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The Revolutionary Path to State Formation in Vietnam: Opportunities, Conundrums, and Legacies

This essay examines the revolutionary path of modern state formation in Vietnam under the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) since 1945. It builds on scholarship produced in the last two decades that has emphasized Vietnamese agency and the radical character of the Vietnamese revolution.¹ Earlier scholarship portrayed this revolution as primarily patriotic and anti-colonial in its goals, which were repeatedly frustrated by foreign intervention.² In contrast, an emerging perspective posits that communist ideology played the central role in the origin and development of the revolution.³

Thanks to the new scholarship, it is now possible to treat Vietnamese communists not as nationalists in disguise, but as genuine radicals who aspired to construct a new order based on their revolutionary vision. This vision gave the VCP an ambitious three-fold mission: to achieve national independence, to build a socialist paradise, and to contribute to world revolution. The mission sounded noble, but opposition and resistance to it were also predictable from nearly every sector of society, including landlords and rich farmers who would later oppose land reform, merchants who would prefer a capitalist system, many intellectuals who would oppose Stalinist thought-control, and small farmers who would question the economic

rationale of Maoist-style collectivization. The communist mission also set the VCP on a collision course with nearly all the major world powers (France, Britain, the United States, Germany, the Netherlands, and Japan) that ruled various parts of the world prior to 1945.

This paper seeks to find out how, given their mission, Vietnamese communists navigated domestic and international politics to build a modern state. I argue that their radical ideology and practices shaped the path of state formation by creating particular opportunities and conundrums in five key aspects of state formation: legitimization, establishing sovereignty, territorialization, creating a centralized bureaucracy, and monopolizing violence.

In a world of nation-states, the party embraced class as the foundation of its legitimacy. Class-based ideology offered the party opportunities for mass mobilization and for gaining support from other revolutionary states. At the same time, the new state needed international recognition, while the mission of the party implied a rejection of the *status quo* world order dominated by the West. The concept of sovereignty in the Westphalian system was based on exclusive national territories, but the party's concept of internationalist solidarities compromised its view of national territory. This problem was exacerbated by the party's disrespect for international laws and institutions that were part of the world order it opposed.

Radicalism also created dilemmas as well as opportunities in building a centralized bureaucracy and coercive apparatuses. The need to create an efficient modern state bureaucracy and a professional military conflicted with the need to ensure that bureaucrats and soldiers were loyal to the revolutionary mission. Because they believed in the importance of class struggle and revolutionary justice, party leaders justified the use of mass violence, terrorism, and other criminal tactics.

The Vietnamese revolution succeeded in defeating its class enemies, in challenging French and American imperialism, and in projecting Vietnam's power across Southeast Asia. Yet, the revolutionary ship ran aground in the late 1980s with the collapse of world communism and the death or retirement of founding party leaders. Today the party has abandoned the Stalinist model of socialist development but still proclaims its loyalty to Marxism-Leninism. The revolutionary state left significant and adverse legacies that Vietnam is still grappling with today. These legacies are

creating problems for Vietnam in its conflict with China in the South China Sea; in its efforts to reform the state bureaucracy to promote economic growth; and in controlling the state's coercive apparatuses, which now wield enormous power but whose corrupt and brutal practices can provoke mass unrest and threaten the regime's survival.

Vietnamese revolutionary state formation is significant beyond Vietnam. In comparative perspective, state formation in Vietnam was a highly purposeful endeavor spanning four decades and led by a small group of revolutionary elites. These elites not only aspired to construct a viable state but also had a particular design for it. The intense purposefulness found in Vietnamese state formation (and in other cases of modern revolutionary state formation in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and Iran) makes this case stand out, especially in contrast to state formation under the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) as well as in much of Latin America and Africa, where postcolonial elites merely sought state power but not much else.

As a revolutionary state, the Vietnamese experience contributes to scholarship on revolutions and their role in world politics. The voluminous literature on revolutions has neglected ideology and has privileged such factors as class, state structure, and economic and political crises.⁴ Although scholars agree that revolutions have great impact on world politics, the literature on the topic is thin.⁵ Some authors argue that the birth of a revolutionary state likely triggers interstate wars or long-term tension in world politics as the revolutionary state flouts international norms and challenges the global order.⁶ Others contend that systemic pressure and other mechanisms would gradually integrate revolutionary states into the existing world order.⁷ As I hope to show, Vietnamese revolutionaries were capable of navigating world politics while maintaining their long-term revolutionary vision.

The first section of this essay will analyze the dilemmas that revolutionary leaders face as they start to establish a state. The latter part will review historical events to show how Vietnamese leaders coped with such dilemmas in five key aspects of state formation.

Dilemmas for revolutionary states

Scholars of the modern state define it as a human community governed by a centralized bureaucracy with sole external and internal sovereignty within

a given territory.⁸ In this definition, the modern state encompasses both international and domestic dimensions. It is a unit in the state system that first emerged in Western Europe with the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia. Its external sovereignty is conferred by other states in that system.⁹ The system may be characterized as “anarchic” for lack of a world government, but it does have a structure shaped by a hierarchy of states with varying power endowments, and by the numerous rules and institutions constructed over time since Westphalia. The structure of the state system has continued to evolve, but the system has generally been dominated by the West.

As a unit in the state system, the modern state also governs a domestic realm. Governance ideally requires a centralized bureaucracy to administer territory and extract resources from society to pay for government operations. Administration and resource extraction in turn require internal sovereignty, which comes from societal acceptance of state legitimacy and from the state’s ability to maintain the monopoly of force. Since the French Revolution, the most common form of legitimization is appeal to an abstract nation defined by shared ethnicity or culture. The monopoly of violence is conducted through a standing military that pledges allegiance to the nation-state.

There are theoretical reasons to think that revolutionary state formation has distinctive features that distinguish it from the normal path. Revolutionary leaders build their state not only to secure their power but also for carrying out revolutionary goals. These goals vary, but they are not modest. Revolutionaries from the Bolsheviks to Islamists have sought not only to overthrow oppressive and corrupt domestic political systems, but also to subvert the global order dominated by capitalist/secular Western powers, either through their own efforts or in concert with other radical groups.¹⁰ Such domestic and internationalist revolutionary missions naturally set them up for conflicts both with the West and with domestic reactionary classes or groups.

Yet revolutionary states’ relations with the West need not be antagonistic. Western powers are often hostile to radical revolutions but they may not automatically oppose every revolution because they might not have enough information (the United States in regard to Fidel Castro in 1959), interest (the United States regarding Hồ Chí Minh in 1945 and regarding the Taliban in 1996), or power (the United States in regard to Chinese communists in

1949). From the perspective of revolutionaries, normal relations with the West can bring significant non-material benefits to a revolutionary regime, especially a newly established one. Diplomatic recognition by the West and by the global institutions under Western domination can bestow the regime “state status” in the international state system. For colonized countries, state status fulfills national aspirations and brings with it considerable prestige. Practically, even if the revolution has taken power, its security is not yet guaranteed. Diplomatic recognition by powerful Western states can ward off potential wars, or at least boost domestic legitimacy. The benefits of Western diplomatic recognition are tempting, but they contradict the radical ideals for which revolutionaries have risked their lives. Given a choice, revolutionary state-builders perhaps prefer building an alliance with other revolutionary states and movements. Such an alliance, if available, can also offer them opportunities for support that could countervail the Western threat.

In constructing a new domestic order, revolutionary parties similarly confront both opportunities and difficulties in their strategy for achieving domestic legitimacy and sovereignty. Historically, radical revolutions have succeeded only in dependent or colonized countries, or in those where states had collapsed. This kind of context gives revolutionaries an opportunity to appeal for popular support from all social strata. Shared national identity can serve as a common bond for the movement. Yet communists are passionate not only about national independence but also about communism, and Islamists are similar in regard to Islam. It is difficult for revolutionaries to accept watering down their radical visions and delaying their progressive programs. Also, those programs can be seen as offering opportunities for mobilizing the lower strata of the population.

