> 1966, Dean Rusk met Prime Minister Ky and Foreign Minister Do in Saigon. They had a U.S.-South Vietnam joint communiqué.<sup>515</sup> Ky stated that South Vietnam had been an independent country for 20 years and the Vietnamese people had struggled against the Communists for two decades: “The Vietnamese people, like their government, appeal with their whole voice for the reestablishment of peace in Vietnam which they have not known for 20 years, their country having for two decades been the object of devastation of subversive war, including atrocities and terrorist acts deliberately perpetrated by the Communist aggressors.”<sup>516</sup> The Prime Minister

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<sup>510</sup> Ibid.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid.

<sup>512</sup> “From USUN New York to SECSTATE WASHDC,” January 15<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

<sup>515</sup> “David Dean Rusk,” <https://history.state.gov/departments/history/travels/secretary/rusk-david-dean>.

<sup>516</sup> “U.S.– South Vietnam joint communiqué,” Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.



expressed his determination to fight for South Vietnam's independence and liberty from "Communist imperialists."<sup>517</sup> He stated:

The people of Vietnam will not and cannot accept peace which would fail to take account of their profound aspirations for independence and liberty. The sufferings that they have endured and the sacrifices that they have accepted create a duty to reject any solution which would be contrary to aspirations that they have many times expressed during their long and bloody fight against Communist imperialists.<sup>518</sup>

The communiqué blamed the "Communist aggression" for violating the Geneva Accord and starting the war in Vietnam. It asked Hanoi to withdraw troops and other "all puppet organizations" including the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam from South Vietnam and let the South Vietnamese "choose and shape of itself its own destiny." Moreover, the communiqué stated: "Only when aggression has ceased, and only then, it will be possible for the Government of Republic of Vietnam and for nations which provide it with assistance, to withhold defensive military measures on the territory of South Vietnam and outside its borders." The communiqué finished by saying: "finally, the independence and liberty of the Vietnamese people must be effectively guaranteed."<sup>519</sup>

In the mission in Moscow on January 17<sup>th</sup> 1966, the government of Kenya did not talk about the Vietnam problem with the Russians because "aid terms went so badly." The Russians told that the "Chinese opposition to negotiation was for the time being an insuperable obstacle." The relationship between the Soviet Union and China was so bad that the Minister of Agriculture Mckenzie added, "he never before heard so much outspoken and gratuitous criticism of the Chinese on part of all Russians they met." Minister of Economics, Planning, and Development of Kenya Mboya talked with Ambassador Addwood, according to Soviet diplomat Malik, that Malik "appeared definitely in favor of ending the war but said Russians were not convinced USG's [U.S. government] 'peace offensive' sincere and emphasized the difficulty of forcing North Vietnam to negotiation."<sup>520</sup> Furthermore, he said that: "the U.S. has consulted closely with GVN through this period of peace efforts. GVN attitude toward the

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<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

<sup>520</sup> "From American Embassy Nairobi to Secretary of State Rusk," January 17<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

‘pause’ and US attempts determine the attitude of the DRV toward possible peaceful resolution of conflict has been cooperative throughout.”<sup>521</sup>

On January 20<sup>th</sup> in Rangoon, “Byroade received the last word from the DRV Charge.”<sup>522</sup> On January 24<sup>th</sup> 1966, the DRV Charge D’affaires Le Chang met Ambassador Kohler at the North Vietnam Embassy in Moscow, where the official stated in Russian that Prime Minister Pham Van Dong’s Four Points and other published DRV positions on settlement in South Vietnam was “unchanged.”<sup>523</sup> The DRV Charge D’affaires Le Chang said that North Vietnam knew “the contents of the Fourteen Points summarizing the United States position, from Goldberg letter January 4<sup>th</sup> to U Thant and the president’s State of the Union message,” but North Vietnam refused the proposal for peace because it “alleged with DRV aggression.”<sup>524</sup> Next, Ambassador Byroade went to the North Vietnamese Embassy in Moscow with American official Alexander Akalovsky (interpreting). On January 25<sup>th</sup>, in a conversation with the U.S. official, Undersecretary of State Belfrage said: “the U.S., the USSR, even perhaps Ho Chi Minh himself in Hanoi, and virtually all other governments wanted peace and therefore the situation tragic.”<sup>525</sup> They wanted peace but they feared the attacks from their rivals. The U.S. official said that:

While I could not RPT [reply] not of course know what Ho Chi Minh or others in Hanoi might feel, it did seem to me that those who resisted NEGOTS for peace might be drawing false conclusions from those who had criticized U.S. bombing and even bombing cessation as maneuver. Just as they might also draw false hopes from a minority in the U.S. itself who criticized our actions.<sup>526</sup>

And “Belfrage agreed perhaps this was so.”<sup>527</sup> On January 26<sup>th</sup> 1966, the British Ambassador said he understood that Ambassador Kohler had met with the DRV representative in Moscow, which Kohler confirmed and said the North Vietnam government had answered negatively.<sup>528</sup>

On January 27<sup>th</sup> 1966, President Lopez of Honduras expressed his sympathy with President Johnson’s decision to “again increase pressures on the North Vietnamese” to

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<sup>521</sup> “Department of State telegram, AMEMBASSY Saigon,” January 17<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>522</sup> “From Moscow to Secretary of State,” January 25<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>523</sup> “From Moscow to Secretary of State,” January 24<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

<sup>525</sup> “From AMEMBASSY Stockholm to SECSTATE WASHDC,” January 26<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

<sup>528</sup> “From Moscow to Secretary of State,” January 26<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

fight against Communists for freedom of South Vietnam and peace of the world." Lopez supported Johnson's decision to resume bombing: "As a military man, however, he recognizes clearly that U.S. cannot endanger its forces and those of its allies by permitting the North Vietnamese to take advantage of this situation for a prolonged buildup of their strength." The Honduran president stood by President Johnson's determination to stay in South Vietnam and fight: "Not only was U.S. prestige at stake but also its solemn commitments to a friendly government and its position in the global fight against Communism."<sup>529</sup>

According to the report from Kohler, the American ambassador in Moscow to Secretary of State Rusk on January 29<sup>th</sup> 1965, "the DRV charge called on the UK Ambassador Harrison this morning [December 29<sup>th</sup> 1965] to convey a propagandistic message from Ho Chi Minh to the Queen which Harrison refused to accept without instructions. The UK Embassy has cabled to resume conversation to the British Embassy with Washington which has instructions to make available to Dept. immediately."<sup>530</sup> President Ho Chi Minh tried to send a message to the Queen of the UK, but the UK Ambassador Harrison did not receive the letter immediately and waited for the instruction from the U.S.<sup>531</sup> Afterwards, "the NVN Charge returned to the UK Embassy noon today (January 30<sup>th</sup> 1965) and handed over English language message which British Ambassador had been authorized receive. Charge insisted English language version authoritative. Some debate ensued over English wording 'USA... should accept position of DRV.'"<sup>532</sup> This document shows North Vietnam privately replied to the U.S. through the UK Embassy in Moscow.

Prime Minister Indira Priyadarshini Gandhi shared her views on searching for peace in Vietnam with Ambassador Bowles on January 31<sup>st</sup> 1966 after considering the letter of President Johnson. She sympathized with the U.S. and worried about Chinese expansionism: "China would like to extend the war and has bludgeoned the North Vietnamese into following their line." Gandhi thought that the Soviet Union "had honestly tried to counter this Chinese influence but had been late in getting started and hence had failed. For obvious reason they were now reluctant to admit their failure."

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<sup>529</sup> "From AMEBASSY Tegucigalpa to Secretary of State," January 27<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>530</sup> "From Kohler-American Embassy Moscow to Secretary of State Rusk," December 29<sup>th</sup> 1965, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

<sup>532</sup> "From Kohler-American Embassy Moscow to Secretary of State Rusk," December 30<sup>th</sup> 1965, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

She believed in Johnson's genuine desire for peace and said "she had done everything she could think of to open" a channel with President Ho Chi Minh but had not succeeded because "the North Vietnam representative here is a junior person."<sup>533</sup> In reality, the Government of India had "pressed the Soviets at the highest levels to use their influence to soften the uncompromising attitude of Hanoi" but had not succeeded.<sup>534</sup>

Late at night on January 31<sup>st</sup> 1966 in Rangoon, Ambassador Byroade received the statement dated Jan 4 by the spokesman of DRV Foreign Ministry on PINTA from the DRV Representative. In the statement, the DRV condemned the U.S. peace efforts as "trick." In the statement, Hanoi condemned that "recently the U.S. Government has started a large scale deceptive peace campaign coupled with the trick of 'temporary suspension of air attacks' on North Vietnam as a sign of 'good will.'"<sup>535</sup> The DRV also expressed Vietnam's continuing determination to fight for national independence and unification:

So long as the U.S. imperialists still pursue the war of aggression against Vietnam, still use U.S. and satellite troops to invade South Vietnam, and launch air attacks on the DRV, the people in both zones of Vietnam, fearing no sacrifices, will resolutely carry the resistance war through to the end and fulfill their sacred duty of defending the sovereignty of the fatherland and the independence of the nation and contribution to the defense of world peace.<sup>536</sup>

On February 8<sup>th</sup> 1966, South Vietnamese Consul General Duc agreed to meet an American official at the American embassy in Rangoon while Ambassador Byroade was in Bangkok. However, the American official Donald Louis Ranard refused because he "took the line previously agreed on with Ambassador Byroade that all embassies had strict instructions not to comment on any channels of communication with North Vietnam."<sup>537</sup>

On February 10<sup>th</sup> 1966, President de Gaulle sent a letter to Ho Chi Minh in response to his letter of January 24<sup>th</sup> 1966:

[...] a better understanding between the Vietnamese and the French following the World War would have prevented the tragic events that are rending your

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<sup>533</sup> "From AMEBASSY New Delhi to SCSTATE WASHDC," January 31<sup>st</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>534</sup> "From AMEBASSY New Delhi to SCSTATE WASHDC," January 26<sup>th</sup> 1966, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>535</sup> "The following TEL sent action immediate SECSTATE 393," January 31 From Rangoon, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid.

<sup>537</sup> "Following sent action SECSTATE Priority 411 from Rangoon," February 8<sup>th</sup> 1966, Signed Ranard, Box 149, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

country sunder. That is to say, its desire to have the right influence in hastening the end of the conflict and actively participating in its settlement as soon as that appears possible. That is to say, also, that, to the end, France is prepared to maintain with your government whatever contacts may be useful.<sup>538</sup>

During the PINTA peace initiative, Ho Chi Minh's government took this opportunity to make efforts to contact Western countries such as the UK and France to support North Vietnam for the future negotiation for peace in Vietnam. The French medias broadcasted the North Vietnam's condemnation of American scheme behind the peace initiative was the efforts to preparing for increasing military involvement in Vietnam. From the other side, the U.S. opened the PINTA initiative to gain the international support for American policies in Vietnam as well as to have a reason for escalation of the Vietnam War.

## 6.2 Why Vietnam Refused to Talk

The *Nhan Dan* newspaper published General Vo Nguyen Giap's article: "Vietnamese people's solidarity escalates the great patriotic struggle and determinedness to win an anti-American invasion war" as a three-part serial from January 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> in 1966.<sup>539</sup> The article gives a detailed account of the two main reasons the Vietnamese leader refused to talk with Americans during the PINTA campaign. The first reason, which was widely known at the time, was that the DRV leaders considered PINTA a "large scale, deceptive, peace campaign."<sup>540</sup> The second reason was that they believed that they would ultimately triumph, regardless of a peace settlement. Their belief in their strategy to win a long patriotic people's war, gave them no incentive to negotiate with American representatives.

In his article, Giap analyzed the motivation behind the American peace initiative. He condemned the U.S. government for starting, what he referred to as "a large-scale deceptive peace campaign designed to prepare for a new military escalation."<sup>541</sup> The general asserted that the U.S. peace efforts "are also an attempt to appease public

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<sup>538</sup> "Text of de Gaulle letter to Ho Chi Minh dated February 8 which passed Embassy on highly personal and confidential basis," Box 146, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>539</sup> General Vo Nguyen Giap (1911- 2013), the first Vietnamese four-star general, the Minister of National Defense and the Commander in Chief of the Vietnam Army. Before becoming a legendary general, he was a history teacher. *Nhan Dan* is a Daily newspaper -The official voice of the Lao Dong Party (Communist Party of Vietnam).

<sup>540</sup> Vo Nguyen Giap, "Vietnamese people's solidarity escalates the great patriotic struggle and determinedness to win an anti-American invasion war," in *Nhan Dan* newspaper, January 16-18, 1966 in *General Vo Nguyen Giap and the Resistance War Against America Imperialism for National Salvation*, (Hanoi: People Military Publisher, 2005, 92) (my own translation).

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

opinion at home and abroad, an opinion which is strongly opposed to the U.S. policy of aggression in Vietnam.” To support the argument that PINTA was a large-scale deception, General Giap analyzed the new situation that were facing the Vietnamese people. He wrote about the war’s escalation in 1965 and America’s armed aggression in South Vietnam, their aerial bombardment against the DRV, the heinous crimes committed against the South Vietnamese people, and the renewed bombing in the North.<sup>542</sup>

Giap believed that although America had initiated the peace initiative, they were still determined to protect South Vietnam with the goal of permanently dividing Vietnam: “The U.S. imperialist schemes remain unchanged. They continue to cling to South Vietnam and perpetuate the partition of Vietnam. They refuse to recognize the South Vietnamese National Front for Liberation, the sole genuine representative of the people of South Vietnam, and the leader of the struggle against the U.S. imperialists’ war of aggression.”<sup>543</sup> In addition, General Giap pointed out that the U.S. continued to try to negotiate from a position of strength “the United States still brazenly gives itself the right to launch air attacks on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, an independent and sovereign country [...] The real purpose of the unconditional negotiation is to force the Vietnamese people to accept U.S. terms.”<sup>544</sup>

Giap had a strong belief that the Vietnamese people would ultimately triumph in the war against America. He pointed out that because the American war in Vietnam was unjust, this had caused the U.S. a lot of intrinsic conflicts for their government domestically and internationally, which would eventually result in their defeat. In contrast, he viewed Vietnam’s war for liberation as a just war. He argued that because the Vietnamese were fighting a people’s war for national liberation, their strategy of a long war of resistance war would favor Vietnam.<sup>545</sup>

General Vo Nguyen Giap further analyzed U.S. and Vietnamese advantages and disadvantages in the war. He pointed out five major disadvantages to the U.S. military’s position. First, the more they chose to escalate the war, the more U.S. troops would be in Vietnam, causing a myriad of problems for domestic politics due to their war-weary public. The more hostile the U.S. and their supporters made themselves to the Vietnamese, the more they would be hated by them and motivate the Vietnamese

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<sup>542</sup> Ibid.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid., 96.

to fight. Secondly, although the U.S. brought greater numbers of troops to battle, the DRV continued to gain more people and more territory. Therefore the U.S. would easily become bogged down in a standoff and would have no choice but to leave. Third, because of the unjust nature of the war, American soldiers were fighting in low spirits and without conviction. They were fighting in Vietnam under rough and unfamiliar weather conditions and tropical diseases. Fourth, South Vietnam was now weak and tired of war. Fifth, the anti-war protest movement against the U.S. was increasing all over the world.<sup>546</sup> General Giap strongly believed that the U.S. would be defeated in Vietnam because of a combination of these disadvantages.

Conversely, according to Giap, the Vietnamese people had four basic advantages in the war. First, Vietnam had an advanced revolutionary strategy under the leadership of the Lao Dong Party. The strategy relied heavily on psychology and defined the war as a just war, for national independence and territorial unity against America's aggression. Second, he asserted that Vietnam had a strong sense of societal solidarity and unity in their determination to fight against the U.S.: "The Vietnamese would rather sacrifice everything than become enslaved."<sup>547</sup> He emphasized that even as the U.S. increased troops in South Vietnam by the thousands, the Vietnamese army and people were still strongly determined to defeat the Americans and allied forces to win the war and reunify their country. Third, Vietnam had used the strategy of a people's war as well as the strategy of total war with the slogan: "Mobilize the entire people, arm the entire people, and fight enemies on every front."<sup>548</sup> The strategy of a people's war was applied simultaneously in both North and South Vietnam. Fourth, the Vietnamese people had the support of the brotherhood of other socialist countries, as well as support from peace-lovers all over the world including the anti-war protesters in America. Therefore, General Giap had a strong belief that Vietnam would triumph with the help of those four assets.<sup>549</sup>

After reviewing the balance of strength between the two sides (Vietnam and the U.S.), Giap concluded that the Vietnamese people would beat the America imperialists regardless of the situation. With his strong belief in the eventual victory for Vietnam, and his analysis of America's PINTA initiative, the General pointed out that this was merely another U.S. plot that could not fool the Vietnamese people and the peace-

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<sup>546</sup> Ibid., 97-98.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid., 99-103.

lovers of the world, “no matter what sophisms the U.S. authorities may resort to in their attempt to cover up their aggressive schemes.”<sup>550</sup>

In conclusion, General Giap’s article condemns the U.S. peace offensive PINTA as a “trick” to fulfill their scheme of an escalation in South Vietnam. This suspicion explains why Hanoi felt it could not enter into talks with the U.S. during the 37-day bombing pause in the PINTA period (December 1965-January 1966). The article also shows once again to what degree the Vietnamese considered the war a patriotic war for national salvation. Giap’s pride in their struggle and his determination that the Vietnamese would fight until they had achieved victory is prevalent throughout the newspaper piece.

This view contrasts strongly with the accounts of American officials and of the Republic of Vietnam at the time. The U.S. and the Republic of Vietnam governments considered the war in the context of the Cold War, a war against Communism, and a war for protecting the world’s freedom. Both sides believed they were fighting for a just cause, but from different angles. They both desired peace, but also wanted to express their courage, prestige and struggle against a seemingly tyrannical power. As a result, Washington was reluctant to accept Hanoi’s conditions to enter the talks, while Hanoi was reluctant because they believed America was still determined to invade Vietnam. This was the underlying cause of the failure of PINTA. General Giap’s article expresses the belief and attitude of the DRV leaders and the Vietnamese people towards the war in 1965-1966. To understand the decision of the Lao Dong Party in refusing talks during the 37-day pause, the next section will analyze the official position as expressed in the 12<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the Party’s Central Committee that took place during the PINTA peace offensive.

During the time of the PINTA peace initiative, the Lao Dong Party Central Committee had an important meeting from December 21<sup>st</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> 1965. Before North Vietnamese leaders such as Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and President Ho Chi Minh discussed the PINTA peace initiative with international leaders, the Lao Dong Party Central Committee had to determine their war strategy. In his policy speech at the 12<sup>th</sup> Plenum, Vietnamese Communist Party First Secretary Le Duan summarized North Vietnam’s negotiation strategy, including the conditions under which talks between the two sides might first begin. After briefing the Committee on lessons from

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<sup>550</sup> Ibid., 104.



the history of Vietnamese diplomacy, Secretary Le Duan confirmed that modern fighting against the U.S. would use the strategy of force and diplomacy. However, he stressed that the way to combine the force and diplomacy would depend on the overall strategy of war and on the specific situation: “the question of fighting and then talking—fighting until we win and then talking—or of fighting and talking at the same time is a matter involving the correct stratagem.”<sup>551</sup> This stratagem, which Le Duan indicated, was in tandem with the overall strategy of a people’s war, a protracted war, and a commitment to fight until the final victory.

