

ALEC HOLCOMBE

## The Role of the Communist Party in the Vietnamese Revolution: A Review of David Marr's *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution (1945–1946)*

David Marr is one of the greatest scholars of modern Vietnamese history. He came of age as an intellectual during the Vietnam War era, which he experienced first in South Vietnam as an intelligence officer in the US Marines (1962–1963),<sup>1</sup> second at the University of California, Berkeley as a history PhD student (1964–1969), third at Cornell University as an assistant professor of Vietnamese Studies (1969–1971), and fourth in Washington, D.C. as an editor for the Indochina Resource Center<sup>2</sup> (1971–1975).<sup>3</sup> Since 1975, Marr has had a distinguished academic career at the Australian National University in Canberra. His three richly detailed and beautifully written monographs, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism: 1885–1925* (1971), *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial: 1920–1945* (1981), and *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (1997),<sup>4</sup> along with many articles and reviews, have arguably done more to shape perceptions of modern Vietnamese history than have the works of any other scholar. Thus the 2013 publication of his fourth major book, *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution (1945–1946)*,<sup>5</sup> marks an important moment for the field of Vietnam studies.

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Marr's latest book explores the sixteen-month quasi-peaceful<sup>6</sup> existence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV)<sup>7</sup> from its founding by Hồ Chí Minh in early September 1945 to the outbreak of full-scale war with France in late December 1946. This period was covered recently from a diplomatic perspective by Stein Tonnesson in his book *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began*<sup>8</sup> and, more briefly, by Christopher Goscha, as the opening act in his path-breaking new history of the First Indochina War.<sup>9</sup> But with 578 densely packed pages (not including endnotes) devoted almost exclusively to the Vietnamese side of these fascinating sixteen months, Marr's book takes us deeper into this period than we have ever been before.<sup>10</sup>

What he explores, ultimately, is the nature of the DRV state in its earliest incarnation, before the harsh realities of carrying out "people's war" began to affect the state's institutional shape and political culture.<sup>11</sup> Where was the DRV state heading before full-scale war with France, intent on re-establishing colonial rule over Vietnam, became increasingly inevitable toward the latter half of 1946? What was the role of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP)<sup>12</sup> within the DRV state and the organization so closely associated with it, the Việt Minh front?<sup>13</sup> What were the politics of the DRV leader, Hồ Chí Minh? Was he the undisputed leader of the ICP? What was the nature of his relationship with the Party's 38-year-old general secretary, Trường Chinh? In his preface, Marr hints at answers:

[M]any of the state institutions created in the late 1940s remain intact in Vietnam today, as do popular beliefs in modernity, efficiencies of scale, and centralization of power. Just below the surface, fears of foreign intervention and manipulation persist as well. The Party continues to justify its dictatorship by reference to alleged achievements in the August 1945 Revolution and the anti-French resistance. Critics of the Party sometimes harken back to the relatively open press of 1945–1946, the January 1946 national elections, the Democratic Party, and the November 1946 constitution, yet they lack detailed knowledge of events.<sup>14</sup>

The above passage reflects two main ideas developed by Marr throughout his book and considered at length in this review. The first, which is a continuation of a key argument of Marr's third book, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (henceforth abbreviated as *Vietnam 1945*), holds that the country's Communists have exaggerated their role in the Việt Minh front, the "August

Revolution”<sup>15</sup> of 1945, and the early DRV state. Marr contends that these institutions and events quickly developed a momentum of their own outside of Party control during the revolutionary period that extends roughly from the summer of 1945 to the summer of 1946. Was the ICP marginalized during the Vietnamese Revolution? I prefer the slightly weaker term “decentralized” to describe Marr’s argument, for he certainly shows plenty of ICP members in the thick of the period’s revolutionary action in *Vietnam: State, War, Revolution (1945–1946)* (henceforth abbreviated as *Vietnam 1946*). In the end, though, the book’s overall balance of agency in the Việt Minh front, the August Revolution, and the early DRV state leaves the Party short of a dominant, “vanguard” role.

A second important idea, closely related to the first, holds that the nature of the DRV state began to change in the summer of 1946 when France’s determination to end the DRV’s existence and to reestablish French sovereignty over the entire Vietnamese people became more and more apparent. Marr alleges that the original state founded and led by Hồ Chí Minh in September 1945 had been a relatively moderate, inclusive, and tolerant polity that took democracy seriously. It had been influenced by the ICP (i.e. the Communist Party) to some degree, but, he argues, had not been under its control.