The construction of a centralized bureaucracy also presents revolutionaries with both opportunities and challenges. Revolutionary leaders can build on the bureaucracy left behind by the old regime. In colonized countries, the colonial bureaucracy has many limitations but is nonetheless an organization with many modern elements. Yet the politically reactionary, socially elitist, and culturally racist colonial institutions represent all the things that revolutionaries fight against. Another dilemma is embodied in the notion of a “revolutionary bureaucracy,” an apparent contradiction in terms. Modern Weberian bureaucracies are hierarchical organizations based primarily on

standardized rules of operation and merit- or performance-based incentives. They are therefore not conducive to the business of leading revolutionary change that promotes egalitarian values and that requires from each bureaucrat great personal sacrifice and unreserved loyalty to revolutionary ideals. Creating an effective bureaucracy is difficult enough. Creating an effective revolutionary bureaucracy that simultaneously administers mundane affairs of the state and oversees campaigns of class struggle or social reform is doubly difficult.

Revolutionary state-builders encounter opportunities as well as challenges as they seek to monopolize violence. They may not relish violence, but do not try to avoid it either. Except for the most radical among them who romanticize violence, most perhaps view violence simply as a tool to accomplish revolutionary goals. As a tool, revolutionary violence poses two dilemmas. First, revolutionaries everywhere glorify martyrdom and uphold the revolutionary spirit as the guiding force. At the same time, revolutionary states need modern armies with sophisticated weapons if they are to defend themselves or attack their enemies successfully. The dilemma is how to achieve a balance between technology and the revolutionary spirit. Second, revolutionary violence is infused with ideological concepts such as “jihad” for Islamists and “class struggle” for communists. Violence is also legitimized by revolutionary justice, which stands above secular or “class-based” laws. This concept of justice rationalizes (i.e., opens up opportunities for revolutionaries to deploy) a wide range of violent means. In particular, tactics such as terrorism and assassinations, which violate “bourgeois” or “infidel” laws, are within the bounds of revolutionary justice.

The missions and practices of revolutionary parties create particular dilemmas for state building. Next, we will examine Vietnam’s revolutionary path to state formation. Throughout their struggle, Vietnamese revolutionaries managed to seize opportunities without wavering in their radical commitments. This tactical flexibility perhaps contributed to their success, but it did not come without a price.

Legitimization

Founded in 1930, the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) sought to carry out a proletarian revolution in French Indochina. In the political manifesto

drafted by its first general secretary, this revolution was projected to go through two phases.¹¹ The first phase was a “national bourgeois revolution” to overthrow colonial rule and landlord power, while the second phase was to create a socialist system modeled after the Soviet Union with public ownership of property, collective farming, and nationalized industry. Party leaders viewed their revolution as a component of world revolution and submitted their party to the leadership of the Moscow-based Third Communist International (Comintern).

ICP leaders defined the nation based on shared class interests as well as on shared ethnicity. For example, they viewed fellow Vietnamese of exploitative classes as a small minority in the Vietnamese national community. These classes did not represent the nation and ought to be eliminated even though they were ethnically Vietnamese. At the same time, French workers were French nationals but their interests were identical with the Vietnamese nation rather than with French colonialists and imperialists. To Vietnamese communists, those who saw only the French-Vietnamese division but not the cross-national solidarity between French and Vietnamese working classes fell victim to a form of nationalism that was “bourgeois,” “narrow,” and anachronistic. ICP leaders believed that only communism could simultaneously advance the interests of the Vietnamese nation and working classes. For tactical advantages, revolutionary tasks could be divided into smaller goals to be achieved in multiple, either separate or interlocking, steps.

The question then became when and to what degree certain tactics should be used. In late 1940, party leaders decided to focus on national liberation and shelve the land revolution for the moment. They established the League for Vietnamese Independence, or *Việt Minh*, a broad united front open to all classes. Patriotic mobilization tapped into deep Vietnamese resentment of colonial oppression and turned out to be a great success. When Japan surrendered to the Allies in August 1945 and created a power vacuum, a largely spontaneous mass movement seized and handed power over to the party.¹² Popular support inundated the new government, established by *Hồ Chí Minh* in September 1945. Not only urban but also local and rural elites rallied to the *Việt Minh* even though they had no idea who *Hồ Chí Minh* was. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) state was clearly founded on national

legitimization. On this occasion, the party took advantage of an opportune moment while leaving aside a critical goal of its revolution.

That opportunistic move soon came back to haunt some party leaders. The party had taken power, but its programs to aid peasants and workers were delayed for the sake of national unity. In 1948, when the Cold War began in Europe and the civil war in China turned to favor Chinese communists, the party seized the new opportunity to launch class mobilization even though it continued to appeal for national solidarity.¹³ The new mode of legitimization was embodied in the land reform campaign during 1953–1956, which was essentially a rural class struggle. This campaign certainly raised rural support for the party throughout Vietnam and may have contributed to the Việt Minh's victory against French forces at Điện Biên Phủ. The terror unleashed against the rural elites caused a large number to migrate from North to South Vietnam after the Geneva Agreements in 1954.¹⁴

During 1954–1975, legitimization continued to be based on both national and class commitments, but after 1975, class commitments were again pushed to the fore.¹⁵ Radical policies implemented in South Vietnam in the late 1970s, from “capitalist reform” to rural collectivization, from cruel revenge against officials and supporters of the Sài Gòn regime to campaigns against the “imperialist cultural poisons,” antagonized millions of South Vietnamese. These policies again spurred an exodus of two million boat people who braved death to leave Vietnam.

The revolution ended long ago, but it has been difficult for the party to drop Marxism-Leninism as the ideology of the state. As a result, national interests are still defined within the confines of twentieth-century socialism. This inability to part with the outdated revolutionary ideology is creating an acute legitimacy crisis. Socialism fails to legitimize the state in the minds of today's Vietnamese youth.¹⁶ The ideological yoke on nationhood also compels the party to remain close to China, a fellow socialist state, despite rising anti-China sentiments among Vietnamese. In the last few years alone, the party may have squandered all its nationalist credentials, hard won over decades of war under the banner of national salvation.¹⁷ As the legitimacy deficit grows, the state must rely more on coercion to maintain its rule. Moreover, past policies of class-based mobilization have left deep scars for diasporic Vietnamese. Many northerners who migrated south in 1954–1955

and those who fled Vietnam in the 1970s and 1980s had been targets of class struggle and, as a result, lost everything they had. Ongoing hostilities between the Vietnamese state and overseas Vietnamese communities attest to the lasting legacies of the Vietnamese revolution.

Establishing Sovereignty

Sovereignty also presented opportunities and obstacles. The party needed both external and domestic sovereignty; yet the threats to each were dealt with differently at different times, suggesting opportunistic behavior. At the same time, as seen below, threats to state sovereignty to a large extent came from the ambitious mission of the party to carry out social revolution and to contribute to world revolution. Not until the revolution ran out of steam in the late 1980s did the Vietnamese state achieve full external sovereignty. The threat from diasporic communities persists, however.

The issue of colonialism had helped the party come to power in late 1945. During World War II, party leaders were keen on exploiting the differences between the United States, Great Britain, and the exiled French government in their attitudes about Indochina.¹⁸ They expressed some hope in winning President Franklin Roosevelt's support for a move toward Indochinese independence once the war was over. Yet Hồ Chí Minh's effort since 1944 to court US support did not score enough points with Washington.¹⁹ President Harry Truman was not as committed to Indochinese independence as his predecessor, and Hồ Chí Minh's substantial record as a loyal Comintern agent did not help.

Still, the presence of a few American intelligence officers besides him in late 1945 helped Hồ Chí Minh to gain an aura of international legitimacy among Vietnamese and some advantage for the Việt Minh over its rivals in their quest for domestic sovereignty. Nevertheless, the DRV state did not win recognition from any foreign countries. Hồ Chí Minh's letters to Truman went unanswered.²⁰ He also tried to gain Joseph Stalin's attention, but to no avail. The party was willing to accept an international trusteeship under the Soviet Union, like the one for North Korea, but the Soviet Union was not interested.²¹

In the South, British occupation forces assisted the French in retaking control of that region.²² There, the DRV struggled to maintain some

presence but had no sovereignty to speak of. In northern and central Vietnam, the occupation forces of Nationalist China that had arrived to disarm the Japanese posed a serious threat as they brought with them anticommunist Vietnamese groups. These groups had significant popular support and controlled a sizable militia that challenged the domestic sovereignty of the DRV state.²³ As soon as Chinese troops were replaced by French forces under an agreement also signed by Hồ Chí Minh, his government used all its power to suppress anticommunist groups.