The meeting occurred at the time of the PINTA peace initiative and Secretary Le Duan took the opportunity to express his views on PINTA. He thought that the real objective of the U.S. peace initiative was to force the DRV to make concessions and to plan for an escalation: “currently, the American imperialists are still planning to intensify and expand the war in order to recover from their current situation, which is one of defeat and stalemate. However, they are also eager for us to sit down with them at the negotiating table so that they can force us to make concessions.” He asserted that the DRV would not agree to begin talks because, at that time, the DRV position was not strong enough to win at the negotiating table: “As for our side, we believe we cannot sit down at the table until we have broken the puppet army and crushed the American imperialist’s aggressive will.”<sup>552</sup> Those were the main reasons why Secretary Le Duan and his comrades refused to negotiate as the U.S. suggested during the 37-day bombing pause. They only agreed to talk when they knew the American “aggressive will” had faded.<sup>553</sup>

Le Duan had a good understanding of the power of a diplomatic front and public opinion. The Secretary stressed that the DRV needed to express their good intentions and peaceful nature to gain support for their struggle: “we must present our concept in a very skillful manner in order to illuminate our good will, to win more widespread sympathy from the peace-loving governments and the peace-loving peoples of the world.” He said the DRV needed to use various methods “to incite the anti-war struggle conducted by the American people, to expose the phony and deceitful peace

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<sup>551</sup> “Lê Duẩn’s speech at 12<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the Party Central Committee” (December 21<sup>st</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>1965), <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113970>.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid.

<sup>553</sup> “Nghị Quyết 12 của ban chấp hành Trung Ương Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam” [The Resolution of 12<sup>th</sup> Plenum of Politburo of Lao Dong Party], 21<sup>st</sup> -27<sup>th</sup> December 1965 (my own translation), [http://dangcongsan.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co\\_id=30577&cn\\_id=175468](http://dangcongsan.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co_id=30577&cn_id=175468).

campaign of the American imperialists.”<sup>554</sup> This could explain why the DRV did not talk with the U.S., but also why the DRV did not refuse the call for peace outright. Instead the DRV delayed responding and hinted at their willingness to talk.

Secretary Le Duan stated that the specific conditions under which they could begin talking was once their forces “have won greater and more complete victories on the battlefield, when the enemy’s situation has become more desperate and confused, and when the enemy’s will to commit aggression has deteriorated further.”<sup>555</sup> In 1965, the DRV was not yet strong enough, and the U.S. was not weak enough, to meet those conditions, so the DRV would not respond to the PINTA peace initiative regardless of whether the U.S. peace offensive offered a real or false desire for peace.

After some days of discussion and debate, the 12<sup>th</sup> Plenum meeting came to some conclusions about diplomatic activities. The Resolution of the Plenum confirmed that in that period (1965-1966), the DRV’s diplomatic activities would focus on the goal of winning the sympathy and support of peace-loving people worldwide. To fulfill that objective, the DRV leaders suggested strengthening their international diplomatic front against the horrors of the U.S., and continuing to support the Vietnamese people. The 12<sup>th</sup> Plenum emphasized that establishing an international front was a “very important issue” for the resistance war against the U.S. and that the DRV would need to “use military strength, political strength and diplomatic strength simultaneously” to achieve Vietnamese peace and independence.<sup>556</sup>

Ultimately, during period of 1965-1966, the Lao Dong Party decided not to enter into peace talks for a variety of reasons. The Resolution of the 12<sup>th</sup> Plenum emphasized that: “currently there is no favorable opportunity for a political solution to solve the Vietnam problem.” The Resolution concluded that: “We will only come to talks and solve the Vietnam problem when the enemy’s aggressive will has deteriorated and when our goals of peace, independence, democracy, and a neutral South Vietnam have been achieved.” They wanted to continue the strategy of a people’s war that would continue until victory: “The whole party, each soldier and all peoples in both North and South Vietnam have to keep the will and determination to fight against America for national salvation; keep the determination to defeat

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<sup>554</sup> Lê Duẩn’s speech at 12<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the Party Central Committee.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid.

<sup>556</sup> Nghị Quyết 12 của ban chấp hành Trung Ương Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam, The Resolution of 12<sup>th</sup> Plenum of Politburo of Lao Dong Party, 21<sup>st</sup> -27<sup>th</sup> December 1965 (my own translation), [http://dangcongsan.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co\\_id=30577&cn\\_id=175468](http://dangcongsan.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co_id=30577&cn_id=175468).

America's aggressive war; keep the determination to fight until we triumph." For the Vietnamese, victory meant not only a military victory and the winning battles, but also defeating America's "aggressive will" and the withdrawal of all their troops. The 12<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the Lao Dong Party emphasized that if these objectives were reached, Vietnam would gain independence, democracy, peace, neutrality, and national unification.<sup>557</sup>

The 12<sup>th</sup> Resolution of the Lao Dong Party was an important foothold on the path of the Vietnamese revolution. It affected other important decisions of the war, especially the timing of when Hanoi would eventually choose to come to the negotiating table. Hanoi would negotiate only when they found that America's will to continue the war was defeated. From 1965 to 1967, many peace initiatives took place, but Hanoi saw that the U.S. still assumed a position of strength and supremacy so Hanoi did not respond. Since the 12<sup>th</sup> Resolution (December 1965), the leaders of Hanoi and the NLF continued to call for determination to fight the invaders, to defend the North, and to liberate the South to achieve an independent and unified Vietnam. The leaders expressed their firm attitude towards negotiation by firmly requiring their conditions be met: the U.S forces must definitively and unconditionally stop the bombing raids and all other acts of war against the DRV.

After Vietnam's national unification, General Van Tien Dung assessed that undertaking the strategy of war in the 12<sup>th</sup> Resolution was "exclusively the right strategy" for the whole Vietnamese revolution. He emphasized that it was a "historic decision [...] from the beautiful traditional culture of Vietnam with 4000 years of history. It was a crystallization of the will, the intellect and the creativity of the Vietnamese people. It created a new epic story of Vietnamese people in 20<sup>th</sup> century, and leaves these heroic stories for their descendants."<sup>558</sup> General Dung linked the Vietnam War against the U.S. to Vietnam's long history of their many battles against imperial and colonial forces, indicating the power such a nationalist narrative held. The Resolution of the 12<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the Lao Dong Party in December 1965 marked a

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<sup>557</sup> Ibid.

<sup>558</sup> Van Tien Dung, *Buoc ngoat lon cua cuoc khang chien chong My cuu nuoc* [The big turning points of the resistance against America for national salvation] (Hanoi: The true publisher, 1989), Chapter 2 (my own translation), <http://www.vnmilitaryhistory.net/index.php/topic,1085.20.html>. Van Tien Dung, Vietnamese general in the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), PAVN chief of staff (1954- 1974), PAVN commander in chief (1974-1980) and Socialist Republic of Vietnam Defense Minister (1980- 1986).

turning point for the Vietnamese revolution. According to General Dung, it opened a new era of the Vietnamese revolution.

## CHAPTER 7. NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN VIETNAM AND THE UNITED STATES 1966-1967

### 7.1 De Gaulle's 1966 Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War: the Sainteny Mission

On February 24<sup>th</sup> 1966, at the Elysée Palace, President de Gaulle met with fellow French politician Jean Sainteny to ask him to visit Hanoi and investigate the possibilities of a peace settlement for Vietnam.<sup>559</sup> Later that year on June 13<sup>th</sup>, Henry Kissinger met with Sainteny in Paris to talk about the French leader's upcoming trip to Hanoi.<sup>560</sup> During their discussion, Kissinger said that the U.S. would withdraw from Vietnam if there were a ceasefire and a promise from North Vietnam that it would not invade South Vietnam for at least the next eight years. He asked Sainteny to keep this information secret, and did not let his opinion on the matter be known at the American Embassy in Paris.<sup>561</sup>

Sainteny was a very suitable choice of mediator between Hanoi and Washington. He was the same French representative who had signed the preliminary agreement between France and Vietnam on June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1946, and had served as the French representative in Vietnam from 1954 to 1957. His years spent in the French service in Vietnam led to an extensive knowledge and familiarity with the country. The Sainteny Mission had two objectives: The first was to reconstruct relations between France and the DRV and thereby create a favorable relationship between General de Gaulle and President Ho Chi Minh. The second, and more important objective was to sound out the DRV/NLF leaders' intentions regarding the war and see if there were any prospects for a peace settlement.<sup>562</sup> Sainteny traveled to Hanoi on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1966 and met with President Ho Chi Minh and Prime Minister Pham Van Dong.

In the discussions, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong discussed the DRV's desire for peace: "We entertain thoughts about the peace settlement, because should the war end one day sooner, that is one day sooner to our happiness." However, Van Dong made clear that they were not willing to give up their position, although the Vietnamese

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<sup>559</sup> Jean Sainteny was a French politician, had been appointed minister and special envoy several times. He traveled to Hanoi on August 22, 1945 with American OSS officers. In 1946, just after the outbreak of the French Indochina War, he had served as the representative of the French government at the Fontainebleau Peace Conference. Vietnamese Communist leaders called him a "good Frenchman."

<sup>560</sup> President Richard Nixon made Henry Kissinger National Security Advisor and later also Secretary of State.

<sup>561</sup> Luu Van Loi, Nguyen Anh Vu, *Tiep xuc bi mat Vietnam- Hoa Ky truoc Hoi Nghi Paris* [The secret contacts between Vietnam and America before Paris talks], 153 (my own translation).

<sup>562</sup> Ibid.

preferred to live in peace and not war, as the more critical issue was their sovereignty and unity: “We know how war is, but the more sacred and desirable thing is national independence.” President Ho Chi Minh also repeated his desire for peace and his lack of hostility towards America: “If America wants, we can give them flowers.” At the same time, he expressed his determination to fight until the end, if necessary, to save their nation: “Please tell the Americans that we do not fear America, but that we will fight until the end even if we have to sacrifice everything.”<sup>563</sup>

During this time, Washington was still very determined to protect South Vietnam. America had just bombed Hanoi severely. Prime Minister Pham Van Dong told Sainteny that the possibility of a peace settlement would not be easy because the U.S was preparing a plan to escalate the war and to negotiate based on a position of military strength. Since the 12<sup>th</sup> Plenum (December 1965), Hanoi’s leaders had agreed to fight until they had achieved total victory. Following that policy, Pham Van Dong confidently expressed his opinion to Sainteny: “Vietnam is determined to cope with any new attack. We know the result of the conflict depends on the battlefield and so we seek victory on the battlefield.”<sup>564</sup>

Sainteny said frankly that the war would destroy Vietnam and tried to persuade the Hanoi leaders to find a peace settlement, stating, “We should find a solution, it is necessary to find a solution.”<sup>565</sup> Although Ho Chi Minh did not refuse a peace settlement, he insisted on the “Four Points” as defined in April 1965 by Pham Van Dong as conditions for that peace, and showed his willingness to resist at all costs until they were met: “We will never give up and we will never surrender even if the United State might be able to annihilate us.”<sup>566</sup> Despite Sainteny’s warnings to the DRV leaders, and his willingness to act as mediator, the talks showed that the DRV was more determined to fight for national reunification than risk losing it at the negotiation table.

Sainteny not only talked with DRV leaders but also visited Phnom Penh to meet NLF official Tran Buu Kiem on June 29<sup>th</sup> 1966.<sup>567</sup> The NLF had made independent policies for the path to neutralization and unification of the two Vietnams after victory was gained. It had considerably different views from Hanoi’s, especially about what

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<sup>563</sup> Ibid., 156-157 (my own translation)

<sup>564</sup> Ibid., 156 (my own translation)

<sup>565</sup> Ibid., 155 (my own translation)

<sup>566</sup> Ibid., 158 (my own translation)

<sup>567</sup> Ibid., 159.

Vietnam would should like after the war's end. The goal of the NLF was to achieve national independence, unification, and political democracy and neutrality. The NLF's most immediate goals were to fight against the U.S. and to overthrow the Saigon government, implicitly through armed revolution. After this had been achieved, the Front planned to form a broad national democratic coalition to negotiate with North Vietnam on national reunification. The NLF's target was to build a neutral Vietnam with a collective government that included non-communist representatives to prevent further encroachments of the U.S.<sup>568</sup> This is because the Vietnamese War against the South Vietnam regime and the U.S. was not only an ideological war between the Communist and capitalist worlds, but, more importantly, it was a people's war against the domination of a foreign power.

President Charles de Gaulle had previously attempted to persuade the U.S. to withdraw troops from Vietnam and to go to the negotiation table, but the U.S. had refused (1963-1964). On September 1<sup>st</sup> 1966, de Gaulle delivered a speech in front of one hundred thousand people in Phnom Penh. In this speech, he addressed Prince Norodom Sihanouk and made his own position on the Vietnam War known. De Gaulle considered the war in South Vietnam a war of national resistance and expressed France's disapproval of America's involvement in Vietnam, warning that a military solution would not be possible. He said:

France feels that the fighting that is ravaging Indochina, by and of itself, offers no end. In France's view, it is unlikely that the American war apparatus will be annihilated on the spot, but there is, on the other hand, no chance that the people of Asia will subject themselves to the law of a foreigner who comes from the other shores of the Pacific, whatever his intentions and however powerful his weapons. In short, as long and cruel as the ordeal must be, France holds for certain that it will have no military solution.<sup>569</sup>

In this famous speech, de Gaulle also expressed that France would no longer venture to become a mediator between Washington and Hanoi, because he realized that: "the possibility of negotiations depends on America's willingness to make a commitment to withdraw its troops within a suitable and definite time limit. There is no doubt that the time is not ripe at all for such an outcome today."<sup>570</sup> This placed the responsibility to compromise firmly in American hands. Yuko Torikata wrote: "Why

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<sup>568</sup> "The NLFSV Political Platform," *Mission and goal of VC for 1967-1968*, Buletin No. 8679, Enemy documents, Capture Date: December 12<sup>th</sup> 1967, Box 150, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>569</sup> De Gaulle, "No military solution", *New York Times* (September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1966): 1.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid.

did de Gaulle have to attack the United States so violently in his speech? From the evolution of de Gaulle's strategy...at that moment, he decided to follow through on his Third World and Communist bloc diplomacy, without caring any longer about its negative fallout on the Atlantic Alliance. If de Gaulle attacked the United States' inflexible attitudes, France's tie with NLF and North Vietnam would be strengthened. International opinion would also actively support de Gaulle's "impartial" position."<sup>571</sup>

Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy expressed the U.S. opinion on de Gaulle's speech on NBC-television's *Meet the Press* three days later. The United States did not agree with de Gaulle's proposal and Bundy said that the U.S. would withdraw when North Vietnam stopped war in the South Vietnam.<sup>572</sup> While tensions between America and France increased after de Gaulle's speech in Phnom Penh, Henry Kissinger met with Sainteny in Paris and explained that America could not begin the talks because Hanoi persisted to demand that America first withdraw all their troops on September 9<sup>th</sup> 1966. Kissinger also expressed that U.S. wanted France to become a mediator between Washington and Hanoi again. The talks between Henry Kissinger and Jean Sainteny did not have immediately tangible results, but a door of cooperation between Paris and Washington regarding the Vietnam problem was opened nonetheless.<sup>573</sup>

## **7.2 An American Journalist Harrison E. Salisbury comes to North Vietnam**

The clearest explanation of North Vietnamese policy and strategy comes from a talk between American journalist Harrison E. Salisbury, an assistant managing editor of *The New York Times*, who came to Hanoi between December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1966 and January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1967, and Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong. This very important document gives an explicit insight into why the Vietnamese were reluctant to go to the talks with the U.S. from 1965 to 1968. It details Prime Minister Pham Van Dong's rationale behind 'The Four Points', which were the Vietnamese conditions for establishing peace. Moreover, this document reiterates the Vietnamese determination

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<sup>571</sup> Yuko Torikata, "Reexamining de Gaulle peace initiative on Vietnam War," 935.

<sup>572</sup> "De Gaulle urges the United States to get out of Vietnam," History, <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/de-gaulle-urges-the-united-states-to-get-out-of-vietnam>.

<sup>573</sup> Luu Van Loi, Nguyen Anh Vu, *Tiep xuc bi mat Vietnam- Hoa Ky truoc Hoi Nghi Paris* [The secret contacts between Vietnam and America before Paris talks], 159.



to fight until the war had concluded in a Vietnamese victory because of the widely held belief that the Vietnam War was a sacred war. The document shows that just as Americans were trying their best to protect their credibility by refusing to surrender South Vietnam, the Vietnamese were doing the same. Pham Van Dong believed that the power of American weapons could not alone defeat the Vietnamese power of spirit, with their strong patriotism and unified culture. He was convinced that the only way to solve the problem in South Vietnam was the withdrawal of American troops, allowing the Vietnamese to unify the country by themselves. Pham Van Dong also understood that America would not easily give up the determination to protect their credibility, so Vietnam had to prepare for a long war to fight until victory was achieved. As the result, Ho Chi Minh's government refused to discuss peace negotiations, and all negotiation initiatives from 1965 to 1968 failed. The critical talk between Salisbury and Pham Van Dong has been faithfully translated.

During the talk, Pham Van Dong emphasized that for the Vietnamese, the Vietnam War was a patriotic and sacred war. It was the fight for independence and freedom, but not the fight to embrace the U.S. He stated:

We need to fight for the thing we believe in; we need to fight for the righteous and the sacred. For us, our war is for independence and freedom. [...] We have to make this a patriotic war. However, we do not have the intention of embarrassing the U.S. because the U.S. is a great power.<sup>574</sup>

He continued to express that just as Americans were trying their best to protect their credibility by refusing to surrender South Vietnam, the Vietnamese were doing the same:

The U.S. respects its own credibility. We also respect our own credibility. Whenever the U.S. administration stops the war, we can respect each other enough to solve any problem.<sup>575</sup>

Additionally, he reiterated the Vietnamese determination to fight until the war had concluded in a Vietnamese victory because of the widely held belief that the Vietnam War was a sacred war, stating:

For us, this is a sacred war. This is our independence, freedom and life. For us, this war is for our generation as well as our future generations. We are determined to fight until victory. The victory begins with the will of every Vietnamese person. Victory has its roots in determination.<sup>576</sup>

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<sup>574</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid., 179.

Therefore, Pham Van Dong strongly believed that the power of American weapons could not alone defeat the Vietnamese power of spirit, with their strong patriotism and unified culture although he clearly knew that it might be difficult for European people to understand and to imagine how the Vietnamese could fight against the U.S. He analyzed:

In past years, the U.S. administrations escalated the war because they believed in the power of weapons. When they failed the first time, they believed they needed more troops. When they failed the second time, they believed they would win the third time. And now, do they continue believing? That is a problem. [...] The more troops America sends, the larger the problem is that they will ultimately have to face.<sup>577</sup>

He continued:

As a result, the more American expeditionary troops that come, the more people in South Vietnam feel angry. In the cities of South Vietnam, the anti-American movement is increasing. This movement will attract all social classes including upper class, intellectuals, bourgeois, religious groups, as well as officials in the South Vietnam government's companies.<sup>578</sup>

Being asked about the solution to the problem in South Vietnam, Pham Van Dong replied without any reluctance that there was no other way than that America had to accept 'the Four Points', unconditionally halted aggressive activities in the North, and allowed Vietnam to unify the country by themselves. He emphasized:

We are determined to gain national unification. We usually say that: no force in this world can separate our country. Our nation is very unified. My hometown is in the South. How can we successfully gain national unification? Our policy is unification, along with independence and democracy, by peaceful means. It means that both regions should talk with each other in the spirit of brotherhood to achieve the best result.<sup>579</sup>

During the talk, Pham Van Dong also told that Vietnam understood that America still wanted to stay in South Vietnam; and that peace initiatives were just a trick. The U.S. administration and the Pentagon talked about peace while they continued preparing to escalate the war. When the U.S. administration wanted to escalate the war, they would cover it with a peace initiative.<sup>580</sup> He analyzed:

The U.S. administration does not accept it [the Four Points] because they do not want to solve the Vietnam problem. Notably, they still do not accept the

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<sup>577</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid., 184.

third point, which means that they still want to stay in South Vietnam, and still desire to send troops down the pipeline.<sup>581</sup>

Pham Van Dong also understood that America would not easily give up their determination to protect their credibility, so Vietnam had to prepare for a long war to fight until victory was achieved. He stated:

How could we know when the war will end? Because we cannot send troops to America to defeat America's aggressive will. As a result, we prepare for a long war. America will still invade, and we will still fight. How long? Ten years, twenty years, even more. I usually say to my foreign friends that our young generations will fight better because they prepared better.<sup>582</sup>

He added:

The people in the South say that Hanoi is the heart of the country. That is the truth. Therefore, we have to unify our nation by any means.<sup>583</sup>

This talk partly explains why Ho Chi Minh's government refused to discuss peace negotiations with America, and all negotiation initiatives from 1965 to 1968 failed.