Over the ensuing months, Marr suggests, the steady march toward war radicalized Vietnam’s political atmosphere, opening the door for Communist militants, often associated with the Party general secretary, Trường Chinh, to step out of the shadows and into the relatively moderate semi-democratic DRV state. According to this narrative, during the latter part of 1946, these Party militants were able to pressure Hồ Chí Minh into abandoning his moderate ways and allowing the transformation of the DRV state into the Party dictatorship it remains today.

From the American perspective, the tragic irony of Marr’s narrative is all too apparent. Motivated primarily by the desire to contain communism in Europe and secondarily by concerns that the DRV might be communist-led, the US government chose anachronistic support for French re-colonization rather than realistic embrace of the newly founded DRV. As Marr implies, this US policy helped derail an emergent Southeast Asian state traveling down a potentially non-communist track and ensured its redirection down

a militantly communist one. Thus, in addition to all the other grim consequences of American intervention in their country, Vietnamese can thank the United States to a large extent for the undemocratic regime that continues to rule them today.

The final two sentences of Marr's book reinforce this overall image of a popular, semi-democratic, and non-Communist early DRV versus the Party dictatorship of later years and today:

With revolution now a distant memory, and war avoided for a quarter century, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam state is the most obvious legacy. If the Communist Party were to fragment or fade away, the state would persist, with the country most likely reverting to the name Democratic Republic of Vietnam.<sup>16</sup>

Looking at evidence from this period, I question the plausibility of this narrative. Where Marr sees the ICP as somewhat sidelined from both the Việt Minh front and the DRV state during the early months of the revolution, I see the Party as central to those two organizations throughout their existence. Where Marr sees rivalry and dissention between Hồ Chí Minh and the party general secretary, Trường Chinh, I see mutual respect, loyalty, and a clear understanding between them that the former was the leader and the latter his trusted subordinate. More broadly, where Marr sees rupture and transformation in the DRV state, I see coherence and continuity. I argue that the seeds of the later Party dictatorship, which reached full bloom in about 1960 with the completion of agricultural collectivization, were sown mostly during August of 1945, not during the summer of 1946.

This review article has four sections. The first summarizes *Vietnam 1946's* nine chapters. The second surveys reviews of the book to provide a picture of its broader scholarly reception. The third examines Marr's depiction of the August Revolution in his award-winning third book, *Vietnam 1945*. The fourth and final section turns to Marr's picture of the early DRV state, the main topic of his recent book, *Vietnam 1946*.

## Part I: Sources and Chapter Summaries

### 1. SOURCES

Marr creates his narrative primarily from two sources. The first is a diverse trove of abandoned DRV documents that fell into French hands in

December 1946 when fighting broke out between the two sides in Hà Nội. The French found the documents in the Northern Region Office [*Bắc bộ phủ*], an elegant two-story office building in central Hà Nội that had served for nearly sixteen months as the DRV capitol. Eventually, the French took these DRV documents back to France, where they have been available to scholars since the 1970s. The second major type of source used by Marr is Vietnamese newspapers from the 1945 and 1946 period, most of which may be found in Vietnam's National Library in Hà Nội. Marr supplements these two sources with official Communist Party document collections, general histories of the period published under Party imprimatur, memoirs produced by Vietnamese actors from a range of political views, and a remarkable number of other sources. Always a hardworking and fastidious reader, Marr pulls an enormous amount of detail from these sources, bringing this period alive as no one has before.

Considering how much he provides in 578 densely packed pages covering only sixteen months, it is surely unfair to ask for more. Yet it does seem unusual that Marr, famous for tracking down documents and people in all corners of the world, appears not to have used a single document from Vietnam's National Archives Center III. That archive, which the Vietnamese government officially established in 1995, "to be responsible for collecting, preserving and making effective use of archival records of national significance dating from the August Revolution in 1945 up to the present time," contains "almost ten linear kilometers of records made up of four main types of materials: administrative, scientific and technological, audio-visual, as well as personal papers."<sup>17</sup> In the preface to his book, Marr cryptically thanks the Vietnamese government historian Phan Huy Lê for having "sponsored my entry to the Vietnam National Archives, Center No. 3."<sup>18</sup> Why did Marr end up not using this rich and important source of material? I wish he had explained.