The DRV then waged a war against French occupation forces in December 1946 to settle, by force, the question of Vietnam's sovereignty. In the first two years of the war, Hồ Chí Minh's government enjoyed domestic sovereignty in the areas under its control in northern and central Vietnam. In the Mekong Delta, it was only one among several Vietnamese groups that vied for control while fighting the French.²⁴ By late 1948, changes in world politics presented DRV leaders with the opportunity to win support from the Soviet bloc for their sovereign claims—at the risk of getting caught in the emerging conflict between the two superpowers.²⁵ Domestically, anticommunist groups resumed efforts to form a united front under former Emperor Bảo Đại, raising the possibility that they would again become a threat to the domestic sovereignty of the DRV.²⁶

Party leaders did all they could to win recognition from China and the Soviet Union, which they achieved in early 1950.²⁷ But the United States and its allies immediately retaliated by offering recognition to the Bảo Đại government that was founded a year earlier. In this case, the DRV achieved only partial external sovereignty while turning the Bảo Đại government from a weak challenge to its domestic sovereignty into a vital one. Their loyalty to the mission of the revolution explained this risky move by Hồ Chí Minh and his comrades. Joining the Soviet bloc was a natural step to realize their revolutionary commitments and gain material support from other revolutionary states.

During the next two decades, the party waged a savage war to achieve sovereignty in the southern half of the country. Its victory in 1975 immediately established domestic sovereignty, and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) was on its way to achieving full external sovereignty by 1977, as the new Jimmy Carter administration offered to normalize relations with the

SRV and dropped its opposition to Vietnam's membership in the United Nations.²⁸ The long struggle for sovereignty would have ended there, but revolutionary hubris prevented Vietnamese leaders from seizing the opportunity.²⁹ That hubris also prevented them from seeing new security threats emerging from China and Cambodia. Those threats mounted by 1978, when American interest in normalizing relations with Vietnam was waning.

After Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1978 and successfully withstood a border war with China the following year, the threats to Vietnam's security became manageable. At the same time, Vietnam's external sovereignty shrank due to the embargo imposed on Vietnam by the United States, its allies, and many international organizations. Vietnam only regained full external sovereignty in the mid 1990s as it mended relations with China and normalized relations with the West. By that time, the revolution had become history, and the VCP was no longer a revolutionary party, despite how it saw itself.

Nevertheless, in an important sense the struggle for Vietnam's sovereignty is not yet over. Many diasporic Vietnamese remain hostile to Hà Nội and organize protests that humiliate Vietnamese leaders whenever they travel abroad. These protests continue to pose a challenge to the SRV state's claim to sovereignty. This is currently a weak threat, but recent moves by Vietnamese leaders to counter it have generated a backlash.³⁰ The ability of overseas Vietnamese to lobby their host governments and use the links they have with dissident groups inside Vietnam suggest that the threat is both domestic and external.

Territorialization

Territorialization is a central component of state formation. Due to their beliefs and experience, Vietnamese revolutionaries had mixed feelings about this topic. A major issue that stirred much debate early on was the geopolitical scope of their revolution. Under colonial rule, Vietnam joined Laos and Cambodia to form French Indochina. By the 1920s, as Chris Goscha argues, the Indochinese identity was being accepted by an increasing number of younger Vietnamese, including communists like Trường Chinh, while the term Vietnam itself was not as common as the old name Annam.³¹ Given the existence of a single colonial state over all of Indochina, it made

strategic sense for the ICP to plan a revolution for Indochina as a whole. In fact, the Comintern wanted Vietnamese communists to organize a movement for all of Indochina, not just for Vietnam. The Comintern favored a regional movement for strategic and political reasons, but also because they supported the principle of class solidarity across national boundaries.

Vietnamese communists' concept of territory was revealed not only through their muddled sense of national identity but also in their transnational organizing activities. Thanh Niên, the first Vietnamese communist organization, was founded by Hồ Chí Minh in Guangzhou in southern China. Thanh Niên recruited youth from Vietnam to come to China for training and return as organizers. As a Comintern representative in Southeast Asia, Hồ Chí Minh also organized revolutionary activities among Vietnamese exile communities in China and Siam.³² He presided over the formation of communist parties in Siam, Laos, and Malaya, and helped revive the Indonesian Communist Party after its failed coup in 1926–1927. In the mid-1930s, the ICP was led from an Overseas Office based in China.³³ While Vietnamese revolutionaries considered their homeland a sacred territory, their extensive cross-border activities were based on a general disregard for the principle of exclusivity embedded in the concept of national territory.

Their disregard for territorial exclusivity contributed to the success of Vietnamese communist state-building. Before its rise to power, the ICP had developed extensive links with northern Thailand and southern China. Soon after its founding, the DRV was able to trade with and obtain weapons and funds from Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries.³⁴ Southern China played the same role, helping the DRV to mobilize resources for its war with France.³⁵ During 1946–1949, Hồ Chí Minh's government offered Chinese communists a base inside Vietnam and other forms of assistance; several units of Việt Minh troops marched into China in mid-1949 to help Chinese communists defend their Yunnan base from attacks by Chiang Kai-shek's forces.³⁶ In 1950, the Chinese returned the favor by officially recognizing the DRV and persuading the Soviet Union to do the same. From 1953, southern China hosted large numbers of Vietnamese troops for training and Vietnamese students for schooling.³⁷

By the mid-1940s, the ICP had recruited quite a few of its cadres from Laos and Cambodia. In late 1948, the party still had the goal of creating

a socialist Union of Indochinese Democratic Republics [Liên Bang Cộng Hòa Dân Chủ Đông Dương].³⁸ While the idea of an Indochinese Union did not eventually work out, the party did help Laotian and Cambodian communists organize their movements during the anti-French war. Their Laotian and Cambodian comrades, in turn, helped them protect their flank from French attacks. In the 1960s, Laotian and Cambodian communist forces assisted in the defense of the Hồ Chí Minh Trail. By opening a route through Laos and Cambodia, DRV state leaders again showed their disregard for international borders—just as they did when they were still a band of outlawed revolutionaries. Without the Hồ Chí Minh Trail, it would have been impossible for Hà Nội to defeat Sài Gòn.

At the same time, communism could never have triumphed in Laos and Cambodia without Vietnamese assistance. Yet Vietnam's control over the revolutionary process in Indochina triggered resentment from younger Cambodian radicals such as Pol Pot and Ieng Sary.³⁹ This led to territorial disputes and eventually the Third Indochina War. Vietnamese troops defeated the Khmer Rouge in 1979, and Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia during the following decade was seen by Cambodian nationalists, such as opposition leader Sam Rainsy, as Vietnam's attempt to dominate and colonize their country. If Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen's government loses power to Rainsy's party, which is not inconceivable in the next decade, it is likely that territorial disputes will flare up again.

Another, more urgent, territorial problem that confronts Vietnam today involves the Paracels and Spratlys. It is a direct consequence of a vague concept of territory and the Vietnamese revolutionaries' blind faith in their Chinese comrades. Back in the 1950s, Hà Nội leaders fully accepted China's claim to sovereignty over the two archipelagoes. In a recently published diary, the late Lê Văn Hiến, a Minister of Finance and a high-ranking leader of the VCP until the 1950s, expressed joy in May 1950 upon hearing that Chinese communist forces had seized parts of the Paracels from the French. Lê Văn Hiến thought the Chinese takeover would help advance the Vietnamese revolution in central and southern Vietnam; he did not mention the issue of sovereignty.⁴⁰ The World Geography textbook used in the DRV in the 1950s was translated in whole from a Chinese textbook in which maps showed lines of Chinese sovereignty over most of the South China Sea.⁴¹

That was the context of a controversial diplomatic note that DRV Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng sent to his Chinese counterpart Zhou Enlai in 1958. In that note, Phạm Văn Đồng essentially agreed with China's claim over the two archipelagoes. At the same time, the DRV also organized massive demonstrations in Hà Nội in support of China.⁴² As Sino-Vietnamese relations deteriorated in the early 1970s, Hà Nội leaders began to suspect Beijing's motives for assisting the DRV in its war against South Vietnam and the United States. Still, when China took the Paracels from Sài Gòn troops by force, Hà Nội kept silent. Only after war broke out between China and Vietnam in 1979 did Vietnam claim sovereignty over those islands. Today, a militarily weaker Vietnam can appeal to international law to resolve the dispute, but Hà Nội's failure to assert sovereignty from the 1950s to the 1970s seriously weakens its legal claims.