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<sup>581</sup> Ibid.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid., 186.

## CHAPTER 8. VIETNAMESE STRATEGIES OF WAR AND PEACE

The history of the split of South and North Vietnam is essential to understanding how the Vietnamese viewed the conflict, which necessitates a short summary of key events. The Republic of Vietnam (usually called South Vietnam) received international recognition in 1949 as “the State of Vietnam” (1949-1955), which was later converted to the Republic of Vietnam.<sup>584</sup> In June 1954, the Chief of State, Bao Dai<sup>585</sup> named Ngo Dinh Diem<sup>586</sup> Prime Minister of the State of Vietnam. On October 1955, the Ngo family organized a sham election whose results were overwhelmingly against Bao Dai. Ngo Dinh Diem was declared the winner of the referendum with 98% of the vote. On October 26<sup>th</sup> 1955, he used the election results to proclaim himself President of the Republic of Vietnam, in opposition to the spread of Communism from North Vietnam. Commenting on what was to come after this event, David L. Anderson wrote: “This election revealed the Ngos to be more clever than many had thought, but it also gave evidence of a problem that was to plague the RVN until its demise in 1975.”<sup>587</sup> South Vietnam’s leaders argued that South Vietnam was not bound by the Geneva Accords, and thus did not have an obligation to cooperate in a general election with North Vietnam. They also argued that North Vietnam was an oppressive regime and a free election could not be guaranteed. In this manner South Vietnam justified rejecting cooperation with the North in holding the general election, and North Vietnam and South Vietnam became two separate international entities. In the view of many South Vietnamese, American intervention was an effort to defend South Vietnam from Communist aggression. The South Vietnamese government considered itself an independent nation and the Hanoi Communist regime a puppet of the Chinese empire.<sup>588</sup>

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<sup>584</sup> Robert Scigliano, *South Vietnam: Nation under stress* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin company, 1963,1964), 11.

<sup>585</sup> Bao Dai was the final emperor of Nguyen dynasty (1926-1945), afterwards, he became the Chief of State of the State of Vietnam (1949-1955).

<sup>586</sup> From a mandarin family, Diem had served briefly in Bao Dai’s powerless cabinet in the 1930s.

<sup>587</sup> David L. Anderson, “The Vietnam War and its enduring historical relevance” in *The Columbia History of the Vietnam War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 30.

<sup>588</sup> “The declaration of Government (July 20<sup>th</sup> 1964),” File: Politics Crisis and the Anti-Government Movement in Saigon Gia Dinh (1964), Republic of Vietnam, File: Prime Minister, Vietnamese archival center II, HCMC (my own translation)

According to Foreign Minister Tran Van Do of South Vietnam, the start of the Vietnam War was officially “provoked by Communist aggression and subversion.”<sup>589</sup> The people of South Vietnam wanted to be free to settle their own internal affairs in accordance with established democratic principles and do so without any outside intervention. The South Vietnamese Government called for the Hanoi Communists to end their aggression and campaign against the South Vietnamese people. Additionally they asked the Hanoi Communist regime “to dissolve all puppet organizations in South Vietnam under the names of the National Liberation Front, Liberation Radio, and the People’s Revolutionary Party.”<sup>590</sup> American documents detail how the South Vietnamese regime responded to the Northern Communist threat. However, Ho Chi Minh’s government perceived the nature of the U.S. intervention in Vietnam, and their alliance with the South Vietnam government quite differently. Ho Chi Minh government’s strategy of war and peace was largely based on North Vietnamese perceptions of what the U.S. was trying to accomplish in the region, and countering these objectives as forcefully as possible. They believed this would eventuate in American military and domestic fatigue with the war. However, the questions remains how Hanoi did manage to retain their Four Points and force the U.S. to accept their negotiation conditions to go to Paris peace talk in 1968. North Vietnamese government documents show that they understood that using public opinions on the war was the essential power behind their determination to fight until their demands had been met. Additionally, Ho Chi Minh’s government’s use of the Marxist-Leninist ideology must be examined, in both their use of force in the revolution and in their fierce fight against Modern Revisionism.

Ho Chi Minh’s articles provoked international actors and the Vietnamese people to think about the escalation of America’s involvement in Vietnam since 1946. In truth, after World War II, the U.S. government kept their eyes on Vietnam and tried their best to find a way to keep Vietnam far from the sphere of influence of Communism and the Soviet Union. According to a memoir by Dang Van Ngu, after World War II the American delegate in Japan prepared to visit Vietnam to survey the Vietnamese to

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<sup>589</sup> “Except of the speech delivered June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1966 by Foreign Minister Tran Van Do,” File: The Attitudes of the Republic of Vietnam, North Vietnam, NLF on the negotiations 1966, File: Prime Minister, Vietnamese archival center II, HCMC (my own translation).

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.

better understand the political situation of Asia.<sup>591</sup> This American delegation asked one of the members of the Patriotic Vietnamese Society in Japan, Trinh Hung Ngau, about the desires of Vietnamese intellectuals in Japan. Dang Van Ngu and his friends wrote a report, stating:

The people of Vietnam gained national independence in 1945. The French betrayed the Treaty on March 6<sup>th</sup> 1946 using their forces to retake Vietnam. However every Vietnamese followed the Ho Chi Minh government to fight against the French for national independence. Vietnamese people want the American government to enact the Atlantic Charter and recognize the independence of Vietnam.<sup>592</sup>

Trinh Huong Ngau however, did not agree with this report. In his counter argument to these assertions he wrote: “The war in Vietnam is very painful. It will end only when Ho Chi Minh and Bao Dai reach an agreement together, but Ho Chi Minh never agrees to talk. The Vietnamese people want independence but do not like the Viet Minh because they are afraid of Communism.”<sup>593</sup> After reading a draft of Trinh Huong Ngau, the members of the Vietnamese Patriotic Society reacted in anger. Dang Van Ngu asked the members of the Vietnamese Patriotic Society in Japan to make a choice between the two reports, and all members except Trinh Hong Ngau agreed to support Ho Chi Minh’s government. A few days later, Dang Van Ngu discovered that Trinh Huong Ngau had come to live in the Cuong De house to “become a henchman for American intervention in Vietnam.”<sup>594</sup>

With his pen name T.L, Ho Chi Minh wrote the story of the origin of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam since 1946 in the paper *Nhan Dan* (The People), the official voice of the Lao Dong Party:

American Imperialists encouraged the French to betray the treaty of March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1946 and to invade Vietnam again; they encouraged the French Colonialists to ‘use Vietnamese to kill Vietnamese.’ In August 1947, an official of the U.S. State Department met with Bao Dai in Hong Kong to prepare for Bao Dai to return to his position as emperor. At that time, Bao Dai was a failed puppet emperor, a playboy who spent his time in bars. In December 1947, that

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<sup>591</sup> Dang Van Ngu (1910-1967) was a famous doctor and intellectual. He studied medicine in Japan and became the president of the Patriotic Vietnamese Society in Japan in 1940s.

<sup>592</sup> “Narrative of professor Dang Van Ngu,” <http://nghiencuulichsu.com/2012/10/08/tu-thuat-cua-giao-su-dang-van-ngu/> (my own translation).

<sup>593</sup> Ibid.

<sup>594</sup> Cuong De was a direct descendant of the emperor Gia Long, representing the link between royalty and commoner, seeking support for his cause of national dependence from French Narrative of professor Dang Van Ngu, <http://nghiencuulichsu.com/2012/10/08/tu-thuat-cua-giao-su-dang-van-ngu/> (my own translation).

American official persuaded the French to play the Bao Dai picture card, and said that ‘If France does not use him, America will.’<sup>595</sup>

This remark showcases the American scheme behind their protection of the ‘Vietnamese freedom.’ The U.S. gave the green light for a French invasion of Vietnam because the U.S. did not want Vietnam to fall under the influence of the Soviet Union. Step by step the U.S. became the main supporter of the French in its war with Vietnam.

Ho Chi Minh knew he could use the power of the pen to attack the U.S. During the French war in the 1950s, he wrote many articles to let his fellow Vietnamese know that America was another dangerous enemy standing behind the French. In July 1950, he spoke with a journalist about the U.S. involvement in Indochina:

For a long time, American Imperialism publicly intervened in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. For a long time, America supported the French with guns and money for the war in Vietnam, while Cambodia, Laos and France obeyed American orders. However, American Imperialism intends to extract France from Vietnam, so America can exclusively control Vietnam. As a result, America intervenes in Vietnam more each day, in all facets: militarily, politically and economically.<sup>596</sup>

In September 1950, in answer to the question, “What is your opinion about the American intervention in Vietnam?” Ho Chi Minh replied that: “The nature of that intervention is an invasion, undemocratic and very different from the America I know. The U.S. will be defeated in Vietnam as it was in China.”<sup>597</sup> In 1954, with the pen name D.X, Ho Chi Minh wrote about America’s huge support of France in Dien Bien Phu:

In October 1953, a French bourgeoisie magazine wrote that the French government was obeying America’s orders to continue the war, and that America was spending money while the French sacrificed blood. French soldiers became a mercenary army. According to the French newspaper *Le Monde*, America was afraid that France would negotiate, and so forced France to continue the desperate war. [...] In the battle of Dien Bien Phu, the

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<sup>595</sup> C.B., “In the early days of our people’s resistance, American Imperialism gives assistance in the aggressive war in Indochina,” (Nhan Dan (The People), number 294, December 20<sup>th</sup> 1954) in *Ho Chi Minh total volume*, volume 7, National Politics Publisher: 2000, 402 (my own translation).

<sup>596</sup> *Cuu Quoc* [National Salvation Magazine], number 1608-July 25<sup>th</sup> 1950.

*Ho Chi Minh total volume*, volume 6 (National Politics Publisher: 2000), 73-74 (my own translation).

<sup>597</sup> Ho Chi Minh, *Cuu quoc* [National Salvation], no. 1641-September 8<sup>th</sup> 1950, *Ho Chi Minh total volume*, vol. 6 (National Politics Publisher: 2000), 92 (my own translation.)

American Secretary of State said that the U.S. would try to help France win. America gradually became the main enemy of our people and army.<sup>598</sup>

At that time, most of the Vietnamese believed in the Ho Chi Minh government, especially the generation of the Vietnamese elite who had devoted their lives to the same cause as Ho Chi Minh in the war of resistance against France for national independence. After Ho Chi Minh had identified America as the enemy in his writings, he began to criticize American culture to give the Vietnamese people a bad impression of the country. Ho Chi Minh respected the spirit of American democracy in the past and praised its beautiful landscapes, but he also knew of many problems that persisted in American society. In October 1951, he wrote: “Today America is sowing a kind of poison in the occupied regions [...] by manipulating Vietnamese magazines to express an appreciation of American culture. It is trying to poison the Vietnamese with American culture, which we have to strongly fight against.”<sup>599</sup> In November 1951, he continued writing on the same theme stating that: “American society is so foul, and so decadent, but American Imperialism boast about American civilization and always talk about having the mission of educating people. In the occupied regions, America shares many decadent magazines and erotic movies to poison our young. We must be determined to boycott them.”<sup>600</sup>

However, Ho Chi Minh did not blindly criticize all things American. He distinguished between the American government and the average American citizen: “American imperialism seeks war, but the American people want peace. [...] The people’s desire is the almighty’s desire. As a result, American imperialism will be defeated.”<sup>601</sup> He believed that justice would prevail in the situation. Ho Chi Minh and his comrades wrote powerful articles to persuade the Vietnamese to believe in their party’s point of view; to give the Vietnamese courage against the power of the American military and believe in the ultimately victory of the revolution.

On May 27<sup>th</sup> 1954, after receiving the news that President Eisenhower would establish an international organization for collective defense in Southeast Asia, an

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<sup>598</sup> D.X, “*Những câu chuyện về Điện Biên Phủ*” [Stories about Dien Bien Phu] in *Cuu quoc* [National Salvation], no. 2608, May 31<sup>st</sup> 1954, *Ho Chi Minh total volume*, vol. 7 (National Politics Publisher: 2000), 287 (my own translation).

<sup>599</sup> *Cuu quoc* [National Salvation], no. 1939, October 31<sup>st</sup> 1951, in *Ho Chi Minh toan tap* [Ho Chi Minh total works], vol. 6 (National Politics Publisher: 2000), 323 (my own translation).

<sup>600</sup> *Nhan dan* [The people], no. 31; November 5<sup>th</sup> 1951, in *Ho Chi Minh toan tap* [Ho Chi Minh total works], volume 6, (Hanoi: National Politics Publisher, 2000), 326 (my own translation).

<sup>601</sup> *Nhan dan* (The people), number 17, July 19<sup>th</sup> 1951; in *Ho Chi Minh toan tap* [Ho Chi Minh total works], vol. 6, (Hanoi: National Politics Publisher: 2000), 246 (my own translation).



article with the title “Determined to prevent American interventionists” appeared in *Nhan Dan* which expressed the belief that America would be defeated: “U.S. imperialists and French colonialists stubbornly stab in the back of Indochina’s people, Asia’s people and the world’s people, and these people are united to fight against them. Their insidious plot will fail.”<sup>602</sup>

On June 6<sup>th</sup> 1954, an article titled “Unmask America [to] Block America” wrote: “The U.S. imperialists are trying to cause a deadlock at the Geneva conference, preparing to establish an organization for invading Southeast Asia, and continue to expand the war in Indochina [...] These actions make the people in Indochina be more alert and they will be determined to defeat every cunning intrigue.”<sup>603</sup> Ho Chi Minh understood the Vietnamese psychology very well. He knew that listening to frequent criticism of America would convince the Vietnamese to hate America more day by day. The articles would have the effect of compelling young Vietnamese to consider fighting against the American invaders for national independence. On June 12<sup>th</sup> 1954, Ho Chi Minh wrote an article titled “American opinions” to tell about the difficulties of Americans in Indochina and alleged Americans were “war criminals and destroyers of peace”:

After an investigation into the situation in Asia, the U.S. congress delegation to Asia reported (February 1<sup>st</sup> 1954) that: ‘the American difficulty was that pro-American governments are considered dictatorships.’ Sir [Mike] Mansfield, an American senator, reported that on April 14<sup>th</sup> 1954: ‘the leaders of South Vietnam do not represent the voice of the people. They want only to become rich and earn satisfying lives for themselves.’ Sir [William] Douglas, an American jurist of the Supreme Court of the United States, came to the Far East, reporting (on May 1954): ‘Most of the Vietnamese people support Ho Chi Minh, not because he is a Communist or non-Communist, but because he has devoted his life to fighting against French colonialism and for national independence. He is number 1, no one can gain his position.’ America has tried to extend the war in Indochina. As the American Vice President said on November 1953: ‘the U.S. uses every method to prevent France from negotiating with Vietminh.’ American imperialism is therefore the war criminal that started this war and destroyed the peace.<sup>604</sup>

As early as July 1954, after the defeat of France in Dien Bien Phu and while the Geneva conference was happening, the 6<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the Lao Dong Party’s Central Committee had identified America as the new enemy of the country:

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<sup>602</sup> “Determined to prevent American interventionists”, *Nhan Dan* [The People], no. 188 (May 27<sup>th</sup> 1954): 4 (my own translation).

<sup>603</sup> “Unmask America, Block American,” *Nhan Dan* [The People], no. 191 (June 6<sup>th</sup> 1954): 4 (my own translation).

<sup>604</sup> C.B., “American opinions”, *Nhan Dan* [The People], no. 193 (June 12<sup>th</sup> 1954): 2 (my own translation).

“American imperialism has become the main and direct enemy of the people in Indochina.”<sup>605</sup> In August 1955, at the 8<sup>th</sup> Session of the Lao Dong Party’s Central Committee, Lao Dong’s leaders repeatedly said that: “our enemies are now American imperialists and their puppets [...] American imperialists are the most dangerous and oligarchic enemy.”<sup>606</sup> In this session, the DRV’s leaders clarified the mission of Vietnamese struggles as “using peaceful and political struggles to maintain peace and prevent a war in Indochina.”<sup>607</sup>

Notably, Ho Chi Minh and his comrades in the Lao Dong Party always distinguished between American imperialists and American peace-lovers, and the American government and American civilians. In this article, he gave consideration to Americans who were criticizing their government, and insisted he would continue to lead his country with the aim of gaining the hearts and minds of the American people to support his war for national independence and unification. More and more, news about American public opinion and anti-war protests in America appeared in *Nhan Dan*. For example, on June 27<sup>th</sup> 1954, an article titled “Unmasking the aggressive American imperialist” said: “Senator [Robert] Hendrickson asked the U.S. government not to send our beloved young Americans to Indochina.”<sup>608</sup> In *Nhan Dan* on January 4<sup>th</sup> 1961, another article titled “The American people demonstrate against the American Government” covered the news about an American demonstration in Washington on January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1961. The representatives came to Washington from many cities such as New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles to ask their government to dissolve the thing called ‘The Committee [belongs to the House of Representatives] which investigate the anti American Activities’ which suppressed Communists as well as pacifists who fought for peace and democracy.<sup>609</sup>

To further their propaganda campaign against American activities in Indochina, Ho Chi Minh and other journalists wrote many articles criticizing Ngo Dinh Diem.<sup>610</sup>

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<sup>605</sup> “Báo cáo Hội nghị 6 Ban Chấp Hành Trung Ương Đảng mở rộng” [The report of the 6<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the Lao Dong Party’s Central Committee] (15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> July, 1954), [http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co\\_id=30652&cn\\_id=46443](http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co_id=30652&cn_id=46443) (my own translation).

<sup>606</sup> “Hội nghị 8 Ban Chấp Hành Trung Ương Đảng” [The report of the 8<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the Lao Dong Party’s Central Committee] (13-20, August, 1955), <http://dangcongsan.vn/tu-lieu-van-kien/tu-lieu-ve-dang/hoi-nghi-trung-uong/khoa-ii/doc-192620159310146.html> (my own translation).

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

<sup>608</sup> “Unmask American aggressive Imperialist,” *Nhan Dan* [The People], no. 198 (June 27<sup>th</sup> 1954): 6 (my own translation).

<sup>609</sup> “The American people demonstrate against American Government,” *Nhan Dan* [The People], no. 2482 (June 4<sup>th</sup> 1961): 2 (my own translation).

<sup>610</sup> Ngo Dinh Diem: Anticomunist nationalist who became prime minister of South Vietnam under the emperor Bao Dai whom he deposed in 1955. The first president of South Vietnam, Diem was killed during the coup of 1963.