## 2. CHAPTER SUMMARIES

*Vietnam 1946* covers the sixteen-month period from August 1945 until December 1946 in nine thematically organized chapters. The first chapter, "Forming the DRV Government," looks at the overall structure of the DRV state, its system of committees, and its management of national and local

elections. The second chapter, "The Government at Work," describes, among other things, the two meetings of the DRV National Assembly in March and October-November 1946, the functioning of the National Assembly's controversial Standing Committee, and debates about what type of political system (as expressed through the DRV's 1946 Constitution) Vietnam would have. The third chapter, "Defense," examines the efforts of DRV leaders to build an army, to respond to early French armed incursions in the South, to implement a commissar [*chính trị viên*] system, and to carry out "military socialization" among recruits.

In the fourth chapter, "Peace or War," Marr turns to an analysis of the complex diplomatic negotiations between the DRV and France that preceded the outbreak of war. He highlights such episodes as the Preliminary Convention (March 1946), the Đà Lạt Conference (April 1946), and the Fontainebleau Conference (July-September 1946). The fifth chapter, "Seeking Foreign Friends," explores the DRV's relations with and attitudes toward countries within the region and beyond, with special emphasis placed on China (both Nationalist and Communist), the United States, and the Soviet Union. The sixth chapter, "Material Dreams and Realities," looks at the economics of the DRV. Marr shows us the precarious financial position of the new regime and how this reality pressured its leaders, time and again, to opt for quick and easy ways of raising desperately needed cash, often at the price of long-term economic viability.

Chapters seven and eight, "Dealing with Domestic Opposition" and "The Indochinese Communist Party and the Viet Minh," address two of the most controversial issues concerning the August Revolution and the DRV. The first is the regime's handling of rival political parties, individuals, and ideas. Here, in chapter seven, we see glimpses of the DRV regime's darker side, its use of assassination squads, arbitrary arrests, forced confessions, detention camps, and various other forms of physical and psychological intimidation to cow potential rivals and skeptical foot-draggers on the street. Marr has interesting accounts of how the DRV leadership dealt with Nationalist Party members who had been allotted seats in the National Assembly and how the regime handled the country's anxious Catholic population. The second controversial issue (the subject of chapter eight) concerns the relationship between the ICP and the front organization it had founded, the Việt Minh.

Here Marr makes his intriguing, if controversial, case for a shift in power from Hồ Chí Minh to Trường Chinh during the latter half of 1946.

These two chapters are followed by Marr's ninth and final chapter, "Mass Mobilization," which describes how the DRV regime motivated Vietnamese people from various classes, religious groups, and ethnicities to support its agenda of national independence and "new democracy," the Communist movement's code word for socialism.

## Part II: Scholarly Reception

*Vietnam 1946* was the subject of a 2014 H-Diplo Roundtable Review that included individual contributions from Pierre Brocheux, Shawn McHale, Phạm Quang Minh, and Tường Vũ—all outstanding Vietnam specialists.<sup>19</sup> Though each reviewer raises serious questions about aspects of Marr's narrative, each also recognizes, as I do, the extraordinary amount of research that went into the book and, controversies notwithstanding, the enormous contribution it makes to our understanding of the period examined.

Pierre Brocheux, in his review, devotes significant attention to the intriguing question of the ICP's role in the Vietnamese Revolution:

The author [Marr] is led, even if not overtly, at least to contest the leading role of the ICP in the revolution, and he goes so far as to deny that the Party planned to take power; the ICP had been carried along by events more than it had directed or mastered them. In taking the extreme opposite view of established scholarly opinion, Marr goes to the opposite extreme, which will be a source of controversy.<sup>20</sup>

Brocheux argues that Hồ Chí Minh's "politics of unity" during the early period of the DRV—for example, his claimed dissolution of the Party on November 11, 1945—are more plausibly interpreted as "tactical maneuvers" rather than reflections of an actual commitment to democratic principles such as multi-party rule, checks and balances, rule of law, freedom of expression, and representative government. Though Brocheux leans toward the "tactical maneuvers" interpretation rather than toward Marr's interpretation of budding democracy, he cautions us not to equate a lack of democracy with a lack of legitimacy, asking whether the DRV's victory over the French would have been possible without a significant measure of popular support.<sup>21</sup>