Creating a Centralized Bureaucracy

The relationship between the VCP and the state is typically framed in two ways. Officially the political system is frequently described as one in which “the party leads, the state manages, and the people are the masters.”⁴³ This confusing official formula essentially means that political leadership by the party is conducted through state machinery and is based on popular sovereignty. The formula suggests both a division of roles between the party and the state and their common mission of serving the Vietnamese people.

Scholars of Vietnamese politics have used the term “party-state” drawn from the field of communist studies.⁴⁴ This term focuses on the organization of the communist system as a whole rather than on the roles and mission of the party and the state. In all communist countries, the Communist party is intimately bound to the state through a *nomenklatura* system. In this system, all state positions except the lowest are reserved for party members appointed by the party. Within each state bureaucracy at most levels of government, and in all branches of government, is a party committee entrusted with controlling and guiding that state bureaucracy from inside.

Rather than distinguishing the different functions of the party and the state, the term “party-state” treats them as if they are inseparable. However, both “party-state” and the official concept obscure the tension between the two. Despite a high level of enmeshing between them, the party and the state

must be considered two separate organizations. In fact, a double dilemma has existed for the party since it founded the DRV state: how to control the bureaucracy it is supposed to lead, and how to make that bureaucracy serve the revolutionary mission.

The ICP swept into power in August 1945. The Trần Trọng Kim government, established five months earlier, handed the colonial bureaucracy to Hồ Chí Minh and his comrades without a fight. Seizing the opportunity, Hồ Chí Minh declared independence and established a new government. Based in Hà Nội, this government had a new central leadership and many new local leaders, but on the whole it was simply the old colonial bureaucracy with most colonial personnel, laws, and institutions intact.⁴⁵ Given the shaky foundation of Hồ Chí Minh's state, the ability to quickly restore order was key to achieving international recognition. Such ability would indicate to foreign powers and the returning French that the Việt Minh was not just a band of usurpers and rioters. The colonial elites who had worked under Trần Trọng Kim now played a central role in Hồ Chí Minh's government.⁴⁶ Highly educated and trained in technical fields such as law, agriculture and medicine, these elites quickly got the colonial state back on its feet to deal with famine, floods, and other urgent issues that faced the DRV.

During the next five years, the DRV bureaucracy grew exponentially. The ICP expanded its membership from a few thousand in 1945 to about five hundred thousand in 1948.⁴⁷ Most new party members came from the middle or upper classes, and most also served in the state bureaucracy. In addition to bureaucrats responsible for administrative tasks of the state, there were perhaps as many personnel on the state payroll who were involved in the management of the party, in mass organizations, state media, and state enterprises. These additional bureaucrats were to ensure party leadership over the state, the party's relationship with the masses, and state control over the economy and culture—in short, to safeguard the revolutionary mission.

As the DRV joined the Soviet camp and the ICP began to promote class struggle in the late 1940s, many colonial elites who were working for the DRV state left for the French-controlled zone. Those who stayed increasingly clashed with party leaders over new radical policies. Their resistance contributed to paranoia among party leaders about the pervasive infiltration into the party and state bureaucracy by the bourgeois class, along with

counterrevolutionary elements and French spies.⁴⁸ This fear provided the rationale for a purge, carried out during land reform. In this purge, about half of all party and state units from the provincial to village levels were dissolved, and their leaders were arrested, tortured, and in many cases executed—regardless of their past contribution to the revolution. New government units were formed to be led by people of “good” class backgrounds (usually poor peasants). This purge destroyed much of what remained of the colonial state while centralizing the Việt Minh state in the mold of the Maoist state. The impact of the purge on the party was positive: new local leaders were far more committed to the radical mission, and loyal to the central leadership. Although the party suspended the purge in mid 1956 and ordered a “rectification” campaign, the new local order was preserved.

The purge clearly solved the double dilemma: the state was now fully under party control and committed to radical revolution—at least for the time being. The remaining issue was to guarantee an appropriate ratio of “reds” to “experts.” Experts, subordinated to reds, were needed for technical tasks. The appointment of all bureaucratic chiefs was based primarily on the red criterion; family class backgrounds were assigned greater weight than technical skills in recruitment and promotion; reds were paired with experts as co-leaders of a bureaucratic unit; embedded party committees led state bureaucracies from within; and finally, revolutionary momentum was sustained through regular political campaigns such as “anti-individualism,” “learning from Đại Phong,” and “three-readinesses.”⁴⁹ These campaigns were aimed not only at mobilizing mass support for state programs but also at disciplining and instilling loyalty in bureaucrats. These combined methods helped ensure a loyal bureaucracy but they incurred enormous financial costs by maintaining a bloated bureaucracy with many red bureaucrats appointed just for “politicking.” The red bureaucrats’ interference in administrative issues, and the loss of productivity due to political campaigns, also wasted money. Data on the size of the bureaucracy are sparse and inconsistent, but it appears that the party and mass organizations today employ about one-third (one hundred thousand) of the total officials and public employees at the national level (three hundred thousand).⁵⁰

Before the late 1980s, the party encountered little problem recruiting a sufficient number of experts for the state bureaucracy. They had few

alternatives outside the state sector. Non-state jobs were either manual or illegal. Since market reforms in the late 1980s, experts who are not red can find jobs in the private sector (including foreign-invested enterprises). At the same time, the genuinely red are now fewer, and red becomes merely a label indicative of family connections. The bureaucracy is increasingly ineffective, and corruption more endemic.⁵¹

The revolutionary mission of the party crucially shaped the development of the state bureaucracy in Vietnam. The party first relied on the colonial bureaucracy, but later launched a bloody purge to create a loyal bureaucracy. To control the state, the party created an oversized bureaucracy at enormous financial cost. In addition, the emphasis on loyalty has enabled family ties and money to penetrate and corrupt the state bureaucracy.

Monopolizing violence

Violence is central to the creation of the modern order, and by definition modern states distinguish themselves from other forms of organizations by monopolizing the legal use of violence within a given territory. The revolutionary state in Vietnam acquired its monopoly on violence through wars and conquests for more than thirty years, which was unusually long and brutal for a postcolonial state. The Vietnamese path was also distinct in that communist violence was infused with ideology. In the process of creating and consolidating the violent apparatuses of a revolutionary state, Vietnamese leaders strived to cultivate a revolutionary spirit by stoking violent mass campaigns. The state's modality of violence relied as much on professional military expertise, sophisticated weapons, terrorism, and criminal tactics as on the revolutionary spirit and the power of the Vietnamese masses. Among the many adverse legacies of Vietnam's revolutionary past are the long shadow of ideology over the military and the vast powers and criminal character of the coercive apparatuses.

The history of the People's Army (PAVN) demonstrates the state leaders' passionate promotion of the revolutionary spirit. The original name of the PAVN when it was founded in 1944 was the Vietnam Propaganda and Liberation Army.⁵² This name indicated most clearly the intention of Vietnamese communist leaders to create a revolutionary army. Spreading revolutionary messages was a critical task of the new army, as important as

fighting was. Vietnamese leaders viewed revolution as the work of the masses, and propaganda was essential to mobilizing them.