While the Geneva conference was taking place, there was an article in *Nhan Dan* titled: “Ngo Dinh Diem, a playing card [of gambler] of American Imperialism and French aggression” that severely attacked Diem. It began:

Although the puppet government and their leaders try to praise Ngo Dinh Diem for his mind, he used to lick the heels of French imperialism, then Japan and would lick the heels of American imperialism. They ask our people to believe in them to become shields for American invasions and hold American guns to kill our people so that the Ngo Dinh Diem government can have butter and milk, wine and meat.<sup>611</sup>

On July 16<sup>th</sup> 1954, another *Nhan Dan*, article called “The Traitor Ngo Dinh Diem- One who sells the country and harms the people” tells of the political activities of Ngo Dinh Diem, portraying him as a bloodthirsty opportunist:

In 1930, while the revolution was growing, Ngo Dinh Diem became an official of the French government in Ninh Thuan [...] He savagely suppressed the people’s uprising [...] He asked us sit down on the chair and fired under the chair. It made our hearts hot, our heads dizzy and faint. [...] Before torturing revolutionaries, Ngo Dinh Diem crossed over to the devil’s side. Although he used many methods of torture, Ngo Dinh Diem could not destroy our will to fight against the French imperialists. He tried to entice us to become traitors with bribes. I scorn him and his actions. [...] Thanks to his talent of becoming a faithful dog for the imperialists, he was promoted very quickly. In 1933, he became a high-ranking official in the puppet government of Bao Dai.<sup>612</sup>

After reading these articles, many Vietnamese citizens become convinced that Ngo Dinh Diem was a traitor to his country and a puppet of the French before becoming a lackey of American. The famous Vietnamese poet Tu Mo created a satirical poem to express the scornfulness felt by the Vietnamese toward Ngo Dinh Diem:

Follow the enemy to earn bone and meat  
They are selling their country and harming the people  
They devoted their lives to the enemy to be forever hounds.<sup>613</sup>

From the North Vietnamese perspective, the years between 1954 and 1956 were a political struggle to fully implement the Geneva Agreement and a fight against the Diem government. They also sought (the implementation of) a general election to reunify the country, an election that North Vietnam was confident they would win. However, not only had the Diem regime refused to hold consultations on national elections with representatives of the DRV, but Diem's control over the southern

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<sup>611</sup> “Ngo Dinh Diem-a card of American imperialism and French aggressive,” *Nhan Dan* [The People], no. 201 (July 4<sup>th</sup> 1954): 1 (my own translation).

<sup>612</sup> “Traitor Ngo Dinh Diem-the person sell the country and harm the people,” *Nhan Dan* [The People], no. 205, July 16<sup>th</sup> 1954: 3 (my own translation).

<sup>613</sup> Tu Mo, “Ngo Dinh Diem, the 8<sup>th</sup> puppet Prime Minister,” *Nhan Dan* [The People], no. 206, July 19<sup>th</sup> 1954: 3 (my own translation).

provinces was tightening. In order to establish a dictatorship for his family's rule, Ngo Dinh Diem instituted many harsh repressive measures against the South Vietnamese people, including mass jailing and the use of mobile scaffolds. Thus, July 1956 passed without general elections being held to bring about the national unification called for in the Geneva Agreement.

After 1956, the DRV gradually and reluctantly moved from a primarily political approach to a predominantly military one. A Le Duan report, titled *The Path of Revolution in the South* in 1956 was a forceful statement advocating the use of violence in the struggle for the South.<sup>614</sup> This opinion was widely supported in the 15<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the Lao Dong party in January 1959. In this session, the North Vietnamese leaders decided to initiate a new way forward for the revolution in the South to take hold. They clarified that “the principle task of the revolution in the South is to liberate the South from imperialists and feudalism [...] to make Vietnam become a peaceful, unified, independent, democratic and prosperous nation. The immediate task is to fight against American imperialists and their puppet Ngo Dinh Diem.”<sup>615</sup> Significantly, in the 15<sup>th</sup> Resolution, the Lao Dong Party leaders pointed out the changes to appropriate methods for the revolution, from a political struggle to a combination of diplomacy and armed insurgency: “The revolutionary method is a combination of the political struggle with an armed struggle, looking towards a general uprising and a protracted war.”<sup>616</sup> In this session, the Lao Dong Party' leaders also praised the 15<sup>th</sup> Resolution and confirmed that it marked the beginning of new phase of revolution in the South: “The 15<sup>th</sup> Resolution is historic [...] It reflects the true demands of the people from both the North and the South to liberate the South, defend the North, and achieve national unification.”<sup>617</sup> This Resolution also reflected the desire of the masses in the South to use violent means to counter the Diem government's policy of terror. With the 15<sup>th</sup> Resolution began a new phase of South Vietnam's revolution.

It relieved restrictions that had been in place on using violent means, and as a result, there was a wave of general uprising in South Vietnam in late 1959. The first uprising happened in Tra Bong, Quang Ngai, a province in South-central Vietnam on

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<sup>614</sup> Le Duan (7 April 1907- 10 July 1986), General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party of Vietnam (Communist Party of Vietnam) at the 3<sup>rd</sup> national Congress, 1960.

<sup>615</sup> “Nghị quyết 15 của Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam, 1959” [The 15<sup>th</sup> resolution of Lao Dong Party, January 1959], [http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co\\_id=30652&cn\\_id=48624](http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co_id=30652&cn_id=48624) (my own translation).

<sup>616</sup> Ibid.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid.

August 28, 1959. In this uprising, under the leadership of the Lao Dong Party of Vietnam, people in upland communities revolted against and seized power from the local apparatus of the Diem government. The Diem government sent troops to this area to re-establish law and order but failed. Tra Bong and the Western part of Quang Ngai became a liberated area under the control of the revolutionary forces. The Tra Bong uprising became a lesson for other provinces to apply, especially the Ben Tre Province. The concerted uprisings swept across the provinces of the South. These revolutions in the South became a turning point for the transition of the conflict from a political struggle to a military one.<sup>618</sup>

From the DRV's point of view, the war's origins stemmed from their understanding of the United States' global strategy. In his letter explaining the strategy to South Vietnam's revolutionaries of that period, Le Duan wrote: "American imperialists not only want to invade South Vietnam and to attack North Vietnam, but also to try to make South Vietnam become a wall preventing South East Asia from falling into the Communist orbit [...] That was the origin of the severe struggle in the South."<sup>619</sup> The Vietnamese had an acute awareness of their own history of nationalist resistance against foreign invasions and domination.

After the victory at Dien Bien Phu during the 6<sup>th</sup> Session of the Lao Dong Party's Central Committee, the Party's leaders understood the need to "establish a united front against American imperialists, French imperialists and their puppets with the slogan: Vietnamese peace, unification, independence, democracy."<sup>620</sup> The front was officially established on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1960 under the name The National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF) (Mat-Tran Dan-Toc Giai-Phong Mien-Nam). Its objective was the overthrow of the South Vietnamese government and the reunification of North and South Vietnam. The NLF included many non-Communists, especially Southern revolutionaries that had fought a long war against the French as Viet Minh members. The NLF represented the South in many diplomatic affairs in all Communist countries and in several neutral countries. The NLF's aim was to end the war of aggression by overthrowing the puppet government and setting up a

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<sup>618</sup> President of Socialist Republic of Vietnam Vo Chi Cong's comment on Tra Bong uprising, in Le Hong Khanh, *Di tích khoi nghĩa Tra Bong va Mien Tay Quang Ngai* [The relics of the Uprising of Tra Bong and Western Part of Quang Ngai province], <http://baoquangngai.vn/channel/2047/201207/di-tich-cuoc-Khoi-nghia-Tra-Bong-va-mien-Tay-Quang-Ngai-2169586/>.

<sup>619</sup> Le Duan, "To Anh Muoi Cuc and the central office of South Vietnam, July 1962," *Letters to the South* (NXB Quân đội nhân dân, 2005), 30 (my own translation).

<sup>620</sup> "The report of the 6<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the Lao Dong Party's Central Committee" (15-17, July, 1954), [http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co\\_id=30652&cn\\_id=46443](http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co_id=30652&cn_id=46443)

government of democratic national union in South Vietnam. The effort would include representatives of all religious faiths, political parties, and political leaders.<sup>621</sup>

On February 11<sup>th</sup> 1961, the National Liberation Front announced its official program through the Vietnam News Agency. The objective of the NLF was “to overthrow the disguised colonial regime of the U.S. imperialists and the dictatorial Ngo Dinh Diem administration, lackey of the United States, and to form a national democratic coalition administration.” The NLF wanted to help the Vietnamese people to recover their economic, political, social, and cultural interests; realize independence and democracy; improve their living conditions; carry out a policy of peace and neutrality; and advance toward a peaceful reunification of the fatherland. Responding to the demands of the Vietnamese people, the NLF would undertake the gradual reunification of the country by peaceful means, encouraging negotiations and discussions between the two sides.<sup>622</sup>

After Resolution 15 and the creation of the NLF, the Lao Dong Party and NLF leaders instigated a mass uprising that swept across Southern Vietnam. The widespread nature of the struggle in the South attracted more and more people from both urban and rural areas. The movement against American and Ngo Dinh Diem forces by North and South Vietnamese students developed very quickly. This was due mainly to strong patriotic feelings and a mutual hatred for the Diem government. In early 1960, the students of Thuong Ho Duong School stopped going to school to protest against Diem’s orders asking students to wear uniforms. On January 9<sup>th</sup> 1960, during a memorial for student movement leader Tran Van On who had died during the French resistance war, students in Saigon demonstrated against Ngo Dinh Diem’s education policy, asking for a reduction of examination fees and criticizing his crackdowns. There were movements asking for a teaching reform at Vietnamese universities, to promote the teaching of Vietnamese culture. In retaliation, Diem had some of the professors arrested and closed several private schools. These acts by the Diem regime caused 118 professors in Saigon to organize a meeting to fight this

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<sup>621</sup> “The organization, activities, and objectives of the Communist Front in the South Vietnam, intelligence memorandum,” Central intelligence agency, Directorate of Intelligence, September 26<sup>th</sup> 1966. Box 157, Vietnam File, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

See also Nguyen Thien Nhan, “Mat tran dan toc giai phong Vietnam va Chien thang 30 thang 4” [The National Liberation Front and The Victory of April 30<sup>th</sup>], <http://vov.vn/chinh-tri/mat-tran-dan-toc-giai-phong-mien-nam-viet-nam-va-chien-thang-304-396293.vov>.

<sup>622</sup> “The official Program of the National Liberation Front, as announced by Hanoi VNA on 11 February 1961,” NSF File, File Vietnam War, box 197, LBJL.

terrorist stance towards education. Students also fought against Diem's policy of military service.<sup>623</sup>

However, not only students fought against the Diem government and American intervention in South Vietnam but also different Vietnamese classes took part. In 1960, there were 57,400 resolutions sent by Vietnamese to the International Committee denouncing American Intervention in South Vietnam and denouncing Ngo Dinh Diem's cruel suppression of the Vietnamese people.<sup>624</sup> In 1960, the Diem Government killed 70 civilians and secretly captured 70 more in just the small district of Tam Ky, in Quang Nam.<sup>625</sup> On January 1<sup>st</sup> 1961, mostly 150,000 people in Hanoi organized a meeting denouncing the American-dictator Diem government's massacre in Da Ban and the cruel killing of Vietnamese civilians in the South.<sup>626</sup> On January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1961, in An Xuyen, a group named "Republican youth, armed with rifles" joined in the revolt against Ngo Dinh Diem.<sup>627</sup>

When Kennedy became the President of the U.S on January 20<sup>th</sup> 1961, *Nhan Dan* posted a letter to Kennedy denouncing America for its crimes in South Vietnam:

Because of America, Vietnam has Nazi courts, vile laws, mobile guillotines, innocent civilian murders, and destroyed villages. Because of America, South Vietnam has become the hell on the earth [...] Please suspend any American intervention in Vietnam and withdraw American military men from Vietnam; and let South Vietnam solve their own problems.<sup>628</sup>

Ho Chi Minh and the Lao Dong Party considered U.S. policies after World War II carefully because they suspected the U.S. desired to become a global empire: "During the post-war years, relying on their large economic and military forces and taking advantage of the weakening of other imperialist countries, the U.S. began to control these countries with the aim of dominating the capitalist world."<sup>629</sup> However, the Lao Dong Party was not intimidated by the U.S. power, and took pains to point out the limits of their power after World War II:

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<sup>623</sup> Phung Bao Kim, "The Students' Movements in the South Increased," *Nhan Dan* [The People], no. 2488, January 10<sup>th</sup> 1961: 3 (my own translation).

<sup>624</sup> "57400 resolutions against American-Diem," *Nhan Dan* [The People], no. 2489, January 11<sup>th</sup> 1961: 1 (my own translation).

<sup>625</sup> "Bloody crimes of Diem in Tam Ky (Quang Nam)," *Nhan Dan* [The People], no. 2516, February 7<sup>th</sup> 1961: 2 (my own translation).

<sup>626</sup> "140 868 people in Hanoi denouncing American- Diem's guilty for the massacre in Da Ban- Binh Dinh," *Nhan Dan* [The People], no. 2506, January 28<sup>th</sup> 1961: 2 (my own translation).

<sup>627</sup> "Diem force 'Republic youth' make crimes," *Nhan Dan* [The People], no. 2506, January 29<sup>th</sup> 1961: 2 (my own translation).

<sup>628</sup> T.L., "Letter to new American president Kennedy," *Nhan Dan* [The People], no. 2511, February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1961: 2 (my own translation).

<sup>629</sup> "The resolution of the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Vietnam Workers' Party Central Committee," December 1963, pp.6-9, Box 157, Country File: Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.

Although the U.S. has large economic and military forces, they cannot avoid being increasingly weakened. The development of the U.S. militarized economy has reached the highest point. But in the United States, it is obvious that production capacity has not been fully used. Serious unemployment is permanent. The speed of production development has been slowed down day by day.<sup>630</sup>

The party often discussed the weaknesses of the U.S. political position: “The U.S. imperialists have set up thousands of military bases and positions throughout world. However, since their forces are too widely dispersed, they cannot defend all these bases and positions and thus, the people in many countries have the possibility of defeating the U.S. Imperialists locally.”<sup>631</sup> In 1963, the Lao Dong Party’s leaders specifically discussed how the intentions of the U.S. peace initiatives was actually to turn socialist countries into capitalist countries:

Recently, along with actively preparing for a new world war and undertaking the ‘special war,’ the U.S. imperialists have resorted to the ‘people strategy,’ with the aim of deceiving people in various countries. They have relied on modern revisionism to achieve ‘peaceful evolution,’ hoping to cause a number of socialist countries to degenerate ideologically and politically and gradually restore capitalism.<sup>632</sup>

In the eyes of the Lao Dong Party’s leaders, America had the advantages of military strength and nuclear weapons, but its nation was in crisis and therefore it had limited power. As a result, they believed that with the strength of Vietnamese patriotism and with the support of other socialist countries, they could defeat the Americans, and they used many methods to lead their country to fight against the U.S. and the South Vietnamese government. For DRV/NLF leaders, the goal of building a socialist society was of much less concern than the ultimate goal of national independence and unification. Every decision was calculated to achieve those critical targets.

Since 1962, the Lao Dong Party had instated a policy that was a combination of three fronts: political, military and diplomatic, and carried out the traditional tactic of continuing to fight throughout negotiations. In a letter to the Central Office for South Vietnam on July 18<sup>th</sup> 1962, Le Duan stated his belief that the U.S. would lose. Le Duan seriously considered negotiations as a possible solution to the war: “In the development of the war, if the U.S. position is unwinnable, the U.S. may overthrow

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<sup>630</sup> Ibid.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid.

<sup>632</sup> Ibid.



Diem or may negotiate with us to accept a coalition government.”<sup>633</sup> He also considered how to achieve a coalition government: “We should associate with prestigious intellectuals who are sympathetic to the revolution to carry out the struggle of establishing the coalition government.”<sup>634</sup> The DRV’s willingness to work in a coalition shows that their main objective was not to establish a Communist government, but primarily to achieve national unification and independence. If the U.S. seriously wanted to end the war and achieve peace through negotiations, they were ready to establish a coalition government. In this document, Le Duan emphasized the importance of the combination of political and military struggle. He imagined “the political struggle as the shield and the military struggle as the sword” in the hard struggle against dangerous enemies.<sup>635</sup> On May 8<sup>th</sup> 1963, in a speech before the DRV’s congress, President Ho Chi Minh wanted to send a message to President Kennedy, to persuade him to end the war in Vietnam because it was an unjust war: “Do you have any reason to invade Vietnam, spending thousands of American dollars to support a putrid dictatorship government that is spat on by the South Vietnamese people? Do you have any authority to send thousands of young Americans to kill innocent Vietnamese people, and then die in an unjust and dirty war?”<sup>636</sup> Ho Chi Minh wanted to remind Kennedy about a lesson from history: “The President needs to understand history. History has shown that when a nation is united to fight for independence and freedom (like your ancestors and our South Vietnamese people), they will win.”<sup>637</sup> Although Ho Chi Minh and the Lao Dong Party still desired to use peaceful means to solve the conflict, they knew the U.S. could not easily abandon South Vietnam and therefore had to find another suitable strategy to find peace in the war for national independence and unification.

With their many experiences of fighting against the French, the Lao Dong Party explicated their understanding of political science by utilizing Marxist-Leninist ideology: “Naturally, we wish to advance towards socialism in a peaceful way, but historic experiences show that exploiting classes are never willing to relinquish power

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<sup>633</sup> Le Duan, “The letter to the Central Executive Committee of the People’s Revolutionary Party-July 18th 1962”, *The letters to the South*, (Hanoi: The People Military Publisher, 2005), 32 (my own translation).

<sup>634</sup> Ibid. 36.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>636</sup> Ho Chi Minh, “The speech in 6<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Congress II- May 8<sup>th</sup> 1963”, in *Ho Chi Minh’s total work*, vol. 11 (Hanoi: National Politics Publishers, 2000), 62 (my own translation).