Shawn McHale, in his contribution to the H-Diplo Roundtable Review, expresses four concerns about Marr's book: its "northern-centered" source base, its lack of attention to key events in the South, its top-down approach, and its employment of a conceptual framework that inadequately appreciates the "dual character of the conflict":

Marr does not situate this [DRV state] repression in the context of civil war. Some individuals—and I would provisionally put myself, François Guillemot, and Chris Goscha in this category—see the 1945 to 1947 period as both a civil war *and* a war against the French. In his key essay on the "fracture vietnamienne," of 1945–1956, for example, Guillemot analyzes the process by which the ICP and Việt Minh got rid of their nationalist enemies and created the fundamental rift that shaped post-1946 politics.<sup>22</sup>

Phạm Quang Minh, for his part, echoes Brocheux's concern over Marr's depiction of the Party as other than central in the August Revolution, the Việt Minh, and the early DRV state. He points to published materials from the Vietnamese government's *Văn Kiện Đảng* [Party Documents] series<sup>23</sup> that detail the ICP's "preparation and guidelines for revolution, as well as the leadership of the Indochinese Communist Party."<sup>24</sup> Questioning Marr's emphasis on "spontaneous voluntarism" as the key force in the August Revolution, Phạm Quang Minh argues that "without the thorough preparation by the Việt Minh and the ICP, there would have been no revolution at all."<sup>25</sup>

Tường Vũ, in his review, largely supports Marr's assertion that the summer of 1946 marked a fundamental turning point in the evolution of the DRV state. "Under that [early DRV] state, there were political assassinations and deportation camps, but there were also freedoms of press and association, at least before the summer of 1946." Tường Vũ praises the book for its analysis of some of the "lively debates" in the Vietnamese press which, during the early months after the August 1945 seizure of power, "ranged the ideological gamut." In his view, another strength of Marr's narrative is the "sense of contingency" it conveys about these tumultuous sixteen months in Vietnam.<sup>26</sup>

Tường Vũ's primary concern with Marr's book lies in its separation of Hồ Chí Minh from the ICP and thus from the transformation of the early DRV government into the Party dictatorship it became. "It is also unclear from the

book what Ho's relationship with other key ICP leaders was during this period," Tường Vũ writes. "Did those leaders accept Ho's overall leadership, or did the entire leadership divide responsibilities among themselves? Did they make all or only some kinds of decisions collectively, or did they act individually?" Tường Vũ points out that Hồ Chí Minh "remained very active" during the period of the Maoist-inspired land reform from 1953 to 1956, usually seen as the most radical period in the history of Vietnamese communism. Considering *Vietnam 1946's* depiction of the DRV leader as separate, to some extent, from the Party, and the book's strong association of him with the (good) early DRV state, Marr's assertion that Hồ Chí Minh was "no less a Leninist than Trường Chinh"<sup>27</sup> seems contradictory. In Tường Vũ's estimation, the Hồ Chí Minh in Marr's narrative does not behave like a devoted Leninist.<sup>28</sup>

The H-Diplo Roundtable Review format provides an opportunity for the author of the reviewed book to respond to questions raised by the four reviewers. To the big question of Party control in the Revolution, Marr responds:

Each reviewer addresses my contention that the role of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in determining 1945–1946 events has been greatly overblown by historians. Brocheux suggests that I may have gone too far in contesting "established scholarly opinion." Tuong Vu summarizes my position well, and seems to agree with it. McHale says my claim that the DRV state was not simply an appendage of the ICP is "a plausible argument to make." Pham Quang Minh disagrees completely, asserting that "without thorough preparation by the Viet Minh and ICP, there would have been no revolution at all." My earlier *Vietnam 1945* book was also the object of a lively seminar in Hanoi in 1995, where the Party spokesman denounced my claim of 'revolutionary spontaneity', but three other individuals active in 1945 each described how their own local youth group took matters into its own hands with little or no knowledge of central Viet Minh pronouncements.<sup>29</sup>