From the beginning, the revolutionary militia was directly under the leadership of the ICP. In the late 1940s, it was a largely volunteer guerrilla force armed with few modern weapons. When China established diplomatic ties in 1950, Hồ Chí Minh's government quickly requested military assistance.⁵³ In the 1950s, Chinese advisors helped to reorganize and modernize the PAVN, enabling it to engage the French in large conventional battles. At the same time, the Chinese also strengthened the revolutionary character of the PAVN by removing commanders of upper-class backgrounds (such as Lt. Col. Đặng Văn Việt, a noted regimental commander whose father was a mandarin) and promoting men of poor peasant roots (such as Nguyễn Chí Thanh who came from peasant background and who was made the PAVN's commissar).⁵⁴ Another important change implemented at this time was the consolidation of party leadership throughout the military, with the newly created General Political Department [Tổng cục Chính trị] entrusted with overall ideological work in the military.⁵⁵ Each military unit was under the leadership of a party committee, which assigned responsibility for fighting to the military commander and for political work to the political officer or commissar.

In the 1960s, the revolutionary character of the PAVN faced a challenge by those who championed military professionalism.⁵⁶ General Võ Nguyên Giáp, the Defense Minister, reportedly belonged to this group. The Commissar of the PAVN, General Nguyễn Chí Thanh, led the other faction, which did not give as much priority to military professionalism as to its revolutionary spirit. This debate over the PAVN mirrored the dilemma of balancing "red" and "expert" in the state bureaucracy.⁵⁷ The party ended up not having to choose between revolutionary spirit and military professionalism. US bombing campaigns against North Vietnam, which began in 1964, triggered deeper Soviet involvement in PAVN air forces and air defense systems.⁵⁸ The technical expertise of such units was upgraded. The 1968 Tết Offensive, which was planned by General Secretary Lê Duẩn and General Văn Tiến Dũng, counted on both military means and mass uprisings. It was a military disaster because they underestimated the enemy.⁵⁹ Ironically, this led Hà Nội to place more emphasis on regular forces as post-

Tết military campaigns by the RVN's armed forces successfully wiped out most local communist units. When they regained the military initiative in 1972, communist forces in southern Vietnam fought mostly with large units that commanded sophisticated weaponry provided by the Soviet Union. By 1975, Hà Nội's victory was the result of a purely conventional military campaign combining the most advanced Soviet tanks, artillery, and sophisticated logistical support that extended thousands of miles.⁶⁰

In the early 1980s, the VCP was tempted to follow Soviet advice to prioritize professionalism over revolutionary spirit in the military.⁶¹ A plan to increase the PAVN's professionalism was implemented, along with a decision to replace party committees and commissars with a single-commander system.⁶² This experiment was short-lived, however. Party committee leadership was revived in 1985, even while the single-commander system was retained. The commissar served as a deputy to the military commander, not his equal, as had been the case in the commissar system. In the 2000s, as the party became obsessed with an American plot of "peaceful evolution,"⁶³ the commissar system was revived.⁶⁴ The revolution was long dead by then, but ideology continued to exert a strong influence on party thinking, which affected the organization of the military.⁶⁵

Not only did the Marxist-Leninist ideology complicate state-building in Vietnam by linking it to the concept of revolutionary spirit, but it also offered special opportunities to state-builders by sanctioning certain violent tactics. Class struggle in communist doctrine, in particular, allowed mass violence involving a multitude of perpetrators and victims. Class struggle presented an opportunity for the revolutionary state to destroy its rivals and acquire control over territory. But, for every class struggle campaign, the party had to factor in the international and domestic balance of forces, the degree of resistance by class enemies, and revolutionary needs at particular points. The ultimate goal for past campaigns was to "eliminate" [*tiêu diệt, xóa bỏ*] enemy classes, but throughout its history the party has acted opportunistically without sacrificing the goal. Varying levels of violence, from mass killings to mass incarceration and mass exile, have been applied to maximize impacts while minimizing cost or risk.

For instance, during the land reform of the mid-1950s, tens of thousands of landlords and rich farmers were tortured and executed. Yet, the land reform

and collectivization in southern Vietnam after 1975 avoided such violence and relied mostly on coercive tactics such as isolation and intimidation.⁶⁶ In 1954, the party did not carry out mass detention of those who had worked for the French, yet hundreds of thousands of southerners who had worked for the Sài Gòn regime were incarcerated in hard labor camps after 1975, many for more than a decade. In the wake of an imminent conflict with China in 1978–1979, the party sought to expel ethnic Chinese from the country. Wealthy and middle-class ethnic Chinese in the south were especially forced to pay up front to depart “semi-legally” [*đi bán chính thức*] on government-contracted rickety boats that would dump them on neighboring countries. According to (likely incomplete) official data, 134,322 Chinese left in 533 boats in this program, which brought the government 16.1 tons of gold, \$165,000, 34.5 million đồng, 538 cars, and 4,145 houses and residential units.⁶⁷

Besides the mass violence of class struggle, the revolutionary path to state formation in Vietnam relied on practices that were of a terrorist or criminal nature, such as assassination, extortion, weapons smuggling, money laundering, and the heroin trade. These practices were not the monopoly of the revolutionary regime but were nonetheless justified in the name of the revolutionary mission, and contributed decisively to state formation. These practices are well-documented and often retold with pride long afterward in official histories of the revolution. The assassination of opponents and other terrorist acts were common tactics even before the party seized power in 1945.⁶⁸ Violence was deployed against prominent political rivals, leaders of anti-communist groups, and “conspirators” with the enemies. They were assassinated or captured and executed in public by communist agents. In the 1960s, numerous local officials and political figures in the South Vietnamese government were assassinated.⁶⁹ Some were beheaded in front of their families by communist cadres.⁷⁰ Also, urban commando teams detonated bombs at public places, killing many innocent civilians in addition to the targeted enemy officials.⁷¹

As a young revolutionary, Hồ Chí Minh railed against the French for profiting from the drug trade and for encouraging Vietnamese to become drug addicts.⁷² But, during the anti-French resistance, his government condoned and managed a lucrative heroin trade between resistance zones and

the French-controlled areas to earn money for the revolution.⁷³ During the Vietnam War, Hà Nội managed a clandestine international banking network connecting Paris, Moscow, Beijing, Hong Kong, and Phnom Penh to launder money and transfer nearly a billion US dollars and billions of South Vietnamese đồng to the southern insurgency.⁷⁴

The history of criminal and terrorist tactics that helped the revolutionary state establish its monopoly resulted in extremely powerful yet deeply corrupt public security forces.⁷⁵ These forces were crucial for the survival of the revolution from day one, and today remain “the sword and shield of the regime.”⁷⁶ With four current or former Police Generals (Trần Đại Quang, Tô Lâm, Phạm Minh Chính, and Trương Hòa Bình) currently occupying positions in the 19-member Politburo, the power of the public security apparatus is unmatched by any other state institution, including the military. At the same time, the Ministry of Public Security [Bộ Công An] can be likened to a criminal racket in which individuals and businesses are coerced to pay bribes or do so in exchange for favors. Police officials at all levels are known to sell offices and extort bribes in exchange for protection or simply for freedom from police harassment or legal punishment. Traffic patrol officers commonly demand bribes from violators. At his trial, Dương Chí Dũng, the former director of the bankrupt state corporation Vinalines, disclosed that he had earlier paid Police Senior General Phạm Quý Ngọ and his superiors one and a half million dollars to obtain information from the party’s Central Committee about his impending arrest.⁷⁷ Thanks to that information, Dương Chí Dũng was able to escape arrest (for some time) with the collusion of his brother, Police Colonel Dương Tự Trọng, the deputy chief of Hải Phòng Police Department. (Dương Chí Dũng would be captured abroad, extradited to Vietnam, brought to trial, and sentenced to death).⁷⁸ Another case currently undergoing trial involves Police Major General Trần Quốc Liêm, who is former Prime Minister Nguyễn Tấn Dũng’s brother-in-law. According to journalist Huy Đức, this general stood behind a business run by a criminal who went on to commit massive fraud.⁷⁹

This example of close ties between a high-ranking police official and criminals was not an isolated event. Like their counterparts in other communist states, the Vietnamese police directly control the massive prison system, which gives them an additional lever of power in the investigation

and prosecution of criminals and regime enemies. Their control of prisons enables the police to monitor, penetrate, and even develop mutually beneficial ties with criminal networks as criminals move into and out of prison. Those criminal ties have served the state as well as entrepreneurial police commanders. In the 1990s and 2000s, many cases of organized crime involving the police were reported, but the most notorious case was the “Năm Cam affair” in Hồ Chí Minh City that implicated a Police General and many other high-ranking officers.⁸⁰ When Colonel Dương Tự Trọng orchestrated a scheme for his brother to flee abroad, he and his conspirators relied on the help of a seasoned criminal.⁸¹

Vietnam’s public security forces today form a state within the state. They were created and authorized to deploy tactics that can be characterized as terrorist and criminal to defeat enemies of the revolution. The party entrusted them with wide powers during the revolution. In the post-revolutionary era, they have retained those powers while degenerating into perhaps the most corrupt and brutal institution in Vietnam. This is a legacy of the revolution and a potential fuse for the future rise of public anger directed against the state.