<sup>637</sup> Ibid.

and leave the political stage.”<sup>638</sup> With a belief in Marxism-Leninism and their own national experiences of revolution, the Lao Dong Party decided that the revolution of South Vietnam would need to use violence to gain power. The resolution of the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Vietnam Worker’s Party Central Committee detailed the new direction of their revolution:

The Marxist-Leninist theory teaches us that the basic problem for all revolutions is the problem of power. To advance from capitalism to socialism, the most decisive factor is that the proletariat should smash the state machinery of the bourgeoisie and achieve proletarian dictatorship. The great October Socialist Revolution and the revolutions in China, Vietnam, Cuba, and many other countries prove that seizing power through violent means is correct and necessary.<sup>639</sup>

They explained that the reasons for using revolutionary violence in the fight against the U.S. was similar to the way that the U.S. as a capitalist country resorted to violence to repress the lower classes, so Vietnam had no other choice than to use violence to gain power in South Vietnam:

A prominent truth in the political activities in many capitalist countries is that state monopolist capitalists are following the path of militarization and fascistization and using violence in the most brazen way to repress the working class and laboring people. Thus, it is necessary to assert the use of revolutionary violence to smash the bourgeoisie as a general rule for the revolutionary struggle of the working class in capitalist countries under present conditions.<sup>640</sup>

Based on the theory of Marxism-Leninism about revolutionary violence, the Lao Dong Party gave further details on the different forms of the manifestation of revolutionary violence as either an “armed force, or a political force, or political force associated with armed force [...] During the process of the revolutionary violence campaign, the party of the working class must use the various forms of struggle in a flexible way, combining the illegal forms of organizations and struggles with the legal one.”<sup>641</sup> The Lao Dong Party indicated that the way to transition from capitalism to communism for the Vietnamese revolution would be through a proletarian dictatorship.<sup>642</sup> They strongly believed in the necessity of using revolutionary violence

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<sup>638</sup> “The resolution of the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Vietnam Workers’ Party Central Committee,” December 1963, pp.6-9, Box 157, Country File: Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid.

for national independence and unification, and sharply criticized the modern revisionists.<sup>643</sup>

For a long time, the Lao Dong Party considered the Vietnamese revolution part of the international revolution, and their fight against modern Revisionism as beneficial to the international communist movement as well as their own revolution. Modern Revisionism was seen as an extension of imperialism and the fight against it a very important mission to “solve the problem of ‘who will win’ on the world scale”, directly affecting the outcome of the Vietnamese revolution.<sup>644</sup> The Lao Dong Party believed that at the end, they would win, not only in the struggle against modern revisionism, but also in their violent struggle against the U.S. To persuade every member of Party to believe in the Party’s policies, the key leaders of the Lao Dong Party analyzed the history of their strategy for war and peace. They pointed out that the Vietnam War against the U.S. was a continuum of the war against French colonialists and since the foundation of the Communist Party in 1930 it had been “inter-related and interdependent” with revolutions throughout the world including “the revolutionary war of the Chinese people against the U.S. Chiang clique and the anti U.S. war of the Korean people.”<sup>645</sup> In this resolution the Lao Dong Party confirmed that Vietnam was a part of socialist revolution against the Imperialists-headed by the U.S. imperialists and modern revisionism. A small number of members of the Lao Dong Party did not vote for the resolution of the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Party because they fought against using revolutionary violence or a dictatorship.<sup>646</sup>

Since 1963, Le Duan, Le Duc Tho and his comrades publicly attacked those opposed to violent insurgency as modern revisionists, in the hopes of protecting their strategy. In his presentation before the Soviet Union’s delegates visiting Hanoi on February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1964, Le Duan expressed his opinion that the Lao Dong Party needed to

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<sup>643</sup> “N. Khrushchev's group and their followers, have completely deviated and have turned into enemies of Marxism-Leninism and of proletarian internationalism, of socialism and of the revolutionary and liberation movement of the working class and the peoples under bondage, enemies of the unity of the socialist camp and the international communist movement. They have joined in a holy alliance with the American imperialists and the reactionaries of different countries, with all the anti-communist forces against peoples and socialism. They have turned the blade of all their daggers against Marxism-Leninism, against all fraternal parties and revolutionary communists loyal to it, against the anti-imperialist, liberation and revolutionary movement of the peoples. All their utterances about "loyalty" to Marxism-Leninism, to the cause of socialism, to the revolution and proletarian internationalism are sheer bluff and demagogy from head to foot.” (Enver Hoxha, *The Modern Revisionists on the way to degenerating into Social-Democrats and to fusing with Social-Democracy*, April 7<sup>th</sup> 1964), <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hoxha/works/revisionists.htm>.

<sup>644</sup> “The resolution of the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Vietnam Workers’ Party Central Committee,” December 1963, pp.6-9, Box 157, Country File: Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid.

attack modern revisionism severely because it was dangerous for the Vietnamese liberation revolution:

The situation in our Party also proves that anti-revisionism is very necessary. There are some comrades who do not agree with the resolution of the Ninth Plenum and plead wrong opinions. For example, some said that the Southern Vietnamese fight against America and their lackeys was simply “an act of riding the tiger.” The Vietnamese idiom, “an act of riding the tiger” means doing something very dangerous leading to a dilemma [...] If we let those opinion spread in our people, our revolutionary causes would be damaged severely.<sup>647</sup>

The reason why Le Duan, Le Duc Tho and his cadres fought against the small number of the Lao Dong Party’s members who supported revisionism was to have total unity in their approach to the war in Vietnam. This speech of Le Duan clearly expresses the Lao Dong Party’s determination to fight against individualism, revisionism and imperialism until the final triumph, Vietnamese unity. In this speech, Le Duan shows the role of emotions in the strategy of peace and war of the Ho Chi Minh government. They decided to fight America until the Vietnamese had achieved victory because the U.S. had helped France to invade their country in 1946. Le Duan and the leaders of the Ho Chi Minh government feared that if the revisionists, who supported peaceful cooperation and supported having talks with the enemies even when they were still very strong, the enemies could defeat them in the future. This official document from the Vietnamese Communist Party talks clearly about the determination of fighting against revisionists and against any ideas of stopping fighting from within the Vietnamese Communist Party. Fighting against revisionists was also part of the fight against the ideas of going to peace talks with America when American still held a military advantage. The document make us understand that the fighting against revisionists in the Vietnamese Communist Party, was also a fight against the ideas of stopping the war because the highest target of the Vietnamese revolution was to gain national independence and unification. This makes us understand that Ho Chi Minh’s government was very determined to refuse any peace initiatives from the U.S. from 1965 to 1968, and therefore they all failed.<sup>648</sup>

The fight against revisionism in the Lao Dong Party was so intense that some Vietnamese students studying in the Soviet Union feared they had become dissidents

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<sup>647</sup> The Le Duan’s speech in the meeting between DRV leaders and Moscow delegates in Hanoi on February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1964, File of colloquy between Hanoi’s delegates and Moscow delegates in Hanoi, File of Foreign Affairs from 1958-1991, Archival of the Central Committee of Vietnamese Communist Party’s Bureau (My own translation).

<sup>648</sup> Ibid.

and did not want to come back to Vietnam. According to documents detailing the meeting between Hanoi's and Moscow's delegates on February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1965, "Le Duc Tho said that 36 students had deserted their country for political reasons. He asked the Soviet Union to send them back to Vietnam to avoid a misunderstanding. That would have benefits for both countries."<sup>649</sup> Another document showed that the Soviet Union permitted the Vietnamese dissidents to stay in Russia: "We ask Russians why they have let Vietnamese dissidents live in their territory. Russia responded that if they were American, they would be expelled immediately, but these were people from brother socialist countries, and they can live in Russia or Vietnam. We responded that they are anti-Party, and the Russians have remained silent."<sup>650</sup>

According to the head of the Party Central Organization Committee Le Duc Tho who played very important role in the struggle against revisionism in the Lao Dong Party, most members of the Lao Dong Party were very determined for the proletarian revolution to succeed in Vietnam.<sup>651</sup> In a report in 1966, Le Duc Tho emphasized that although the number of followers of Khrushchev in the Lao Dong Party was small, they were dangerous to the revolution, especially as some of them had high positions in the Party: "Since the peace establishment in the North, some of our senior officials have had the illusion of peace and bourgeois individualism in their minds. That was the fertile territory for revisionism. That was the reason why we have to fight intensively against bourgeois individualism and revisionism."<sup>652</sup> In the Vietnam War, there was the Anti Party Affairs and there was a list of Lao Dong Party's members who were punished.<sup>653</sup> Among the victims of this were the former Private Secretary of General Vo Nguyen Giap, the head of the General Department of Military Intelligence, Colonel Le Trong Nghia, Deputy Minister of Defence Nguyen Van Vinh, Major General, Deputy Minister of Farm Dang Kim Giang, Deputy Minister of

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<sup>649</sup> Memorandum of Conversations between Hanoi's Delegates and Moscow's delegates, Le Duc Tho wrote in February 18<sup>th</sup> 1965, File of Foreign Affairs from 1958-1991, Archival of Vietnamese Central Committee Vietnamese Communist Party's Bureau (my own translation).

<sup>650</sup> The report of Le Duc Tho about Russian situation through the visit Moscow of our delegates leading by Pham Van Dong in 1966, File of Foreign Affairs from 1958- 1991, Archival of Vietnamese Central Committee Communist Party's Bureau (my own translation).

<sup>651</sup> Ibid.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid.

<sup>653</sup> Documents: *List of Lao Dong Party's members who was punished in the Anti Party Affair* are impossible to access, Archival of Vietnamese Central Communist Party's Bureau

Culture Le Liem, and the Chair of Marx-Lenin Philosophy Institute Hoang Minh Chinh.<sup>654</sup>

During this time, although leaders in Hanoi did not agree with Khrushchev's theory of 'peaceful co-existence,' they made efforts to improve the relationship between the DRV and the Soviet Union. In the summer of 1961, after accepting an invitation of the Russian Communist Party, Le Duc Tho led Vietnamese delegates to visit Moscow and learn more about the Party's organization, with Soviet delegates also visiting Hanoi in 1962. Le Duan, Le Duc Tho and his cadres did not want to express their disagreement with Russian policy, and were afraid of showing their respect for Stalin who had been criticized as a dictator, tyrant and murderer under Khrushchev. This attitude came from the Lao Dong Party's coherent policy, which aimed to contribute to the unification within the socialist camp as well as gain support for their revolution. In the talks with DRV leaders in Hanoi in 1962, the Russians usually asked what Hanoi thought about the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the Soviet Union Party and Stalin, and the anti-Party group of Revisionists. Vietnamese communist officials replied politely that they read the papers of the Congress and praised the policy of building Communism in the Soviet Union.<sup>655</sup>

In the talks, Russian officials admitted that there were some mistakes in Stalin's book *The Economic and Social Issues of Soviet Union*. When Russian officials visited the Communist museum in Haiphong city, they saw pictures of Stalin, Marx, Engel, and Lenin on the walls, and whispered together for a while before changing the topic with Vietnamese officials.<sup>656</sup> Even when they discussed another problem, the head of delegates, a Secretary of Central Committee Communist Party of Soviet Union Ponomarev took the opportunity to criticize Stalin: "Stalin might have had good policy on industry but he was very bad at agriculture. We have to fight against the cult of individual. Stalin killed many of our excellent comrades and ravaged our Party."<sup>657</sup>

These short stories about Stalin in the talks between Moscow officials and Hanoi officials had a symbol meaning. Although knowing that Khrushchev and Moscow

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<sup>654</sup> Mặc Lâm, Vụ án xét lại chống Đảng: Khi tượng đài bị đập đổ [Anti Party Affairs] [https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in\\_depth/the-anti-party-revisionist-case-ml-10222013120111.html](https://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/the-anti-party-revisionist-case-ml-10222013120111.html)

<sup>655</sup> "Ho so ve viec doan dai bieu Dang Cong San Lien Xo do d/c Ponomarev, bi thu Ban Chap Hanh Trung uong" [The document about the Communist Party of Soviet Union's delegates headed by Ponomarev- A Secretary of Committee Communist Party of Soviet Union visited Vietnam] (March 1<sup>st</sup> to March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1962), Archival of Vietnamese Central Communist Party's Bureau (my own translation). Since 1953 Ponomarev had been head of the department of the Central Committee concerned with foreign Communist Party outside the Soviet bloc.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid.

officials had mixed feelings about Stalin, the DRV officials hung Stalin pictures on their walls. It meant that the DRV tried their best to keep some independence from Moscow policy and utilized Marxist-Leninism as they saw fit in the Vietnamese situation. This may have stemmed from their determination to not follow Khrushchev's policy of peaceful co-existence with Western countries. This also expressed the general coldness of the relationship between Moscow and Hanoi during this time.

Other details in the meetings between Moscow and Hanoi officials showed the lack of interests from Moscow in the Vietnamese revolution. Soviet Union delegates "did not want to talk about the South Vietnamese revolution. In the Soviet Union delegates' first speech, they did not indicate their support for Vietnam's revolution and unification. Hanoi officials had to remind them to express Russians' supports for Vietnam in their last speech."<sup>658</sup> During the time Khrushchev was head of the Soviet Union, the relationship between Hanoi and Moscow was icy. While Khrushchev and his cadres criticized Stalin severely and called for peaceful cooperation between the East and the West, Le Duan and his cadres protected Stalin and called for using violence in the revolution in the South Vietnam. Khrushchev and Moscow officials did not seem to care greatly about the DRV/NLF struggle against the U.S./South Vietnamese government, so the Lao Dong Party did not accept the policy of co-existence, which had failed to achieve the desired result of unification in Vietnam.

After the U.S. supported France in fighting against the Viet Minh, Ho Chi Minh and the Lao Dong Party considered the U.S. as the main enemy of the Vietnamese revolution and South Vietnam an extension of American neo-Colonialism.<sup>659</sup> Ho Chi Minh had a good understanding of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War and the main reasons why the U.S. intervened in Vietnam. Vietnam had created a problem for American policy towards Asia and the American global strategy against Communism. Ho Chi Minh and his comrades carefully analyzed the American global strategies and their policies toward Southeast Asia to get a better understanding of the American goals in Vietnam.

According to a report of the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the most important reason given for the U.S. embarking on a war in Southeast Asia was its

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<sup>658</sup> Ibid.

<sup>659</sup> "Le Duan's speech in Hanoi on February 3rd 1964," File: the documents of talks between the delegates of our Party and Soviet Union Communist Party (1964-1965), Archival of Central Committee of Vietnamese Communist Party, Hanoi, Vietnam (my own translation).

global political strategy: “Southeast Asia is a market for raw materials, consumption and investment for the U.S economy and very important for the U.S. and its allies. However, the main reason that the United States increasingly intervened in this area is the cause of strategy and politics.”<sup>660</sup> The report explains how Southeast Asia played an important role in the American global strategy:

Southeast Asia has a strategic location, connecting two oceans and would be a target of the U.S plan to surround Socialist countries, which might well be used as a dangerous bridgehead to attack China. Politically, Southeast Asia was a weak point in the Imperialist chain and was the place where revolutionary movements and struggles for national independence were constantly rising. Therefore, the suppression of the revolutionary movement in Vietnam had great significance for the control of the intermediate areas of the U.S. government. The U.S tried to replace the positions of European countries, which had many interests in all areas in Southeast Asia in the form of neo-Colonialism. In this way, the U.S. could increasingly undermine its allies and strengthen its hegemonic position. These reasons that arose from a limited point of interest caused the U.S. to strongly embark on this mission.<sup>661</sup>

In the eyes of DRV/NLF leaders, China was the most important factor that influenced American policy in Southeast Asia:

A mainstream concern running thoroughly through the whole of American foreign policy in this region was the anti-China ideology. The United States did not abandon megalomania to selflessly return this continent to its people; therefore the U.S. presence in Southeast Asia was a critical stage in the strategy of U.S. aggression in the Far East. On the one hand, the U.S considered China the source of the entire revolutionary movement in this area, so it was essential to prevent Chinese control and suppress the revolution. After Kennedy took office, the U.S promoted policies against China in all military, political, and economic areas.<sup>662</sup>

Ho Chi Minh and the Lao Dong Party believed that the U.S. intervention in South Vietnam was also a part of American foreign policies against China:

Meanwhile, the movement in southern Vietnam was growing, more and more intensely influenced by revolutionaries in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. The situation in Laos turned civilians once more against the U.S. Therefore, in parallel with the preparation for a large war in the Far East, the U.S. embarked on a war in South Vietnam, with aims to suppress the revolutionary element there, threatening revolutionaries in nearby places, and drawing lessons to be applied in cracking down the struggles throughout the

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<sup>660</sup> “The report of The Section of Foreign Affair of Central Committee of Lao Dong Party,” Ministry of Foreign Affair and the Vietnam embassy in Soviet Union about the U.S Foreign Affairs, April 15<sup>th</sup> 1964, File: The Section of Foreign Affair of Central Committee of Lao Dong Party, Archival of Central Committee of Vietnamese Communist Party, Hanoi, Vietnam (my own translation).

<sup>661</sup> Ibid.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid.



world. The tactics of the U.S at this stage were sophisticated, sinister and cunning.<sup>663</sup>

DRV/NLF leaders strongly believed in the future global victory of communism and the success of their own revolution, entailing an American failure in Southeast Asia:

U.S. policies advocating aggression toward China prove to be increasingly bankrupt. The U.S policy of preventing the influence of China, and to isolate China on the diplomatic and economic aspects has failed miserably. However, the rise of China has had a very important effect on preventing the encroachment of the U.S in Southeast Asia. Today, the capitalist nations of Japan, Britain, France, Italy, Belgium even West Germany were scrambling to breach the siege of the U.S. economy and attempting to access the huge new market of China. Meanwhile, the U.S. was placed in the awkward position of defeat after so many years in Laos and increasingly becoming bogged down in Vietnam. The U.S. had lost money, weapons and soldiers, but also enormous political credibility. The U.S.'s prestige in the world was damaged.<sup>664</sup>

The DRV/NLF indicate in their reports that they understood the power of the U.S. military and tried to find a strategy to minimize its dominance. They did this through a carefully executed public relations campaign to gain the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people, as well as people all over the world. Internationally, they tried to gain support from the large military powers China and the Soviet Union.

In conclusion, Ho Chi Minh's government understood the U.S. Cold War strategy of war and peace in the context of the Vietnam War. They exploited the conflicts between the West and East in the Cold War to gain support from Russia, China and people of other socialist countries for their struggle for national independence and unification. They prepared for a long war, utilizing violence to achieve the goals of the revolution and refused all peace initiatives until they saw that the American will to fight had been defeated. As a result, the Ho Chi Minh government was very reluctant to go to peace talks and negotiation initiatives from 1965-1968 failed.

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<sup>663</sup> Ibid.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 9. VIETNAM WINS THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF THE WORLD'S PEOPLE

### 9.1 The Tet Offensive

The Tet Offensive-Tong Cong Kich-Tong Khoi Nghia (General Offensive-General Uprising) was North Vietnam's plan to attack American bases in South Vietnam in a surprising and secret way to achieve a decisive victory for North Vietnam in the war during the Vietnamese Lunar New Year Festival 1968. According to historian James H. Willbanks, there was a debate in the Politburo of Communist Party of Vietnam about the plan of the Tet Offensive which Le Duan and Nguyen Chi Thanh won. The Politburo supported their plan with "a more aggressive strategy to conclude the war by destroying U.S. confidence and spreading Communist control and influence in the countryside."<sup>665</sup> However, in the Party, there were the "voices calling for caution" including Vo Nguyen Giap and Ho Chi Minh. In 1967-1968, many of the Party's members were arrested for anti-Party affairs. During the Tet offensive, Ho and Giap were abroad for medical treatment.<sup>666</sup>

From 1954 to 1962 Vietnam's strategy was focused on peaceful struggle although still preparing for the possibility of a long war. Through the war, Vietnam struggled in many fields both through violence and peaceful protest, which included the use of diplomacy, and cultural and political struggle. President Ho Chi Minh and the Lao Dong Party tried to garner support from the people in the world to assist the Vietnamese struggle, as part of their political strategy. In the meeting of the Ninth Plenum of the Lao Dong Party's Central Committee in December 1963, President Ho Chi Minh argued that their party must be instrumental in: "mobilizing and mustering the forces of the world's peoples and organizations in Asia, Africa and South America together for peace, and ask the American Imperialists to stop the invasion of South Vietnam, withdraw their military people and weapons from South Vietnam, and let the South Vietnamese people solve their own problems."<sup>667</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> James H. Willbanks, *The Tet Offensive: A Concise History* (New York: Columbia University Press), 2007, 9-11.

<sup>666</sup> Fifty years after the Tet offensive: Lessons from the Vietnam War. <https://www.cfr.org/event/fifty-years-after-tet-offensive-lessons-vietnam-war>

<sup>667</sup> "Biên bản hội nghị Trung Ương Đảng 9" [Memorandum of Meeting of the Ninth Plenum of Lao Dong Party's Central Committee] (December 1963), DVBQ 58, Archive of Central committee Communist Party's Bureau. Quoted in Tran Minh Truong, *Hoạt động ngoại giao của chủ tịch Hồ Chí Minh giai đoạn 1954-1969* [President Ho Chi Minh's Diplomatic Activities 1954-1969], Dissertation, (Hanoi: Ho Chi Minh National Politics Institute, 2001), 97 (my own translation).