With respect to the issue of Hồ Chí Minh's politics and his relationship with Trường Chinh, issues raised primarily by Tường Vũ and Phạm Quang Minh, Marr replies that the DRV leader had evolved by 1945 into a "creative Leninist." This meant that he wanted the DRV to have three branches of government (executive, legislative, and judicial), with the executive as the

most powerful. Additionally, Marr writes, “Ho wanted three hierarchies – state, army and Party – with Party members salted through the other two but not taking control of them. Proletarian dictatorship for Ho would need to wait decades.” As for Hồ Chí Minh’s relationship with Trường Chinh, such a central part of his book’s overall narrative, Marr explains:

When it came to Ho Chi Minh asserting his authority over established Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) leaders like Truong Chinh, having been away from Vietnam for thirty years until 1941 was a liability. The arrival of Chinese People’s Liberation Army units at the Indochina frontier in late 1949 and rapid introduction of Chinese ‘advisors’ resulted in a dramatic extension of ICP powers through the government and the army, whatever Ho’s wishes. Today, Ho remains the most difficult topic to research in Vietnam. Only when Party and army archives are opened to independent scholars—Vietnamese and foreign—can historians hope for breakthroughs on either the ICP or Ho Chi Minh. I’m not holding my breath.<sup>30</sup>

A few months after the H-Diplo Roundtable Review, Keith Taylor reviewed *Vietnam 1946* for the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*.<sup>31</sup> As the H-Diplo reviewers do, Taylor lauds the “remarkable and praiseworthy” degree to which Marr bases his narrative on archival sources and the “depth of detail” that the book provides.<sup>32</sup> “Whatever the criticisms that might be made of his work, including mine in this review, they take nothing away from his monumental achievement in bringing historical knowledge about the modern Vietnamese into readable books.”<sup>33</sup>

Like McHale, though, Taylor questions the book’s relative lack of attention to events in southern Vietnam, where the Party and its front organizations were less influential. This could be interpreted as implying that the South had “fallen out of the logic governing Vietnamese history.”<sup>34</sup> Related to this issue is Taylor’s more general concern with Marr’s handling of identity politics in Vietnam: “it cannot but be obvious that the general direction of this interpretive strategy is to scrape away a large number of Vietnamese [who did not necessarily support the DRV regime] from the bailiwick of “Vietnam,” or, at least, to render them into some kind of lesser category of membership in the thing called ‘Vietnam.’”<sup>35</sup>

As Tường Vũ does, Taylor questions Marr’s depiction of Hồ Chí Minh in general and his relationship with Trường Chinh in particular. To a certain

degree, “Marr appears to buy into Ho Chi Minh’s cult of ‘Uncle Ho,’” Taylor writes, pointing to Marr’s “doubt” that “Ho wanted an ICP dictatorship anytime soon,” and his belief that the DRV leader had retained a “multilateral view of the world until 1949.” Was the relationship between Hồ Chí Minh and Trường Chinh one of suspicion and rivalry? Taylor writes:

Where Marr is going with his comparison, his suggestion, his doubt, his anytime-soon, becomes apparent at the end of the paragraph: “Along the way, Truong Chinh became a separate pole of power from President Ho Chi Minh.” What this actually means is vague, but it strongly implies that Truong Chinh was as much or more in the driver’s seat of the state as was Ho Chi Minh and thus shared or even bore most responsibility for unsavory aspects of the Vietnamese revolutionary path. The idea of Truong Chinh being the scapegoat taking away any possible sins that might accrue to Uncle Ho is not new, but it has yet to be proven and Marr provides no evidence for it, being content to simply say that it is something that happened “along the way.” Without evidence, it can be no more than an effort to keep a clean slate for Uncle Ho.<sup>36</sup>

These five intriguing reviews convey a shared sense of admiration for *Vietnam 1946*, yet all five raise important questions about key aspects of the book’s narrative. In the fourth and final part of this review essay, I probe deeper into some of these questions, particularly those connected to the broad issue of the ICP’s role in the Revolution.

### Part III: The August Revolution, *Vietnam 1945*: *The Quest for Power*

*Vietnam 1946*’s image of an early DRV state, under the influence but not the control of the Communist Party, builds on Marr’s interpretation of the August Revolution put forward in his preceding book, *Vietnam 1945*. In the following section, I examine Marr’s construction of that earlier argument about the events of August 1945. In particular, I look at his handling of key evidence that appears to challenge his overall argument about the limits of Party influence. Here I must stress that Marr’s image of “revolution-from-below” does not require an implausible total exclusion of the ICP from the August seizure of power. Instead, it requires, here and there, reductions in the Party’s agency so that the narrative’s overall balance of agency does not tip in the ICP’s favor.