Conclusion

The formation of the postcolonial state in Vietnam followed a revolutionary path, which was distinct from the path taken by most other states. On this path, Vietnamese state builders confronted distinct challenges and enjoyed special opportunities due to their commitment to an ambitious revolutionary mission. This mission required the state to legitimize its *raison d’être* in class terms, form bonds with other revolutionary states, and construct a revolutionary bureaucracy. The mission also freed state-builders from the Westphalian concept of territory and cited revolutionary justice to justify class violence.

The process of state-building was significantly shaped by the VCP’s relentless pursuit of revolutionary goals despite domestic resistance and foreign intervention. State-building was not only a top-down process but involved important contributions by members of lower classes in prerevolutionary society. Although the revolutionary identity of the state allowed it to draw support from the international revolutionary network, that very identity also triggered massive domestic and foreign challenges to its sovereignty. In the

process, territorialization was downplayed as revolutionaries practiced proletarian internationalism that was not limited by national borders. The process also displayed a persistent tension between the revolutionary spirit and modern technology; the former played an important role throughout.

By definition, revolution implies violent conflict, and it is clear that the revolutionary path to state formation was a conflict-ridden and violent one for Vietnam. Vietnam appeared to experience much more violence than other postcolonial states, with three wars following one another and with millions of lives destroyed in the process. Foreign intervention obviously is to blame for initiating and prolonging wars, but much of the violence that took place was deliberate or necessary to implement the revolutionary mission.

Vietnam's revolutionary path suggests an important paradox in how revolutionary states' behavior affects their relationship with the world. On the one hand, Vietnamese state-builders strived to live up to their radical commitments, which contributed to protracted conflicts that involved some of the world's great powers as well as many regional states. On the other hand, the communist revolutionaries were forced to react to changing international conditions, and in fact often acted pragmatically and opportunistically while still being committed to the revolutionary mission. To the extent that the Vietnamese experience can be generalized, the paradox suggests that international conflicts and tensions involving revolutionary states may occur and even be protracted, but may not be inevitable under certain circumstances.

Modern Vietnamese history as a case of revolutionary state formation illuminates many issues currently threatening the communist regime's survival. A prominent issue involves the VCP's difficulty in articulating the national interest in the face of mounting territorial conflicts with Vietnam's neighbors. Other intractable problems include an unusually large and politically hostile diaspora, an oversized yet inefficient bureaucracy, and powerful but criminally inclined coercive apparatuses. Many other developing countries face similar problems, yet for Vietnam these problems have their origins in the way the state was formed.

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the revolutionary path of modern state formation in Vietnam under the Vietnamese Communist Party. I argue that the party's radical ideology and practices shaped the path of state formation by creating particular opportunities and conundrums in five key aspects of state formation: legitimization, establishing sovereignty, territorialization, creating a centralized bureaucracy, and monopolizing violence. The revolutionary state left behind significant and adverse legacies that today's Vietnam is still grappling with. In comparative perspective, the Vietnamese experience contributes to scholarship on revolutions, revolutionary state-building, and the role of revolutions in world politics.

KEYWORDS: *Vietnam, revolution, communism, state formation, state building, world politics*

Notes

1. David Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta 1930–1975* (New York: Armonk, 2003); Tuong Vu, *Vietnam's Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
2. Two of the most influential works that represent this line of thinking are David Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885–1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), and Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism 1925–1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).
3. For a discussion of this emerging perspective in contrast with earlier scholarship, see Tuong Vu, “Triumphs or Tragedies: A New Perspective on Revolution in Vietnam,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 45, no.2 (June 2014), 236–257.
4. For reviews, see Jeff Goodwin, “Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements,” in Thomas Janoski et al., *The Handbook of Political Sociology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), esp. 421; Jack Goldstone, “Comparative Historical Analysis and Knowledge Accumulation in the Study of Revolutions,” in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds. *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), esp. 70.

5. The most important works are Fred Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics: the Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Stephen Walt, *Revolution and War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); and J. D. Armstrong, *Revolution and World Order: The Revolutionary State in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
6. Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics*; Walt, *Revolution and War*; Martin Wight, *Power Politics*, eds. Hedley Bull and Carsten Holbraad (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978), 81–94.
7. Robert Jervis, “Socialization, Revolutionary States and Domestic Politics,” *International Politics* 52: 5 (2015), 609–616; Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Relations* (New York: Addison Wesley, 1979), 128; Alastair Ian Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980–2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).
8. See: H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. *Max Weber* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 79; Margaret Levi, “The State of the Study of the State,” in Ira Katznelson and Helen Milner, eds., *Political Science: The State of the Discipline* (New York: W. W. Norton and the American Political Science Association, 2002), 40.
9. Krasner’s argument that the so-called Westphalian order may be a mere “organized hypocrisy” does not mean that leaders of new states don’t take it seriously. See Stephen Krasner, “Rethinking the sovereign state model,” in Michael Cox, Tim Dunne, and Ken Booth, eds. *Empires, Systems and States: Great Transformations in International Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 17–42.
10. Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics*, 99.
11. Trần Phú, “Luận cương chánh trị của Đảng Cộng sản Đông dương” [Political Thesis of the Indochinese Communist Party], Đảng Cộng Sản Việt Nam [Vietnamese Communist Party], *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập* [Collection of Party Documents], v. 2 (Hà Nội: Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2005), 94–95.
12. Tuong Vu, *Paths to Development in Asia: South Korea, Vietnam, China, and Indonesia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
13. Tuong Vu, “It’s Time for the Indochinese Revolution to Show Its True Colors: The Radical Turn in Vietnamese Politics in 1948,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40, no.3 (October 2009), 519–542.
14. For a recent treatment of this subject, see Peter Hansen, “Bắc Di Cư: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954–1959,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4, no.3 (2009), 173–211.
15. Huy Đức, *Bên thắng cuộc* [The Winning Side], vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Osinbook, 2012).
16. For example, see “Tâm sự của Bí thư Đoàn xã tuổi 44” [Thoughts of a 44-year-old village Youth League Secretary], *Tuổi Trẻ* [Youth], September 11, 2006; “Lên

- chức ông ngoại vẫn làm bí thư Đoàn xã” [Becoming grandfather while serving as village Youth League Secretary], *Tiền Phong* [Vanguard], July 3, 2006.
17. See Tuong Vu, “The Party v. the People: Anti-China Nationalism in Vietnam,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 9, no.4 (Fall 2014), 33–66.
 18. “Nghị quyết của Ban Thường vụ Trung ương,” [Resolution of the Standing Committee of the Central Committee], February 25–28, 1943. Đảng Cộng Sản Việt Nam, *Văn Kiện Đảng Toàn Tập*, v. 7, 272–315.
 19. Dixie Bartholomew-Feis, *The OSS and Hồ Chí Minh: Unexpected Allies in the War against Japan* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).
 20. David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
 21. “Hội nghị Mạc tu khoa về vấn đề Đông Dương” [The Moscow Conference on Indochina], *Sự Thật* [Truth], January 12, 1946.
 22. For the period 1945–1946, see Stein Tønnesson, *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); and David G. Marr, *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution, 1945–1946* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).
 23. Marr, *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution*, 410–422.
 24. See Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*, v.1, chapter 5.
 25. Vu, “It’s Time for the Indochinese Revolution to Show Its True Colors.”
 26. See Ellen Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina 1940–1955* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955), chapter 10; Martin Thomas, “French imperial reconstruction and the development of the Indochina War, 1945–1950,” in Mark Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall, eds. *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Mark Atwood Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), chapter 5; Bùi Diễm and David Chanoff, *In the Jaws of History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), chapter 9.
 27. Tuong Vu, *Vietnam’s Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), chapter 3.
 28. Steven Hurst, *The Carter Administration and Vietnam* (New York: MacMillan Press, 1996).
 29. Vu, *Vietnam’s Communist Revolution*, chapter 7.
 30. Since 2003, overseas Vietnamese have successfully lobbied 14 state and several county and city governments in the U.S. to honor the flag of the Republic of Vietnam. See https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chi%E1%BA%BFn_d%E1%BB%8Bch_C%E1%BB%9D_V%C3%Aong
 31. Christopher Goscha, *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012), chapter 3.

32. Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years 1919–1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
33. Vu, *Vietnam's Communist Revolution*, chapter 2.
34. Christopher Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885–1954* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999).
35. Christopher Goscha, “The Borders of Vietnam’s Early Wartime Trade with Southern China: A Contemporary Perspective,” *Asian Survey* 40:6 (Nov-Dec 2000), 987–1018.
36. Nguyen Thi Mai Hoa, *Các nước Xã hội chủ nghĩa ủng hộ Việt Nam kháng chiến chống Mỹ cứu nước* [Socialist countries’ assistance to Vietnam’s resistance against America to save the country] (Hà Nội: Chính trị Quốc gia, 2013), 53–55.
37. Trần Kháng Chiến, “Qué Lâm: Vùng đất mang nặng ân tình” [Guilin: A land bearing our great gratitude], *Tầm Nhìn* [Vista], April 29, 2015. Available at <http://tamnhin.net/que-lam-vung-dat-mang-nang-an-tinh.html>
38. T. C. (Trường Chinh), “Cách mạng dân chủ mới ở Đông Dương” [The new democratic revolution in Indochina], *Sinh Hoạt Nội Bộ* [Internal Activities (journal of the ICP)], no. 12 (December 1948), 28.
39. Thomas Englebert and Christopher Goscha, *Falling out of Touch: A Study on Vietnamese Communist Policy toward an Emerging Cambodian Communist Movement, 1930–1975* (Melbourne: Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, 1995).
40. See entry dated May 14, 1950 in *Nhật Ký Một Bộ Trưởng* [Diary of a Minister] vol. 2 (Đà Nẵng: Đà Nẵng Publishing House, 2004), 318.
41. See Nhạn Địch Khanh and Chu Quang Kỳ, *Địa lý thế giới* [World Geography], trans. Nguyễn Đước and Nguyễn An (Hà Nội: Bộ Giáo Dục, 1955), 202–203.
42. Editorial, “Trên năm vạn nhân dân Việt nam và Hoa kiều họp mít tinh tuần hành” [Over 50,000 Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese demonstrate], *Nhân Dân*, September 22, 1958.
43. For example, see *People’s Army Daily* editorial, August 12, 2010, available at <http://www.qdnd.vn/qdndsite/vi-vn/61/43/tap-chi-quoc-phong-toan-dan/mot-so-van-de-dat-ra-ve-co-che-dang-lanh-dao-nha-nuoc-quan-ly-nhan-dan-lam-chu-o-nuoc-ta/120723.html>
44. See a discussion of various approaches to studying the state in Vietnam, see Benedict Tria Kerkvliet, “An Approach for Analysing State-Society Relations in Vietnam,” *Sojourn* 16: 2 (October 2001), 238–278.
45. Marr, *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution*.
46. This and the next two paragraphs rely on Vu, *Paths to Development in Asia*, chapter 5.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*

49. For an important study of some of these campaigns in North Vietnam, see Benoit de Treglode, *Heroes and Revolution in Vietnam*, transl. by Claire Duiker (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012).
50. The total number of government employees above the commune level (except the security forces) is about 2.5 million. It is not known how many are employed by the government at the commune level and below, but the average appears to be about 200 for each commune. The total number of government employees including military personnel (all those who receive either full-time salary or supplementary income for part-time work) at all levels is about 8 million, or one out of every 11 Vietnamese. Võ Văn Thanh, “Dự án Luật Công vụ” [Draft Bill on Public employees], *Tiền Phong*, December 7, 2007; “Loài con ông cháu cha yếu kém” [Expelling incompetent officials Hired for Family Connections], *VTC News*, November 29, 2014, available at <http://vtc.vn/loi-con-ong-chau-cha-yeu-kem-dai-bieu-quoc-hoi-hien-ke.2.518159.htm>; Hoàng Anh, “Rùng mình xã 500 cán bộ ở Thanh Hóa” [Shocked by village with 500 cadres], *Nông Nghiệp Việt Nam*, June 26, 2012, available at <http://nongnghiep.vn/nongnghiepv/72/1/1/96702/rung-minh-xa-500-can-bo-o-thanh-hoa.aspx>; and Từ Giang, “Bộ máy hành chính giờ kinh khủng thế!” *Thời báo Kinh tế Sài Gòn* [Sài Gòn Economic Times], June 8, 2014, available at <http://www.thesaigontimes.vn/115847/%E2%80%9CB0-may-hanh-chinh-gio-kinh-khung-the!%E2%80%9D.html>.
51. Ngọc Quang, “Nhà nước đang nuôi báo cô nhiều công chức, viên chức” [Many state employees don’t deserve their salaries], *Giáo dục Việt nam* [Education in Vietnam], 16 November 2015. Available at <http://giaoduc.net.vn/Xa-hoi/Nha-nuoc-dang-nuoi-bao-co-nhieu-cong-chuc-vien-chuc-post163396.gd>. According to this source, as many as 40 percent of public employees are superfluous.
52. According to William Duiker, the name was suggested by Hồ Chí Minh. See Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), 281.
53. Chen Jian, “China and the First Indo-china War, 1950–1954,” *China Quarterly* 133 (March 1993).
54. According to Douglas Pike, he is “aware of no recorded instance in which PAVN generals voluntarily sacrificed expertness in favor of redness.” Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People’s Army of Vietnam* (New York: Presidio Press, 1986), 178. Class background has always been an important criterion in recruitment and promotion of the PAVN—the Chinese advisors first instituted the policy, perhaps over the objections of some Vietnamese leaders, but it soon became a standard operating procedure. On Đặng Văn Việt, see his memoir *Người lính già Đặng Văn Việt: Chiến sĩ đường số 4 anh hùng* [The old soldier Đặng Văn Việt and the heroic Route 4] (Hồ Chí Minh City: Trẻ, 2003).
55. See Gen. Lương Cường, “Tổng cục Chính trị với việc hoàn thiện cơ chế lãnh đạo của Đảng đối với Quân đội” [General Political Department with the issue of

- party leadership over the military], December 11, 2014. Available at <http://tapchiqptd.vn/zh/ngay-ky-niem-lon/tong-cuc-chinh-tri-voi-viec-hoan-thien-co-che-lanh-dao-cua-dang-doi-voi-quan-doi/6905.html?pageindex=2>
56. An early discussion of this issue can be found in William Turley, "Civil-Military Relations in Vietnam," *Asian Survey* 9: 12 (1969), 879–899; also Pike, *PAVN*, 176. Pike cites a statement made by General Hoàng Văn Thái in 1980 to place him in the camp of modernizers, but at the time of the debate, Hoàng Văn Thái actually came out in public to support Nguyễn Chí Thanh's position. See Hoàng Văn Thái, "Nắm vững đường lối quân sự của Đảng, ngăn chặn ảnh hưởng của chủ nghĩa xét lại trong lĩnh vực quân sự" [Understanding the Party's military policy, blocking the influence of revisionism in military affairs]. *Học Tập* [Study], April 1964, 17–25.
 57. To some extent the issue of PAVN development was also related to whether and how the revolution would be waged in South Vietnam.
 58. Pike, *PAVN*, 177–178.
 59. An estimated 40,000 communist soldiers were killed, compared with about 3,500 Allied forces' dead in the first wave of the Tết Offensive alone. See William Turley, *The Second Indochina War*, 2nd edition (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 149.
 60. For a recent account of the campaign, see George Veith, *Black April: The Fall of South Vietnam 1973–1975* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012).
 61. Pike, *PAVN*, 197–206.
 62. Gen. Lương Cường, "Tổng cục Chính trị với việc hoàn thiện cơ chế lãnh đạo của Đảng đối với Quân đội." For a discussion of the rationale for the policy change in mid-1979, see Editorial, "Thực hiện tốt chế độ thủ trưởng trong Quân Đội Nhân Dân Việt Nam" [Successfully carrying out the single-commander regime in the PAVN], *Quân Đội Nhân Dân* no. 9 (1979), 1–8. The decision was made in 1979, and after a trial period it was implemented throughout the military in 1982.
 63. This term refers to communist leaders' imagination of a conspiracy by imperialist powers to subvert their regimes not by waging wars but through peaceful means such as cultural exchanges and economic activities.
 64. Nguyễn Phú Trọng, "Sự lãnh đạo của Đảng là nhân tố quyết định mọi thắng lợi và sự trưởng thành và phát triển của Quân Đội Nhân Dân Việt Nam [Party leadership is the decisive factor in the victory and evolution of the PAVN], *Nhân Dân* [The People], December 18, 2014. Available at http://www.nhandan.com.vn/mobile/theodong/_td_ph%E1%BA%A9m%20och%E1%BA%A5t%20b%E1%BB%99%20%C4%91%E1%BB%99i%20c%E1%BB%A5%20h%E1%BB%93/item/25127702.html
 65. Vu, *Vietnam's Communist Revolution*, chapter 10.
 66. For a recent study see Đặng Đình Trung, "Post-1975 Land Reform in South Vietnam: How Local Actions and Responses Affected National Policy," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 5: 3 (October 2010), 72–105.