Thanks to their strategy of peaceful struggle, more and more nations signed economic and trade agreements with the DRV. For example, there was an agreement signed between Romania and Vietnam for economic cooperation, opening trade between the two countries (February 13<sup>th</sup> 1961).<sup>668</sup> Shortly afterwards came the agreement between Bulgaria and Vietnam, which agreed to cooperate in the sharing of new technology (February 15<sup>th</sup> 1961).<sup>669</sup> The German Democratic Republic also signed a trade agreement with Vietnam in 1961.<sup>670</sup> To strengthen their goal of mobilizing the world's people to support Vietnam in their struggle against the U.S, as well as private efforts to increase the credibility of President Ho Chi Minh, the Lao Dong Party persuaded international organizations in Asia, Africa and South America to meet in Hanoi for a gathering under the name: "The Meeting of the International Solidarity with the Vietnamese People Against Imperialist Invasion, Protecting Peace" in 1964. President Ho Chi Minh was greatly moved by the efforts of Vietnam's international friends to try and assist in their struggle, and concluded the meeting with a speech of thanks on November 30<sup>th</sup> 1964:

The strongest voice of the meeting is the voice of justice from thousands of people who are determined to fight against imperialism with American leadership to protect world peace, national independence, democracy and social values. The resolution of the meeting for supporting Vietnam is a powerful encouragement for our struggle against American imperialism to gain national independence and unification. On behalf of our people, I would like to thank you for your kindness.<sup>671</sup>

However, Vietnam's first forays into the world of international politics in search of support had not always gone smoothly. The assistance Vietnam received from China came at a time when the Sino-Soviet split was occurring. On February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1961, *Nhan Dan* printed an article titled "thank you so much for the kindness of the Chinese, who generously help Vietnam" by Kha Van Can- Minister of Light Industry. China was at this time supporting Vietnam with money, additional labor forces, and intellectual guidance for their revolution. China gave long-term loans to Vietnam, to stabilize the economy and help to rebuild the factories that had been destroyed, building 14 new

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<sup>668</sup> "The agreement between Ru-ma-ni and Vietnam on cooperation in technology, February 13<sup>th</sup> 1961," *Nhan Dan* 2529 (February 21<sup>st</sup> 1961): 3.

<sup>669</sup> "The agreement between Bun-ga-ri and Vietnam on cooperation in technology, February 15<sup>th</sup> 1961," *Nhan Dan* 2527 (February 19<sup>th</sup> 1961): 3.

<sup>670</sup> "Vietnam and German Democratic Republic," *Nhan Dan* 2519 (February 10<sup>th</sup> 1961): 3.

<sup>671</sup> Quoted in Ho Chi Minh, "The Speech in The meeting of The International Solidarity with Vietnamese People Against Invasion Imperialism, Protecting Peace-November 30<sup>th</sup> 1964," in *Ho Chi Minh total volume, vol. 11*. (Hanoi: National Politics Publishers, 2000), 345 (my own translation).

wool factories by 1961. Additionally, Chinese funds helped Vietnam build mills, food factories; eight ships for the new Ha Long factory-which produced fish products, a chemical factory called Viet Tri, a fertilizer plant named Bac Giang and a utensil factory. Perhaps most outstanding was, China's assistance in helping to build Vietnam's first metallurgical center, named Thai Nguyen. The factories and support materials were also supplemented with Chinese training programs for engineers and workers.<sup>672</sup> The author of the article, Kha Van Can, seemed very touched when he wrote about the images of the Chinese experts helping the Vietnamese in economics and in the military: "In every way in the North of Vietnam, in the factories, on the fields, in the forests, excellent and experienced Chinese experts stand side-by-side Vietnamese workers and leaders, working in spite of rain or shine, day or night, danger or difficulty with the spirit 'work for Vietnam is also working for China.'"<sup>673</sup> It is fair to say that the Chinese experts made a good impression on Vietnamese hearts. In addition, after the Vietnam-Chinese economic agreement was signed, China would lend Vietnam 141,750,000 Rubles to build 28 new factories and a great transportation system that included a railroad.<sup>674</sup>

The tightrope that the North Vietnamese had to walk at the time of the Sino-Soviet split complicated this windfall of Chinese help. According to Duong Danh Dy, a Vietnamese ambassador to China during the Vietnam War, Deng Xiaoping, Secretary-General of the CCP, paid a secret visit to Hanoi after the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964, and offered their commitment that China would cover all costs of Soviet assistance for Vietnam if Hanoi would align itself completely with China. President Ho Chi Minh refused the offer.<sup>675</sup>

However, he quickly realized the risks posed by a gap between Beijing and Hanoi that could widen as they received more support from Moscow. The DRV tried to remain neutral in the Sino-Soviet dispute. In a diplomatic meeting on January 14<sup>th</sup> 1964, President Ho Chi Minh said: "diplomatic officials need to be wise [...] need to cooperate with both the Soviet Union and China as well as other socialist

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<sup>672</sup> Kha Van Can, "Thank You So Much For Kindness of Chinese, Generously Helping Vietnam," *Nhan Dan* [The People], no. 2512, February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1961: 2 (my own translation).

<sup>673</sup> Ibid.

<sup>674</sup> Ibid.

<sup>675</sup> Duong Danh Dy, "Chuyen it biet ve quan he Viet Trung thoi chong My" [Unknown stories about Vietnamese-China relations in the War against American], *Tuan Vietnamnet*, 2009.

countries.”<sup>676</sup> Ho Chi Minh directed his foreign ambassadors to “talk to the Soviet diplomats but absolutely do not make any negative comments about China.” At the same time, “when talking with Chinese diplomats our ambassadors absolutely must not make any negative comments about the Soviet Union. They should talk about their contributions to the solidarity of the Soviet Union and China.” President Ho Chi Minh even instructed the DRV diplomatic personnel how they should behave in the presence of Soviet and Chinese diplomats. The Vietnamese diplomats, Ho insisted, “should be calm and not have an unfavorable attitude.”<sup>677</sup> In June 1964, in an interview with a French journalist, when he was asked the question: “Some people say that North Vietnam is in segregated position, so from the political view, it is not easy to avoid becoming a satellite of China. What do you think about that?” To which President Ho Chi Minh answered: “never.”<sup>678</sup>

Since the 13<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Lao Dong Party’s Central Executive Committee in January 1967, the DRV/NLF leaders had adopted a policy known as *danh va dam* [fighting and talking.] While outwardly negotiating, the DRV/NLF would continue fighting their enemy even more vigorously. The DRV/NLF leaders believed that those who were in charge of conducting negotiations should negotiate, and those in charge of fighting should continue to fight, because the decisive factor lay on the battlefield. They also believed that their diplomatic front would make the world understand that the DRV/NLF were fighting for the aspirations and interests of their people, which would ultimately win the support of various countries as well as intensify the U.S. anti-war sentiment. They felt that if they conducted negotiations while fighting, they would be able to take advantage of any opportunity to step up the political struggle, publicize the American military proselytizing and the activities in the cities. For these reasons, the DRV/NLF planned the Tet Offensive to gain a decisive victory and force the U.S. to accept Hanoi’s three main demands: the permanent cessation of attacks

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<sup>676</sup> *Bác Hồ nói về ngoại giao* [Uncle Ho talks about diplomacy] (Hanoi: Hanoi institute of International relations, 1994), 19.

<sup>677</sup> *Ngoại Giao Việt Nam, 1945–2000* [Viet Nam Diplomacy 1945–2000] (Hanoi: Hanoi publisher, 2005), 210–212.

<sup>678</sup> Video hiêm: Chủ tịch Hồ Chí Minh miễn tiếp trả lời phỏng vấn nữ nhà báo Pháp [Video: President Ho Chi Minh Wisely Answered in French to The Questions of The Female French Journalist in The interview at The President Hall, Hanoi, June 5<sup>th</sup> 1964.] *Viettimes.vn*, 19.5.2016.

against North Vietnam, the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the South, and the dismantling of U.S. military bases.<sup>679</sup>

The DRV/NLF leaders were always trying to find the opportunities for their revolution to succeed. In July 1967, in a letter to Gia Dinh's comrades in Saigon, Le Duan emphasized how opportunities for the revolution to continue ought to be evaluated, writing that we "need to seriously consider every facet, including politics, military, economy, culture, to understand the material and spiritual power of the enemy and ourselves. It is not abstract, but very concrete."<sup>680</sup> Following this line of thinking, the Politburo analyzed the specific conditions of the war and made a resolution with the title "Forwarding the revolution into a new period: the period of gaining decisive victory" in December 1967.<sup>681</sup> The Lao Dong Party analyzed the special political situations in the U.S. in 1968, when America was preparing for a presidential campaign. They considered Johnson to be engaged in efforts to escalate the war to make people believe in their future triumph in Vietnam. After the president election, Johnson administration would have a new strategy to end the war.<sup>682</sup> The Lao Dong Party knew that in the presidential campaign, every presidential candidate would focus on ending the Vietnam War so that if Vietnam had a military victory, it "would have big effects on American politics."<sup>683</sup> The target of the Lao Dong Party was defeating the enemy's "aggressive will" and the year of the American presidential campaign would be an opportunity for Vietnam to put pressure on the American administration.<sup>684</sup> In January 1968, the meeting of the Party's Central Executive Committee approved the resolution, which informed party members that: "We are standing before a new opportunity; American imperialists are faced with a dilemma

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<sup>679</sup> "Nghị quyết hội nghị lần thứ 13 của ban chấp hành trung ương (27 tháng 1 năm 1967)" [The Resolution of The 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of The Party's Central Executive Committee, January 27<sup>th</sup> 1967], [http://daihoi12.dangcongsan.vn/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co\\_id=28340648&cn\\_id=402514](http://daihoi12.dangcongsan.vn/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co_id=28340648&cn_id=402514).

<sup>680</sup> Le Duan, *Thư vào nam* [The Letters to The South], (Hanoi: The People Military Publisher, 2005), 167 (my own translation).

<sup>681</sup> "Nghị quyết hội nghị BCHTƯ Đảng lần thứ 14 (1.1968)" [The Resolution of The 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting of The Party's Central Executive Committee (January 1968)], <http://dangcongsan.vn/tu-lieu-van-kien/van-kien-dang/nghi-quyet-bch-trung-uong/khoa-iii/doc-092520159035246.html> (my own translation).

<sup>682</sup> Ministry of Defense and Institute of Vietnamese Military History, *Lịch sử kháng chiến chống Mỹ cứu nước 1954-1975* [History of resistance war against the U.S. for national salvation] (Hanoi: National Politics-True Publisher, 2013), Vol. 5, 16.

<sup>683</sup> Ministry of Defense and Institute of Vietnamese Military History, *Lịch sử kháng chiến chống Mỹ cứu nước 1954-1975* [History of resistance war against the U.S. for national salvation], 16-17.

<sup>684</sup> "Nghị quyết hội nghị BCHTƯ Đảng lần thứ 14 (1.1968)" [The Resolution of The 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting of The Party's Central Executive Committee (January 1968)] (my own translation).

[...] We are in a victorious position with great advantages [...] the enemy is in a position of failure.”<sup>685</sup>

Afterwards, the DRV’s leaders analyzed the failures of the U.S. military strategy from 1965 to 1968. Although the U.S. had increased troops more and more in South Vietnam, they could not prevail in Vietnam. They published a memorandum that appraised Vietnamese military’s strategic position:

In the winter-spring 1965-1966, after pouring more than 20,000 U.S. and Allied troops into SVN to join more than a half million puppet troops, the U.S. imperialists launched their plans of a strategic counteroffensive [...] They could not destroy any element of our force and they were badly worn down [...] In the dry season of 1966-1967, with an increased US force of more than 40,000 troops [...] They failed to achieve their goal of destroying us and they suffered an unprecedented high number of casualties and material losses.<sup>686</sup>

The DRV’s leaders were assured that although the U.S. continued to bomb the North, the U.S. could not break the will of the Vietnamese to fight until they succeeded in winning Vietnam:

In the North, they have stepped up their destructive activities through intense deployment of their air force and navy. They have launched fierce operations, hoping to be able to scare our people and prevent us from reinforcing our brothers in the South. However, we remain unshakable in our determination. On the contrary, we have fought bravely and destroyed more than 2000 of their aircraft, and right now we are standing side-by-side with the people in the South and are doing our best to support their revolution and to liberate the South.<sup>687</sup>

The DRV’s leaders emphasized the limits of the U.S. power in Vietnam in spite of the modernity of U.S. troops, military strategy and weapons: “In spite of the cunning plots of the U.S. imperialists and their cruel henchmen, and in spite of their mammoth strength, their great fire power, and all their superior war means, the strategic objectives which they selected could not be achieved. The defeats they are suffering become more burdensome and occur more frequently.”<sup>688</sup> The DRV’s leaders pointed out that U.S. leaders were growing tired of the war: “After the failure of two major strategic counter-offensive campaigns, the leaders in the United States have become pessimistic over their war escalation policy in South Vietnam.”<sup>689</sup> After carefully

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<sup>685</sup> Ibid.

<sup>686</sup> “Memorandum: Hanoi’s Appraisal of Its Strategic Position Prior to Current Offensive,” February 27<sup>th</sup> 1968, Box 86, Vietnam File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid.

<sup>688</sup> Ibid.

<sup>689</sup> Ibid.

analyzing the situation of the battlefields, the DRV's leaders concluded that this time was an opportunity for Vietnam to steer the war into a new phase:

This is a perfect opportunity for us to emphasize attacking the enemy in all fields and taking advantage of the victories to push the SVN revolution a great step forward. In this historical period, our entire party, army, and population will fully understand the situation and rush forward to fight without fear of hardship and sacrifice, then we will certainly be able to bring about a turning point in our confrontation with the enemy, and also because the U.S. limited war policy is becoming a failure which can no longer be carried out. From that situation, we can proceed towards realizing our immediate objective and secure a complete victory.<sup>690</sup>

The Politburo was determined to use the Tet Offensive and general uprisings to gain a decisive victory that would put an end to the grinding conflict. The DRV/NLF leaders hoped that the attacks on major cities would “defeat American aggression, and force America to negotiate to end the war and accept our conditions.”<sup>691</sup> The DRV/NLF leaders believed that “however duplicitous the maneuvers of the U.S. imperialists may be, the Vietnamese people, united as one and fearing neither hardship nor sacrifice, are determined to carry out their resistance war until the end- to safeguard the independence and freedom of the fatherland, and contribute to the maintenance of peace in Southeast Asia and the world.”<sup>692</sup> The DRV/NLF leaders carefully planned the Tet Offensive to gain a decisive victory and to ask the U.S. to accept their negotiation conditions and end the war.<sup>693</sup>

At the night of January 30<sup>th</sup> and early morning of January 31<sup>st</sup> 1968, Viet Cong attacked enemies in 37/44 provinces of South Vietnam. At that night, in Saigon, Viet Cong attacked the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, the Palace of Independence, the headquarter of the ARVN Joint General of Staff, the headquarter of the Republic of Vietnam Navy, Tan Son Nhat Airport and the National Radio Station, Police Department.<sup>694</sup>

On the front page of *Nhan Dan* on February 1<sup>st</sup> 1968, there was a red headline about the victories of the Tet Offensive: “Intense attacks: Saigon, Hue, Dang Nang.”

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<sup>690</sup> Ibid.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid.

<sup>692</sup> “Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh’s interview with Burchett,” 28<sup>th</sup> January 1967, Vietnam File, NSF, Box 157, LBJL.

<sup>693</sup> Hồ Khang, *Tết Mậu Thân 1968: Bước ngoặt lớn của cuộc kháng chiến chống Mỹ cứu nước* [Tet Offensive 1968: the turning point of the resistance war against the U.S. for national salvation] (Hanoi: National Military Publisher, 2005), 97.

<sup>694</sup> Nguyễn Thị Việt Nga, *Cuộc kháng chiến chống Mỹ cứu nước của Việt Nam: Sự lựa chọn lịch sử* [The resistance war against the U.S. for national salvation of Vietnamese: the choice of history] (Hanoi: Social Sciences Publisher), 169.



The article stipulated that all of South Vietnam was increasingly under fire and in the heat of guerilla attacks. January 31<sup>st</sup> had been a day of great gains and victories, with the forces of liberation cooperating with civilians to attack the American Embassy, Independence Hall, Tan Son Nhat airport and other headquarter offices' of the South Vietnamese Government. Over 40 cities, towns and burghs, including major cities like Saigon, Hue, and Da Nang from Quang Tri to Ca Mau were attacked and occupied by Vietnamese liberation forces. The sudden attacks touched the hearts of the Vietnamese and shocked the world. As news of the military victories continued to roll in, more and more attacks were executed. The article concluded that in just two days, national liberation forces had occupied many big cities including Hue, Quang Tri, Hoi An, Tam Ky, Buon Me Thuot: "Our people are living and fighting in the most glorious moments in our history."<sup>695</sup>

Another article in *Nhan Dan* from the same day titled: "The Tet spring by the heroic Vietnamese people" by Hung Ca put the Tet Offensive into the context of Vietnam's historical legacy of its many struggles against foreign invaders. This overtly patriotic article plucked at the heartstrings of its Vietnamese readers to tell about their history of national heroism from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the present era of Ho Chi Minh.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Spring At Dau (1284) tells of General Tran Hung Dao fighting the Chinese enemy-defeating the strongest invading force in the world-the Yuan dynasty [...] In this era, since the establishment of our Communist Party, the spring and Tet has had more meaningful events for national salvation. [...] Only a few days into the spring, our great leader Ho Chi Minh proved this true. Heroic people of South Vietnam from Ben Hai River to Ca Mau created the most beautiful spring in the history of national salvation.<sup>696</sup>

The Tet Offensive shocked the world's public. *Nhan Dan* posted the incoming news from international broadcasts, with congratulations received from "Socialist brotherhood countries, peace-lovers and friends."<sup>697</sup> For example, Moscow's broadcast of the Soviet views on January 31<sup>st</sup> 1968 was told:

The Vietnamese people and soldiers have won against America in many great battles. In truth, American soldiers lost contact with American headquarters and Joints of Staff. The American propaganda officials did not give any comment on this event and try to hide their failures. The Tet Offensive has

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<sup>695</sup> "Continuously fighting, continuously victory," *Nhan Dan* [The people], February 1<sup>st</sup> 1968: 1 (my own translation).

<sup>696</sup> Hung Ca, "Mùa xuân và Tết của nhân dân Việt Nam anh hùng" [The spring and Tet of the heroic Vietnamese people, *Nhan Dan* [The People], February 1<sup>st</sup> 1968: 2 (my own translation).