In one way or another, these reductions frequently tie back to the basic question of the Việt Minh front. What was the nature of that organization? This complicated question has two related but distinct components. The first concerns the extent of Việt Minh influence irrespective of Party control. How well-known was the Việt Minh among the Vietnamese population before the August seizure of power? What percentage of the population were members of the various National Salvation organizations connected with the Việt Minh during the summer of 1945? The second component of the question concerns the influence of the Communist Party within the Việt Minh (whatever its reach had been). Should the presence of a Việt Minh organization in a community be taken as a sign of Party initiative and control? Or, as Marr argues, were there many instances when local communities, having heard about the Việt Minh, created their own Việt Minh organizations on their own volition without Party involvement?

#### 1. AN ICP PLAN FOR CONTROL?

During the August Revolution, did the Communist Party have both the will and a plan to establish control over Vietnam? In *Vietnam 1945*, Marr stresses that the ICP “effectively promoted or discouraged particular types of action at the district or local level, but they could not control events on a day-to-day basis.”<sup>37</sup> In *Vietnam 1946*, Marr pushes this argument further, from a slightly different angle, claiming that, while the ICP’s goal was to “control the entire Vietnamese nation, both people and state,”<sup>38</sup> the Party had “no agreed plan” for the establishment of control “over all Việt Minh groups, the nascent DRV state, and the people at large.”<sup>39</sup>

However, internal Party documents from the period indicate that, in addition to having the will to obtain control, the Party leaders had a plan for its achievement. In all communist states, past and present, a primary mechanism for ensuring party control over society is the “party committee” [*đảng đoàn*] system. The resolution of the ICP Central Committee’s 7th Plenum, held in November 1940, explains how this party-committee system worked:

#### 1. How Will the Party Direct the Anti-Imperialist Front?

The Party will have a Party committee inside every anti-imperialist mass

organization. Therefore, even if the number of Party representatives is only equivalent to the number of representatives of each mass organization in the Front, the Party will still hold the power to lead the Front. The ideas of the Party will be implemented in the Front in two ways:

- a) By having party members in every anti-imperialist mass organization carry out mobilization work (work among the lower ranks).
- b) By having the Party committees within the associations' [*hội*] and the front's executive committees request [that a policy be implemented].<sup>40</sup>

An article written by Trường Chinh eleven months later in September 1941 (about four months after the ICP Central Committee's 8th Plenum, when Hồ Chí Minh officially took over the reins of the Party in the North) describes the ICP's "new policies."<sup>41</sup> We can see that the party-committee system remained unchanged after the transition to Hồ Chí Minh's leadership:

The Party must not only unify the Front but also lead the Front. The Party will lead the front by the method of making requests [*đề nghị*] to the masses, of course not through sending down orders. For this reason, we must use the Party committees inside the national salvation organizations and the Việt Minh Executive Committees to lead the masses, to lead the Front. When the Party has a policy that needs to be passed along to the masses for implementation, it will be proposed by the Party committee so that the masses can discuss and decide.<sup>42</sup>

In theory, the masses were to "discuss and decide," but in reality, the policy transmitted from the Party leadership down through the party-committee network was non-negotiable.

Had the party-committee plan been put in effect during and immediately after the August Revolution? An ICP Central Executive Committee directive from November 25, 1945, only a couple of months after the August seizure of power, updates Party members on tasks concerning the Việt Minh front:

The V.M. [Việt Minh] General Headquarters must establish a propaganda section for managing the front's newspapers and releasing books of a general educational nature. Those who are c.s. [communist] must enter and work

within the national salvation mass organizations, mobilizing within their local “U.B.V.M.” [Việt Minh Committee] as they do in the V.M. General Headquarters until the V.M. second all-nation meeting. (They should still describe themselves [*nhân danh*] as national salvation elements of the V.M., as having been hired by the V.M., and as carrying out the work of the front.) We must expedite the work of consolidating the front-organization party committees, *through which our leadership over the front is to be consolidated and maintained.*”<sup>43</sup>

The words “Party” and “communist” are used openly throughout much of the document, but in the section specifically devoted to the Việt Minh front, from which the above passage was taken, the terms are sometimes replaced by thinly coded substitutes such as “c.s.” [*cộng sản* or communist]. Surely this use of coded language functioned not as a means of maintaining the secrecy of the document’s content but rather as a means of reminding Party members involved with the Việt Minh to maintain the secrecy of their Communist Party affiliation as they guided the front’s activities. Also noteworthy is the use of scare quotes around the term “U.B.V.M” [Việt Minh Committee]—a literary device normally signaling authorial skepticism about the accuracy of the quoted word or phrase. In this context, the scare quotes seem to be a reminder to Party members that the term “Việt Minh Committee” was a code word for “Party political apparatus” and not to be taken at face value.