67. Huy Đức, *Bên Thắng Cuộc* [The winning side], v.1 (Boston: Osin Books, 2012), 122–131. Some numbers have been rounded. The policy was discontinued after it created outrage abroad and a boat accident caused the death of hundreds near Sài Gòn Port.
68. For the communist-directed violence against their opponents during 1945–46, see Marr, *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution*, chapter 7.
69. For annual numbers of South Vietnamese officials and civilians killed and abducted by communist agents from 1965 to 1972, see Michael Lee Lanning and Dan Cragg, *Inside the VC and the NVA: The Real Story of North Vietnam's Armed Forces* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), Appendix I. According to this source, which cites U.S. and South Vietnamese statistics, the total number of officials killed during 1965–1972 was 2,700 while the number of those kidnapped was 1,343. For civilians, the total deaths were 30,352 and the total number of kidnapping cases was 56,638.
70. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*, v. 1, chapter 7, esp. 256, 268.
71. For a collection of reminiscences by communist agents about their terrorist “achievements,” see Mã Thiện Đồng, *Biệt Động Sài Gòn: Chuyện Bảy Giờ Mới Kể* [Sài Gòn Commandos: Now the stories can be told], 6th edition (Hồ Chí Minh City: Tổng Hợp Publishers, 2013). For an account of the 1971 assassination of Professor Nguyễn Văn Bông whom the assassin himself acknowledged to be a “reputed intellectual who would soon become Prime Minister and whose leadership would benefit our enemy,” see Vũ Quang Hùng, “Tôi ám sát người sắp làm Thủ tướng Sài Gòn” [I assassinated the man who would have become Premier in Sài Gòn], *Dân Việt* [The Vietnamese], April 30, 2011. Available at <http://danviet.vn/tin-tuc/toi-am-sat-nguoi-sap-lam-thu-tuong-sai-gon-48833.html>. For a well-documented but certainly incomplete list of similar terrorist activities in South Vietnam during the war, see https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nh%E1%BB%AFng_v%E1%BB%A5_t%E1%BA%A5n_c%C3%B4ng_c%E1%BB%A7a_l%E1%BB%B1c_l%C6%B0%E1%BB%A3ng_bi%E1%BB%87t_%C4%91%E1%BB%99ng_Qu%C3%A2n_Gi%E1%BA%A3i_ph%C3%B3ng_Mi%E1%BB%81n_Nam_Vi%E1%BB%87t_Nam.
72. Nguyễn Ái Quốc, *Les Procès de la Colonisation Française* (Paris: Librairie du Travail, 1925). For a Vietnamese translation, see idem., *Bản án chế độ thực dân Pháp* (Hà Nội: Chính trị Quốc gia, 2008).
73. In the first ten months of 1952, for example, heroin [*thuốc phiện*; in official document always abbreviated as “TF”] sales accounted for 72 percent of all revenues for goods sold by three Interzones (Việt Bắc, III, and IV) to the French-controlled areas. See “Kiểm thảo sự lãnh đạo của Bộ về việc thực hiện chính sách bình ổn vật giá” [Assessing ministerial management of price stabilization policies], n.d. (likely late 1952). File [hồ sơ] 17 (permanent), Sở Mậu Dịch, Bộ Công

- Thương [Bureau of Trade, Minister of Trade and Industry], National Archive III, Hà Nội. For 1953, see File 106 (permanent), especially “Báo cáo tổng kết công tác quản lý xuất nhập khẩu 1953” [top secret], n.d. (likely early 1954).
74. See Đặng Phong, *5 Đường Mòn Hồ Chí Minh* [Five Ho Chi Minh Trails] (Hà Nội: Tri Thức, 2008).
 75. For the history of this ministry, see Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam, Un État né de la Guerre 1945–1954*, transl. Agathe Larcher (Paris: Armand Collin, 2011), chapter 6; Lien-Hang Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).
 76. April 3, 2012. <http://vnxpress.net/tin-tuc/phap-luat/luc-luong-cong-an-la-thanh-kiem-va-la-chan-bao-ve-che-do-2227331.html>.
 77. “Dương Chí Dũng khai Phạm Quý Ngọ khuyên bỏ trốn” [Dương Chí Dũng disclosed Phạm Quý Ngọ told him to flee]. *Thanh Niên* [Youth], January 7, 2014. Available at <http://thanhvien.vn/thoi-su/duong-chi-dung-khai-thu-truong-cong-an-pham-quy-ngo-khuyen-bo-tron-6145.html>. General Phạm Quý Ngọ, a Vice Minister of Public Security and a member of the Central Committee of the Party, suddenly died of cancer a month later, generating rumors that he had been sacrificed to cover up the corruption which might have reached the Minister of Public Security himself. “Tướng Phạm Quý Ngọ - Thứ trưởng Bộ Công An đột ngột qua đời” [General Phạm Quý Ngọ, Vice Minister of Public Security, suddenly passes away]. *Soha News*, February 18, 2014. Available at <http://soha.vn/xa-hoi/tuong-pham-quy-ngo-thu-truong-bo-cong-an-dot-ngot-qua-doi-20140218203948932.htm>.
 78. This death sentence has not been carried out at the time of writing.
 79. Huy Đức, “Em vợ Thủ Tướng & ‘siêu lừa’ Dương Thanh Cường” [The Prime Minister’s brother-in-law and the ‘super fraudster’ Dương Thanh Cường], October 31, 2015. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/Osinhuyduc/posts/888830747818774>.
 80. On the “Năm Cam” affair, see Nguyen Hung Quang and Kerstin Steiner, “Ideology and Professionalism: The Resurgence of the Vietnamese Bar,” in John Gillespie and Pip Nicholson, eds. *Asian Socialism & Legao Change: The Dynamics of Vietnamese and Chinese Reform* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2005), 191–211. For an example of a local police chief involved in a criminal racket, see Thùy Vân, “Phó công an phường bay ghế vì bảo kê xã hội đen [Ward deputy police chief fired for protecting gangs], *Đất Việt* [Viet Homeland], October 18, 2013, available at <http://m.baodatviet.vn/phap-luat/tin-tuc-phap-luat/pho-cong-an-phuong-bay-ghе-vi-bao-ke-xa-hoi-den-2357639>.
 81. “Dương Tự Trọng triệu tập giang hồ giúp Dương Chí Dũng trốn” [Dương Tự Trọng summoned a gangster to help Dương Chí Dũng escape]. *Người Đưa Tin* [The Messenger], December 24, 2013. Available at <http://www.nguoiduatin.vn/duong-tu-trong-trieu-tap-giang-ho-giup-duong-chi-dung-tron-a119419.html>.