<sup>697</sup> "Shock the world public," *Nhan Dan* [The People], February 1<sup>st</sup> 1968: 4 (my own translation).

made the war situation change and had a major impact on the decisions of both sides. The American soldiers in South Vietnam have lost the fighting spirit and the American occupation regime is shaken. The attacks on the 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> did not only trouble for American soldiers in South Vietnam but also for the Pentagon. The Soviet Union greets these great victories of Vietnamese national liberation in South Vietnam.<sup>698</sup>

The BBC news on January 31<sup>st</sup> 1968 also commented that the attacks of the Liberation Forces in South Vietnam had given the Johnson administration a great shock.<sup>699</sup> According to the Australian Minister of Defense on January 31<sup>st</sup> 1968: “the active position now belongs to the Viet Cong.”<sup>700</sup> The French AFP broadcast commented: “For the first time in the war, Nha Trang city is occupied. Viet Cong attacked the American embassy in Saigon, which is shocking because this building is very special. The Viet Cong attacks were a great victory especially for psychology and strategy.”<sup>701</sup> The American United Press International wrote on January 30<sup>th</sup> 1968: “The Viet Cong launched the biggest attack in this war. The Viet Cong came into seven of the biggest cities and destroyed millions of American dollars.”<sup>702</sup> On February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1968, *Nhan Dan* continued to post public opinion articles from around the world about the Tet Offensive, alongside optimistic opinions of the Lao Dong Party leaders on the recent events. *The New York Times* wrote: “The enemy’s attack on the American embassy in Saigon shows sad evidence of the limited power of America in Asia.”<sup>703</sup>

For the Vietnamese, the Tet Offensive was a great victory. In the atmosphere of victory that spring, on February 5<sup>th</sup> 1968, *Nhan Dan* wrote news of meetings between different representatives along many fronts, groups and parties in Hanoi to celebrate the Tet Offensive victory.<sup>704</sup> On February 8<sup>th</sup> 1968, *Nhan Dan* printed a long article about the praise received worldwide for the Vietnamese victory, stating: “The world is happy for Vietnam, and praise the Vietnamese for their heroic sprit and intelligence.”<sup>705</sup>

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<sup>698</sup> Ibid.

<sup>699</sup> Ibid.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid.

<sup>701</sup> Ibid.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid.

<sup>703</sup> “Friends in the world feel happy, the enemy scare,” *Nhan Dan* [The People], February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1968: 4 (my own translation).

<sup>704</sup> “The meeting for greeting glorious victory of the heroic soldiers and people in South Vietnam,” *Nhan Dan* [The People], February 5<sup>th</sup> 1968: 1

<sup>705</sup> “The world are happy for Vietnam, and praise Vietnamese for heroic sprit and intelligence.” *Nhan Dan* [The People], February 8<sup>th</sup> 1968: 1 (My own translation)

The Tet Offensive also made an impact on the ARVN's soldiers. On February 28<sup>th</sup> 1968, in a meeting with Johnson, CIA director Helms mentioned the "hard time" endured by the ARNV after the Tet Offensive and worried about a desertion. He stated: "the ARVN is in worse shape today than before Tet. I am concerned about defections since the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese have treated the people in the countryside rather decently. We may have to confront the possibility of desertion."<sup>706</sup>

According to Alan Woods, "The Tet Offensive showed a considerable degree of military preparedness, skill and bravery on the part of the Vietnamese. It shook the morale of the US army, which was forcibly made aware of its own vulnerability. It also had a profound effect on US public opinion, and led to a rapid growth of the anti-war movement as well."<sup>707</sup> For America, the Tet Offensive marked a turning point in the Vietnam War, not in terms of military losses but through unleashing a wave of pessimism about the war in America and throughout the globe.<sup>708</sup>

After the Tet Offensive, American media, both television and print dramatically changed their opinions of the war and questioned U.S. commitment in Vietnam. Before the Tet attacks, 62% of media stories were described as victories for the U.S., 28% as defeats, 2% as inconclusive. However, after the Tet attacks, the figures on media coverage became more negative for the U.S, with only 44% of reporting covering victories, 32% defeats, and 24% inconclusive.<sup>709</sup> The media also increasingly focused on negative aspects of U.S. troops in Vietnam, such as stories about drug use, radical conflict, and refusals to obey orders. Before the Tet Offensive, in 1967, there were four television stories showing positive morale of the troops and zero negative ones. However, everything changed after Tet, in 1968, with only two and a half stories mentioning positive morale while fourteen and a half reflected negative aspects.<sup>710</sup>

According to American historian Frank E. Vandiver, the Vietnam "attack failed, but at grievous cost. Graves sprang up everywhere as monuments to a war that turned

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<sup>706</sup> "Notes of the President's Meeting to Discuss General Wheeler's trip to Vietnam," Washington February 28<sup>th</sup> 1968, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v06/d91>.

<sup>707</sup> Alan Woods, "The Tet Offensive: the turning point in the Vietnam War", <https://www.marxist.com/tet-offensive-part-one.htm>.

<sup>708</sup> Ibid.

<sup>709</sup> Hallin, Daniel C., *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (Los Angeles: California University of California Press, 1986), 162.

<sup>710</sup> Ibid., 180.

against humanity itself and dimmed the souls of those who lived.”<sup>711</sup> The Tet Offensive added to the horrible damage of the war:

No powers of magic, mind, or will could hide the woeful, wandering flotsam of war that spread everywhere. In Saigon, 125,000 were homeless, and across the country 821,000 refugees survived to join 904,000 already disposed before Tet... Tet’s worst costs were lives lost and broken: 12,500 civilians killed, 22,000 wounded, U.S.-ARVN killed about 6,000 (Westmoreland put U.S. killed at 1,001), wounded, uncertain; North Vietnamese and Viet Cong killed, nearly 40,000 of some 84,000 committed, wounded also uncertain.<sup>712</sup>

However, the U.S. were psychologically defeated by Tet in 1968 according to Vandiver:

Four conditions made Tet a decisive battles for America: (1) devastating surprise; (2) confused, faltering, wearied leadership; (3) luridly slanted reporting by the media, especially television; (4) the collapse of public belief in the administration and the war effort.<sup>713</sup>

As described by Mitchell K. Hall in *The Vietnam Era Antiwar Movement*, “the Tet Offensive was a rude awakening of the realities of the war that prompted a reevaluation of the nation’s commitment.”<sup>714</sup> While political and military leaders were telling repeatedly that “the Communists were fading”, the Tet Offensive woke the public up and made them realize that the reality conflicted sharply with the picture that politicians were trying to paint. The new reality reinforced public disagreement with U.S. policy in Vietnam.<sup>715</sup> In early February 1968, American broadcast journalist Walter Cronkite came to Vietnam and televised his grim experience: “he had seen the masses of graves of the many purged by the VC and NVA, smelled death in the air, and would do everything he could to bring the war to an end.”<sup>716</sup> On his television program on February 27<sup>th</sup> 1965, Cronkite said: “The only rational way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could.”<sup>717</sup> On the influence of Cronkite’s reporting on President Johnson’s decision in negotiate an end to the Vietnam War, Vandiver wrote:

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<sup>711</sup> Frank E. Vandiver, *Shadows of Vietnam: Lyndon Johnson’s Wars* (Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 285.

<sup>712</sup> Ibid.

<sup>713</sup> Ibid.

<sup>714</sup> Mitchell K. Hall, “The Vietnam Era Antiwar Movement,” *OAH Magazine of History*, Volume 18, Issue 5 (October 2004): 15.

<sup>715</sup> Ibid.

<sup>716</sup> Vandiver, *Shadows of Vietnam*, 287.

<sup>717</sup> Quoted in Vandiver, *Shadows of Vietnam*, 287.

Some people thought that his broadcast hit Johnson hard enough to nudge him closer toward negotiations. Some thought that wishfully enough to put words in George Christian's mouth: the post-Cronkite 'shock waves rolled through the Government.' Johnson suffered, right enough, and he did tell Christian that 'If I lost Cronkite, I probably lost the country.'<sup>718</sup>

The number of victims of Tet Offensive was huge especially in Hue. Although Hanoi did not achieve decisive military in Tet Offensive, it won public opinion in the U.S. as well as in the world for supporting Hanoi in the war. Media played important role in helping Hanoi achieve its target in Tet Offensive that defeat American fighting will in the war. However, the Communists in the South were beaten back quickly. Too many people died in Tet Offensive and after that both Hanoi and Washington continued their strategies of war and peace. Because of that, the Tet Offensive was not successful for Hanoi.

## **9.2 The Killy Peace Initiative: Vietnam and the United States Peace Talks through Rome Channel**

In January-February 1967, Hanoi had began making efforts to negotiate with the United States through the Roma channel. Italian Foreign Minister Amintore Fanfani "was asked through unspecified channel whether he would be prepared to receive unspecified Vietnamese [ambassador]" After contacting the U.S., Fanfani asked North Vietnam about the "identity and authority of prospective visitor" but "there was no response."<sup>719</sup> In July-August, North Vietnam continued to ask the Foreign Minister if "he would send D'Orlandi to get in touch with NVN Ambassador in Prague." On September 5<sup>th</sup> 1967, Ambassador Giovanni D'Orlandi met Ambassador Phan Van Su and talked about "how soon Hanoi would meet with U.S. after bombing halt." On November 7<sup>th</sup> 1967, both ambassadors met again and "Su said he would go to Hanoi to present ideas."<sup>720</sup> In late January 1968, U.S. State Department Records show:

Su contacted D'Orlandi who went to Prague. Su said there was "general approval of idea of starting of negotiations" and agreed to come to Rome to talk with Fanfani. Refused to come at end of January because it was 'Tet' holiday and said he needed specific Hanoi authorization before selecting date. Agree to D'Orlandi suggestion for February 4 unless he advised D'Orlandi to the contrary.<sup>721</sup>

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<sup>718</sup> Ibid.

<sup>719</sup> "Killy Chronology-Reference File," LBJL, [This folder contains photocopies from State Department files (record group 59) at the National Archive College Park facility. Added to Reference File 10/25/2012.

<sup>720</sup> Ibid. Note: Giovanni D'Orlandi was Italian Ambassador to South Vietnam.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid.

On February 4<sup>th</sup> 1968, Su came to Rome and had dinner with Fanfani and D'Orlandi.<sup>722</sup> The next day, Foreign Minister Fanfani met with the North Vietnamese Ambassador to Prague, Phan Van Su in Rome. This meeting also included Phan Dinh Khiet (a counselor or other senior official of the North Vietnamese Embassy) and D'Orlandi. Fanfani began the conversation: "As we agreed last night about the agenda, I suggest I listen to your general exposition then we discuss together how to get out of the situation and generally discuss stopping of the bombing with specific reference to A) obstacles and B) ways of overcoming the obstacles."<sup>723</sup>

Su gave a long presentation about Vietnam's views. He told the history of the origin of the Vietnam War. He recalled the DRV "wanted loyally to implement the Geneva Agreements" after a "long fight against the French colonialists." He condemned the U.S. for preventing the Vietnam general election in 1956 when America supported Ngo Dinh Diem's decision to not hold an election in North and South Vietnam. Su further called the Diem government "a dictatorial regime," responsible for "more than a million dead, arrested, and persecuted." He added: "Nevertheless, in order to make possible the belated elections, the DRV took several initiatives to better the relations between the two parts of the country." Criticism was then leveled at the U.S. for "the shameless aggression against the people of Vietnam." Consequently, Su stated "all the evils of South Vietnam is [the result of] the aggression of the United States against South Vietnam, of which aggression one [U.S.] has to add from 1965 the aggression [U.S.] against North Vietnam with bombings." He was determined to protect the North Vietnamese view that "as to the legality of the FLN, we say that it is the legal representative of a great number of southerners which does not belittle in the least the liberty of self-determination of the people of South Vietnam." He added that "the aid of the North to the South cannot be interpreted as intervention."<sup>724</sup>

In this conversation, Ambassador Su expressed the sincerity of North Vietnam's desire to negotiate with Washington: "If the United States really wanted to negotiate, it would unconditionally stop its bombing of North Vietnam. If the bombing stopped without conditions, we would get in touch with the United States. We would establish

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<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

<sup>723</sup> "NODIS/KILLY, Document of the meeting between Fanfani and Su in Prague," February 5<sup>th</sup> 1968, Box 139-Vietnam, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid.

a program to solve the Vietnamese question and to stop the war in South Vietnam.”<sup>725</sup> Before the Tet Offensive, North Vietnam had always asked the U.S. to stop all war activities as conditions of negotiation, but this time, North Vietnam confirmed, “the stopping of the bombing is only an accessory problem. All the questions between the RDV [Republic Democratic Vietnam-North Vietnam] and the United States may be discussed.” North Vietnam understood that the U.S. would be interested in the future of South Vietnam and offered that North Vietnam would respect the attitudes of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam: “the United States will have to discuss also with the FLN, on which we can exercise a friendly pressure but never compel them. The FLN has been fighting for twenty years. Both we and they want peace but with independence.” The Ambassador reassured that North Vietnam was making these remarks in good faith: “The statements are serious and not propagandistic. Now it is up to the United States to answer our proposals, to show their good will.”<sup>726</sup> Afterwards, Minister Fanfani summarized the main points of the Ambassador’s presentation: “I wish to add that in the serious contacts between Hanoi and Washington, all existing problems could be discussed. I repeat that in the first stage the participation of the FLN might not be necessary and they could step in at a later time in the conversations.” Fanfani then expressed the good purpose behind the Italian efforts to bring Hanoi and Washington into negotiations: “We consider it our duty to our United States ally, to our love of peace, and to the suffering of the Vietnamese people not to pull ourselves back as we could.” Fanfani then asked what sign of good will from the U.S. to North Vietnam was required. Ambassador Su replied: “a cessation of only bombing North of the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel.” Fanfani asked how many days “following the stopping of bombing for the initiation of the dialogue between Hanoi and Washington.” The Italians stipulated they would “meet the U.S. delegation within one week after the cessation of bombing.”<sup>727</sup> The Ambassador agreed to set a date but he first wished for “authorization” from the North Vietnamese government and said that:

We agree for Foreign Minister Fanfani to let it be known in the communication he will make to the Government of the United States that in case of an unconditional cessation of the bombing, a delay of “X” days already exists for a first meeting of representatives of the two parties, Hanoi and Washington,

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<sup>725</sup> Ibid.

<sup>726</sup> Ibid.

<sup>727</sup> Ibid.

with a view to establish contacts for serious conversations on questions concerning the two parties.<sup>728</sup>

On February 17<sup>th</sup> 1968, Secretary of State Rusk sent a message to Foreign Minister Fanfani about this new peace initiative for Vietnam.<sup>729</sup> In this message, the Secretary agreed to send Daniel I. Davidson, Special Assistant to Governor Harriman to Rome as requested by the Minister. On February 21<sup>st</sup>, the “scheduled Su-D’Orlandi meeting in Prague” was not held because the Ambassador had sent a message days ago that he would be absent from Prague and back in Hanoi, to which Fanfani commented, “this was interesting and possibly encouraging.”<sup>730</sup> Between February 21<sup>st</sup> and March 5<sup>th</sup> 1968, there were several meetings between Minister Fanfani, Ambassador D’Orlandi, Davidson and Mylon.<sup>731</sup> On February 24<sup>th</sup> 1968, Davidson sent records of his talks with Fanfani and D’Orlandi about the new peace initiative in Vietnam to Washington. D’Orlandi thought over the reasons why Hanoi had approached Fanfani: “the North Vietnamese had confidence in his judgment and his advice was that North Vietnamese should move rapidly to seize the opportunity of a trip Fanfani would make to Washington in mid-September.”<sup>732</sup> In a conversation with Fanfani, Davidson doubted whether Hanoi “wanted a free general election,” and he feared Hanoi wanted to “destroy the present GVN [South Vietnam].”<sup>733</sup> Foreign Minister Fanfani expressed his belief in the sincerity of Hanoi’s search for peace:

Fanfani said that the constant theme behind the talks in Rome was that the North Vietnamese took the matter very seriously. Fanfani noted that Su had stated that the contacts Washington had tried to establish with Hanoi were never proportional to Hanoi’s deep interests. [...] There had been various attempts at contact through journalists, members of the ICC, humanitarian institutions such as the Red Cross, but never through serious channels. Although Su didn’t consider any of the Eastern Europe channels as serious. Fanfani had specifically asked Su about Prime Minister [of Romania] [Ion Gheorghe] Maurer, Vietnamese laughed as if to say that they could not RPT [report] not conceivably be a serious channel. They also flatly excluded the

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<sup>728</sup> Ibid.

<sup>729</sup> “Telegram Department of State, AMEMBASSY Rome, Please deliver following message from Secretary Rusk to Fanfani,” February 17<sup>th</sup> 1968, Box 139, Vietnam, Country File, NSF, LBJL, Austin-Texas-U.S.

<sup>730</sup> “From AMEMBASSY Rome to SECSTATE WASHDC,” February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1968, Box 139, Vietnam, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>731</sup> Chronology- Killy- Reference File-LBJL.

<sup>732</sup> “From AMEMBASSY Rome to SECSTATE WASHDC,” February 24<sup>nd</sup> 1968, Box 139, Vietnam, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>733</sup> “From AMEMBASSY Rome to SECSTATE WASHDC,” February 26<sup>nd</sup> 1968, Box 139, Vietnam, Country File, NSF, LBJL.



United Nations from any role in either bringing about negotiations or guaranteeing a settlement.<sup>734</sup>

Davidson said that:

I could not RPT not understand the North Vietnamese comment. If they were fully informed representatives they must have known that on a number of occasions, most recently in January, serious and responsible personalities conveyed messages between the USG and the DRV and that while these exchanges had never succeeded, Hanoi had never questioned their authenticity.<sup>735</sup>

After considering the report of Davidson from Rome about the peace initiative for Vietnam, Harriman replied: "In view of the above, it would seem well to keep the Italian channel open for possible future use rather than to pursue it actively at the present time." He instructed Davidson to answer Foreign Minister Fanfani and Ambassador D'Orlandi. First, Washington expressed its "great appreciation for their (particularly Fanfani's) efforts" in searching for peace for Vietnam. Second, Washington thought that "Hanoi is undertaking a combined diplomatic and propaganda offensive rather than showing a serious intention to negotiate in good faith at the moment." Harriman wanted to know if Hanoi was undertaking a "widespread exercise to impress a variety of government." Then he itemized some important points for Ambassador D'Orlandi in his next discussion with Ambassador Su in Prague. Harriman also indicated that after the Tet Offensive, the U.S. had "been informed by French and through U Thant on information he received from French that negotiations would start immediately if we (U.S.) announced publicly unconditional cessation of bombing and other acts of war against NVN." He continued that the U.S. "are understandably cautious because of the major military operations now in progress or being planned by North Vietnam in the DMZ and the Laos Panhandle" and the U.S. "cannot ignore Hanoi's actions on the ground in interpreting what Hanoi's intentions may be."<sup>736</sup> On March 1<sup>st</sup> 1968, Ambassador D'Orlandi again met Ambassador Su in Prague. Following their meeting, on March 4<sup>th</sup> 1968 Davidson sent Harriman his report about the conversation between the two Ambassadors in Prague on March 1<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>734</sup> Ibid.

<sup>735</sup> Ibid.

<sup>736</sup> Action: Am embassy Rome, Info White House, From Harriman for Davidson, February 27<sup>th</sup> 1968.

1968: “the atmospherics were excellent but (...) there was nothing substantively new from Hanoi. D’Orlandi agreed but said that he was optimistic.”<sup>737</sup>

In a telegram to the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam William Westmoreland, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Earle Gilmore Wheeler judged that the U.S. government was currently facing an extremely difficult situation in the Vietnam War. According to him, “the gloom and doom” generated by the Tet Offensive, together with a fiscal crisis, had had a heavy effect on public support for the U.S. effort in Vietnam. The latest public opinion poll from March 16<sup>th</sup> 1968 showed that 69 per cent of Americans wanted the U.S. forces to carry out “a phased withdrawal.”<sup>738</sup> In the public eye, Johnson was considered “the war candidate” in an election year.<sup>739</sup> Democrats were fearful of the election result in November if the U.S. kept their present posture towards maintaining the Vietnam War effort.<sup>740</sup> On March 31<sup>st</sup> 1968, President Johnson announced he would not run for another term as president and “he was ordering the immediate cessation of most U.S. bombing raids against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and simultaneously inviting it to enter into formal peace talks with American representatives.”<sup>741</sup>

The Negotiation Initiatives through the Rome Channel (Killy) shows that Hanoi waited for the ripe moments to begin a peace talk with Washington through a Western channel. They tried to contact with Roma\_ the center of Catholic Church to gain the supports of the Catholic World for their patriotic revolution. The Killy peace initiative was one of the first steps to open official peace talks in Paris between Washington and Hanoi in May 1968. The conversations between Hanoi and Rome at Prague helped the Western countries understand the DRV/NLF better and supporting them to find a peace solution to end the war.<sup>742</sup>

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<sup>737</sup> “From AMEMBASSY Rome to SECSTATE WASHDC, For Harriman from Davidson,” March 4, 1968, Box 139, Vietnam, Country File, NSF, LBJL.