In general, the above passages indicate that there was an “agreed plan” for Party control over its front organizations; it had been the plan for years; it can be recognized as the same plan used by all communist parties in the world; and it remains the key method for the maintenance of Party control in Vietnam today. Moreover, the above passage from November 25, 1945 speaks of consolidating and maintaining control of the Việt Minh front, not capturing control of an organization moving in an independent direction.

## 2. THE EMPEROR BẢO ĐẠI'S MID-AUGUST 1945 LETTER TO CHARLES DE GAULLE

On August 20, 1945, the day following the seizure of power in Hà Nội, an important Huế newspaper named *Việt Nam tân báo* [Vietnam News] published open letters from the Vietnamese emperor, Bảo Đại, to President

Harry Truman and French President Charles de Gaulle.<sup>44</sup> For the four months leading up to the August Revolution, Bảo Đại had been based in Huế, serving there in the Nguyễn Dynasty's ancient capital as the royal leader of the Japanese-backed state, The Empire of Vietnam (often referred to as the “Trần Trọng Kim Government”).

Marr features Bảo Đại's public letter to de Gaulle in *Vietnam 1945's* chapter “The Opportune Moment,” which details the events leading up to the August Revolution. Marr writes that Bảo Đại's letter “is worth quoting in full, as the feelings expressed proved extraordinarily similar to those Ho Chi Minh would present publicly in Hanoi less than two weeks later, and that continued to motivate many educated Viet Minh adherents during the nine-year war with France.” Here is a passage from Bảo Đại's public letter:

You will understand still better if you could see what is happening here, if you could feel the will for independence which has been smoldering in the hearts of all and which no human force can hold in check any longer. Even if you were to come to re-establish French government here, it would not be obeyed: each village would be a nest of resistance, each former collaborator an enemy, and your officials and your colonists themselves would ask to leave that unbreathable atmosphere.<sup>45</sup>

The importance of Bảo Đại's letter, which is the book's longest quoted passage, seems to be its validation of Hồ Chí Minh's subsequent assessment of the Vietnamese people's mood. I do not know whether each Vietnamese village was thinking in terms of being a “nest of resistance” to French recolonization in 1945—no doubt the hunger for independence after World War II was stronger and more widespread among Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian peoples than it had ever been. However, judging from Bảo Đại's personality and his highly flexible approach to politics throughout his career, I find it hard to believe that the impetus for and content of the de Gaulle letter had come entirely from the emperor himself. But that is certainly the impression given since Marr makes no mention of any contact between Bảo Đại and the ICP before the letter's publication on August 20. And Marr characterizes its content as “extraordinarily similar” to that of Hồ Chí Minh's Declaration of Independence delivered thirteen days afterward.

Seventy-eight pages later in the book, though, Marr returns to Bảo Đại in the context of his abdication on August 24. Here we learn that, in “early August” (several days prior to Bảo Đại’s publication of the letter to de Gaulle on August 20), “Ton Quang Phiet, a respected writer, high school principal, and covert Viet Minh adherent, persuaded Hoe [Bảo Đại’s private secretary] to try to convince the emperor to abdicate.” As Marr explains, “Hoe returned to the palace library to look up regicide precedents,” particularly the “sad fate of Louis XVI in the French Revolution.”<sup>46</sup> Since Tôn Quang Phiệt had been an ICP member since 1930, not merely a “covert Viet Minh adherent,” there had been a path of communication between the Party and Bảo Đại in the days leading up to the publication of the de Gaulle letter. Moreover, Phạm Khắc Hòe’s 1983 memoir, which is Marr’s key source for the episode, strongly implies that the secretary had, at the very least, communicated instructions from Tôn Quang Phiệt to Bảo Đại regarding the content of both the letter to de Gaulle and the abdication speech delivered four days later.<sup>47</sup>

If Phạm Khắc Hòe’s account is to be trusted, the strongest argument that can be derived from the de Gaulle-letter episode is that the Party leaders, in mid-August of 1945, were able, through threats and intimidation (the “sad fate of Louis XVI”), to exert their control over Bảo Đại. Much weaker is Marr’s argument that the content of Bảo Đại’s letter was “extraordinarily similar to” that of Hồ Chí Minh’s Declaration of Independence speech delivered thirteen days later.