<sup>738</sup> “Telegram From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Wheeler) to the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Westmoreland),” March 16<sup>th</sup> 1968, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v06/d136>.

<sup>739</sup> “Telegram conversation between President Johnson and Secretary of defense Clifford,” Washington March 20<sup>th</sup> 1968, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v06/d146>.

<sup>740</sup> “Memorandum from the Postmaster General (O’Brien) to President Johnson,” March 27<sup>th</sup> 1968, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v06/d161>

<sup>741</sup> Robert J. McMahon, “The Politics, and Geopolitics of American Troop Withdrawal from Vietnam, 1968-1972,” *Diplomatic History* (June, 2010): 471.

<sup>742</sup> Killy, Reference File, LBJL.

## CHAPTER 10. CONCLUSION

1. The dissertation analyzed and assessed the talks, both direct and indirect, between Vietnam and United States that took place from 1965 to 1968. However, it is not necessary to consider every peace initiative, and therefore the focus was on selected examples in order to answer the question why the search for peace in this period failed. The PINTA peace initiative (1965-1966) is an important example. The U.S. government wanted to use PINTA to showcase to the world that they were really in search of peace. The Johnson administration needed PINTA to gain the support of allies as well as their own people because the presidents had repeatedly expressed that he was a peace candidate during the Presidential race to the White House. With PINTA, the U.S. offered to come to the negotiating table unconditionally, however they were determined not to accept the condition from Ho Chi Minh's government that the U.S. must withdraw its troops from South Vietnam. Yet, at the same time, they were preparing a plan to expand their armed forces and continue bombing North Vietnam. Frankly, it appears that the U.S. aimed to take its advantage at the negotiating table in order to establish a peace that could meet the American goal, which was to make South Vietnam an independent country that would not follow Communism or be affected by China and the Soviet Union. During the preparation of PINTA, the U.S. estimated that the possibility of Hanoi attending the negotiating table would be very low if their pre-conditions were not satisfied. However, the U.S. still persevered with the bombing pause and noisily sent messages of peace through the world, wanting to express that they had made a huge effort to search for peace and that Hanoi had not accepted it. Therefore, they had to continue their involvement in the Vietnam War. From the standpoint of the South Vietnamese government, they would aim to first become independent, and then once they were strong enough, they would attack the North to unify the country. Regarding North Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh was afraid that in the long-term, the U.S. would invade the North and use it as a springboard for an attack on Communist China if Hanoi did not stick to fighting in the South. Therefore, the North Vietnamese government would not come to the negotiating table until the U.S. fighting spirit was defeated. Since December 1963, Hanoi considered the war against the U.S. in Vietnam as a part of the revolutionary movement against the U.S. in China, and decided to use revolutionary violence to gain victory. Since December 1965, the North was determined to fight until they could win

a complete victory and only come to the negotiating table if the American spirit of invasion was defeated. In 1965-1968, the U.S. resolutely maintained their forces in the South Vietnam to keep their promise to protect the South from Communism, which resulted in Hanoi refusing to talk to the U.S. All the direct and indirect talks between Vietnam and the U.S. in the period from 1965-1968 failed.

2. This dissertation contributed an explanation of why the talks in the period of 1965-1968 failed and why the Vietnam war could not have ended sooner. The power of culture and patriotism indeed enabled DRV leaders to drive the war towards their preferred ends and force the U.S. to accept their pre-conditions for talks. Similarly, U.S. culture, ideals of freedom, and patriotism made the U.S. government jump into the war in Vietnam and commit to protecting their “freedom” even when the situation became desperate. The United States used the Vietnam War as a part of the Cold War strategy against Communist China. However, the Vietnamese people considered the war as a fight to protect their fatherland, keep it independent, defend its territorial integrity, preserve Vietnamese traditional culture and unify the country. The war was no longer a “cold” war, but it became a bloody and extremely devastating war. Obviously, the Americans could not go on supporting a war in which their boys were dying meaninglessly on an isolated land. The anti-war movement developed. Therefore, U.S. soldiers, and U.S. leaders became more and more stuck.

In the meantime, the Vietnamese people kept their fighting spirits up consistently and showed determination to fight against the U.S. until achieving the final victory. Vietnamese traditional culture and the power of patriotism made the people there strongly support a great war for the fatherland by any means. In the viewpoint of the Vietnamese, patriotism was the most sacred ideal. They believed that as their forefathers had once sacrificed their lives to protect the fatherland, continuing their work and defeating Vietnam’s enemies would be the greatest attainment possible for one’s life. The religion of the majority of Vietnamese was the veneration of ancestors and heroes who had dedicated their lives to the country. They considered filial impiety and ungrateful behavior for the sacrifices of the forefathers the most terrible sin. According to the Vietnamese conception of morality, people must obey their parents, respect moral principles, and disregard materialistic things. Therefore, the Vietnamese could withstand hardships and keep their fighting spirits high until the end. It was with a thorough understanding of the culture, psychology and personality of the Vietnamese that President Ho Chi Minh and his Communist Party developed strategies of the

people's war and protracted a resistance war in order to ultimately gain victory. They understood that their fighting spirit gave them an advantage over the U.S. For this reason, they were convinced that the U.S. would only come honestly to the negotiating table once it was close to defeat. That was why Hanoi refused all the talks in between 1965-1968.

3. Key Vietnamese archival sources, used and translated for the first time, show the role that emotions played in the Vietnam War and prove that the leaders of both sides understood their opponent's goals very well. The relations between emotions and policies of the U.S. and Vietnam in the war were pointed out. It was specifically shown that fear played a very important role and ruled over policies on both sides. Ho Chi Minh's government understood why the U.S. was involved in South Vietnam. It was out of the fear of Communist China that the U.S. had helped France fight against Ho Chi Minh's Communist Party. Additionally, fear that the collapse of the South Vietnamese government would accordingly lead to the collapse of Southeast Asia's freedom from Communism, motivated Eisenhower to intervene strongly in the war. His successors Kennedy and Johnson acted out of fear that the U.S. would lose its prestige if they were uncommitted to their allies, and resolutely kept their promise of supporting South Vietnam against the Communists. The U.S. was afraid that a *détente* with the Communists would lead them to make the same mistake as at the Munich Conference in 1938, and thereby cause another world war, so they decided to hold onto South Vietnam and refused the preconditions of the North's government to go to the negotiating table between 1965 and 1968.

The U.S. also knew the effect that emotions played in the policy making of North Vietnamese government. They understood that the war initiated by Ho Chi Minh was indeed a patriotic movement led by Communists. Ho's government was afraid that the U.S. and South Vietnam would expand the war towards the North and use it as a springboard for an attack on China, a huge market. Moreover, Hanoi was always concerned with the origin of the war. This war had been initiated because America had come to Vietnam to help France against Ho Chi Minh's government, and cooperated with Ngo Dinh Diem to prevent a general election; therefore Hanoi was determined to defeat the United States by any means. Since Hanoi did not accept South Vietnam as an independent country, the presence of U.S. forces in the South was, in their mind, considered an invasion. Although U.S. officials always stated that their country did not wish to expand the war towards the North, several Vietnamese documents reveal that

South Vietnam officials were not only determined to protect the South, but that they also considered attacking the North to unify the country when they were strong enough. Therefore Hanoi was rightly worried the U.S. would someday attack the North. They understood that the U.S. involvement in South Vietnam was a part of the strategy against Communist China. If Hanoi did not follow through with the war and let the South become independent and strong, then one day in the not too distant future, the South could persuade the United States to invade the North. This could put all of Vietnam under the control of the U.S. The fear of being again under the yoke of foreign domination, as well as the aspiration for an independent and united fatherland, made Hanoi's leaders determined to fight until they gained a complete victory. That was why they refused to come to the negotiating table from 1965-1968.

The Vietnam War was a competition between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the United States to win the hearts of the people in Vietnam as well as all over the world. The prospect of an independent, united Communist country, where everyone would be treated equal and humanely, combined with the image of the leader Ho Chi Minh dedicating his life to the country, won the sympathy and hearts of the Vietnamese. In contrast, the prospect of a country dominated by the U.S. and the terrible crimes of South Vietnam's leaders made the Vietnamese feel indignant and determined to fight against these forces. The images of the U.S. bringing guns and weapons to Vietnam, then inflicting wounds on the land and causing bloodshed for both the Vietnamese and the Americans aroused anger from the people all over the world and boosted waves of anti-Vietnam war sentiment in America. Therefore, Vietnam received more and more aid from socialist countries, peace-loving organizations and people from around the world including Western countries and the U.S. At the same time, American presidents were growing tired of being criticized, and afraid of losing voters, and they feared losing power and prestige. Consequently, they had to de-escalate the war, be ready to negotiate and withdraw their forces from Vietnam.

4. The fourth contribution of the dissertation is identifying the role of the individual, and of personality in history, thereby giving a more complete methodology for approaching and studying history. In order to study the foreign policies of a country, one must study the biographies, psychologies and personalities of individual leaders. In the Vietnam War, Ho Chi Minh played the most important role, as his thinking defined the war strategy and patriotic movement in Vietnam. Indeed, it was

the patriotism that made Ho Chi Minh decide to follow the path of war until independence and unification had been gained for the nation and only then steering the country towards Communism. Patriotism led him to actively develop the forces within South Vietnam and prepare for the long-term war against the U.S. It can be stated that patriotism was undoubtedly the motivation that galvanized Ho to overcome many difficulties and challenges to lead the country into the war of resistance against the U.S. and to victory. This war of the Vietnamese led by Ho Chi Minh was similar to the previous wars against the expansion of China during the Han, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, and Ch'ing dynasties. Every war of resistance against invasion is the fighting between a "weak" nation against a "powerful" one. Therefore, in order to win in such a battle, Vietnam had to implement the people's war and needed a great leader, who could gather and unite all people from different classes and parties to fight the nation's common enemy. For historical examples of this, in the war against the Ming dynasty, Le Loi was the leader; in the one against Ch'ing, it was Quang Trung; and in the war against France and the United States, it was Ho Chi Minh. Leadership has always played the most important role in Vietnamese resistance wars. Leaders decided about lines and strategies, they motivated the people, and gathered and united forces. In these wars in Vietnam, the unity among the leaders, soldiers, and civilians was the decisive factor that led to victory against the enemy and saved the country.

There were a lot of parties in the patriotic movements against France. However, only Ho Chi Minh's Communist party was able to gather and unite the different social classes into the Viet Minh coalition in order to unanimously fight against France under the same banner. Almost all the Vietnamese patriots failed to gain foreign assistance in their fight against France, but Ho Chi Minh succeeded. He successfully canvassed and obtained the support from socialist countries and peace-lovers from all over the world. He himself also attracted and received the respect of many world leaders and public figures. He came to accept Communism although he knew nothing about its theory at first. He simply believed that Lenin and other communists supported the national and colonial liberation. Therefore, he believed if he followed Lenin and joined the international Communism movement, he would receive the spiritual and materialistic support for the national liberation of Vietnam.

In the war against the United States, Ho Chi Minh was the person who was determined to fight until the end, with Le Duan as his right-hand man, who executed Ho Chi Minh's policy and developed detailed strategies and tactics. Regarding Le

Duan, he was chosen by Ho Chi Minh to take over the first secretary of the Vietnamese Labor Party. After Ho Chi Minh's death, Le Duan took over the role of leading the revolution and continued following Ho Chi Minh's policies, deploying a prolonged people's war, as a difficult and violent revolution as described in Marxist-Leninist philosophy.

5. The fifth contribution of the dissertation lies in answering the controversial question regarding the Vietnam War: what was the essence of the Vietnam War? Was it a civil war or a national liberation war, an ideological or a proxy war? It was a war of national liberation led by the Vietnamese Communist Party and its leader Ho Chi Minh against American neo-imperialism in the contexts of colonial history and the Cold War. The architects of the war were the United States, South Vietnam as well as Hanoi. If the U.S. had not given aid to France against Ho Chi Minh's Communist government and helped Ngo Dinh Diem to prevent the Vietnamese general election in 1956, then the American War would not have occurred. The Vietnam War from 1954-1975 against the United States originated from and was a continuance of the war against France led by the Vietnamese Communist Party in 1930-1954. Looking even further back, it was the extension of the war against France colonialists led by the Nguyen dynasty and their patriotic scholars to liberate the nation from a foreign domination. Due to the U.S. firmly holding South Vietnam as an independent country to stop a Communist advance into Southeast Asia, Hanoi had to actively fight with various strategies, from peaceful to violent, and involving all the fronts, such as culture, politics, military, and diplomacy, in order to achieve a complete victory. However, in the North of Vietnam, there were also the voices against the war.

6. The sixth contribution of the dissertation is to answer the question whether or not Vietnam and the U.S. missed chances for peace talks in 1965-1968. And did they perhaps miss these chances because they did not understand each other? The answer is that no chances for talks appeared in 1965-1968, and that both Vietnam and the U.S. understood each other very well.

Vietnam supposed that the U.S. was a neo-imperialist nation because the United States had come to South Vietnam in order to fight against Communist China. Vietnam learned that the U.S.'s long-term goal was not to rule over Vietnam the same as France had done, but that it would instead impose economic, political, and cultural policies that benefitted the U.S. on Vietnam by means of the pro-American government in South Vietnam.



In regards to the American administrations, they understood that they were fighting against the patriotic movements led by Vietnamese Communists with the support of communist countries. All the peace initiatives in 1965-1968 would fail because Vietnam, at that time, was determined to gain the final victory while the U.S. resolutely kept South Vietnam away from the influence of Communism. When the U.S. made its PINTA peace initiatives public, it also tried simultaneously to increase its forces in Vietnam and made a plan to expand the war to end it its own favor. Therefore, Vietnam could not accept the American preconditions to come to the negotiating table. In 1965-1968, after the U.S. escalation of the war in July 1965, there was no hope for ending the war in Vietnam without a military defeat.

7. The seventh contribution of the dissertation is identifying the role of the Soviet Union and China in the negotiations for ending the Vietnam War in 1965-1968. The Soviet Union was determined to keep peaceful relations with the U.S. in their period of détente, but they also supported the war of resistance against the U.S. by the Vietnamese. The Soviets did not accept the American request to play an intermediary role in talks with Vietnam because they did not want to offend the Vietnamese leaders. They understood that Vietnam was determined to follow the war until they had gained their final goal of unification. The People's Republic of China aided Ho Chi Minh's Communist government in terms of both spirit and goods and military services. They had firmly backed the war of the Vietnamese against the U.S. and South Vietnam since 1950. With the support of China and the Soviet Union, Ho Chi Minh's government could implement a long-term people's war until they had won. However, the dissertation affirmed that Hanoi had their own strategies that were independent from both the Soviet Union as well as China. Hanoi received aid from, but never become their puppet.

8. The Vietnam War was also a competition for gaining the hearts and minds of various empires and of the people all over the world. After World War II, the Soviet Union, the United States, and China all wanted to expand their influence and engaged in an ideological competition to gain the hearts of third parties including Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh's government analyzed the world political situation and used the conflicts among empires to develop their own policies and strategies for a people's war against French colonialists and later American neo-imperialists.

In order to fight against the French colonial presence, Ho Chi Minh came to study Lenin and established the Communist Party to receive support from international

Communism. Since 1950, Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese Communist Party had accepted aid from Chinese Communists for the war against French colonialism and American neo-imperialism. Throughout, he and his party remained neutral in the competition between the Soviet Union and China to gain support from both sides. Vietnamese leaders were able to take advantage of the conflicts among empires, to gain the hearts and support of the world for the war and obtain control of Vietnam. Based on the firm support of their allies, patriotism and the indomitable spirit of the Vietnamese people during the war against the U.S. and the South Vietnamese government from 1954-1975, Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese Communist Party confidently gained the means to analyze and develop strategies for a complete victory.

During the years 1965-1968, the Vietnamese Communist Party judged that the moment was not right to end the war because the fighting spirit of the U.S. forces had not yet been defeated. They did not want to agree to peace talks in this period. No chances for peace were lost in 1965-1968.

9. In the international talks in the period between 1965 and 1968, countries such as Poland, Hungary, Japan, the United Kingdom, France and others acted as intermediaries. Each of them took their own stand on the Vietnamese issues and supported either Washington or Hanoi at different levels. Poland and Hungary strongly supported the war of resistance against the U.S. by the Vietnamese, which led them to honestly try and persuade Hanoi to go to the negotiating table to end the war sooner. France had a lot of experience with Vietnam, which it used to advise the U.S. to stop all their war activities and sincerely enter into negotiations with Vietnam. Japan and the United Kingdom were close allies of the U.S. and supported the American policies associated with Vietnam. All of these countries profoundly cared about peace in Vietnam and they also wanted to increase their prestige in the eyes of the international and domestic community. Therefore, they were active in the search for peace in 1965-1968. The Tet Offensive 1968 was a turning point in the Vietnam War. It was a military as well as a psychological attack on the Johnson administration and defeated the American will to fight in Vietnam. Although Vietnam and the U.S. ultimately made all the decisions regarding peace and war, the voices from countries calling for peace through the media, as well as anti-war movements throughout the world, affected Washington and crippled the American prestige in the eyes of the international community and inside the U.S. This helped Washington recognize that their military intervention in the Vietnam War was wrong. Finally, they decided to

withdraw all the troops out of Vietnam and attended the negotiating table to end the Vietnam War. Both sides must take responsibility for the failures of peace initiatives and the loss of lives. After the Tet Offensive and Richard Nixon becoming president in 1969, both sides continued to follow their strategy of war and peace. It took several more years to achieve the Paris Peace Accords in 1973 to end the Vietnam War. In 1975, Vietnam was reunified under the control of Communist Regime.

## ABBREVIATIONS

AMEMBASSY	American Embassy
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CIA	Central Intelligent Agency
COSVN	Central Office of South Vietnam
CPSU	Communist Party of Soviet Union
CWIHP	Cold War International History Project
CHICOMS	Chinese Communists
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
ICC	International Control Commission
ICP	Indochinese Communist Party
FLN	Front of Liberation Nation (The National Liberation Front of South Vietnam)
GOK	Government of Kenya
LBJL	Lyndon Baines Johnson Library
ND	<i>Nhan Dan</i> (The People's Daily-The voice of Communist Party of Vietnam)
NCS	National Security Council
NLF	National Liberation Front (The National Liberation Front of South Vietnam)
NSF	National Security File
<i>NVGP</i>	<i>Nhân Văn Giai Phẩm</i>
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam
PINTA	The code name of the U.S. peace initiative for Vietnam (December 1965-February 1966)
PRG	Provisional Revolutionary Government
PRC	People's Republic of China
RPT	Report
RDV	Republic Democratic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
SECSTATE	Secretary of State
SOV	Soviet
SC	Security Council

TVA	Tennessee Valley Authority
VCP	Vietnamese Communist Party
U.S.	The United States
UN	United Nations
USG	United States Government
USSR	Union of Soviet Republics
VWP	Vietnam Worker Party
WASHDC	Washington D.C

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