### 3. KICKING-OFF THE AUGUST REVOLUTION: “VIỆT MINH” OR “ICP CENTRAL COMMITTEE”?

For Marr’s overall narrative of Việt Minh agency and ICP lack thereof during the August Revolution, the three days from August 12 to August 15, 1945, when key orders for the “uprising” were officially issued, hold special importance. There is a danger that the reader would be tempted to establish a strong causal link between these orders and what happened during the August Revolution a few days later, weakening Marr’s argument for “revolutionary spontaneity.” Moreover, if the orders of August 12–15 were too strongly connected to the ICP, the book’s overall balance of agency might swing too far in the Party’s favor. Below, quoted in full, are two of Marr’s paragraphs that deal closely with these crucial days:

Possibly as early as 11 August, the Americans at Tan Trao<sup>48</sup> received a radio alert from Kunming that Japanese capitulation might be imminent. On 12 August, the “Provisional Command Committee” of the Viet Minh’s liberated zone issued a General Uprising Order announcing that Japan had asked to surrender and asserting (a bit prematurely) that the Allies had accepted Tokyo’s formulation. All local Vietnamese forces were instructed to send ultimatums to Japanese and Civil Guard units; those who did not surrender were to be annihilated. On 13 August, at 2300 hours, Tan Trao headquarters issued “Military Order No. 1,” stating (erroneously) that Japan had capitulated as of 1200. Nonetheless, the order continued, Vietnamese forces who received this order were to attack the enemy army, cut off its routes of retreat, and seize its weapons—actions that would lead to complete victory and national independence. Tran Huy Lieu, who drafted this order on instructions from Vo Nguyen Giap, refused to let the swarms of mosquitoes deter him from waxing eloquent, or from privately contrasting this unique historical opportunity with the many frustrating hours that he and Giap had spent together in the late 1930s as mere pencil-pushing intellectuals.

Also on 13 August, the ICP’s All-Country Conference opened at Tan Trao. Reflecting the dramatic new circumstances, it first moved to establish a five-man “Uprising Committee,” consisting of Party General Secretary Truong Chinh, Tran Dang Ninh, Vo Nguyen Giap, Le Thanh Nghi, and Chu Van Tan. In practice, this committee does not seem to have played much of a role in the rapidly unfolding events; several days later, it issued a brief “Operation Plan” designed simply to remind Party activists of previously agreed military and political methods, not attempting to control local implementation.”<sup>49</sup>

In subtle ways, the semantics of the above passage boost the agency of the Việt Minh and diminish that of the Party, creating an image that contrasts with the content of the three documents to which Marr refers, all of which appear in a 1946 DRV documentary history of the August Revolution titled *Chặt xiềng* [Breaking the Bonds].<sup>50</sup>

In the above passage, Marr begins with a description of the first of the three documents, the August 12 “General Uprising Order” released by the “Provisional Command Committee” of the “liberated zone” [*khu giải phóng*].<sup>51</sup> The document does not specify any organizational affiliation, but Marr connects it with the Việt Minh. The second of the three documents, “Military Order No. 1,”<sup>52</sup> Marr attributes to “Tan Trao headquarters,” which encourages readers to assume that the order came from the aforementioned

“Việt Minh” rather than from the subsequently mentioned “ICP.” The third order, the “Operation Plan,”<sup>53</sup> is covered by Marr in the second of the two paragraphs. And it is attributed directly to the ICP via the ICP-elected Uprising Committee.

Looking back at these three original documents, we see that the second of the three, “Military Order No. 1,” is clearly attributed to the ICP-elected Uprising Committee. Yet in Marr’s chronology, it is attributed vaguely to “Tan Trao headquarters,” and its anachronistic placement before rather than after the ICP Congress, at which the Uprising Committee that produced the document was elected, makes the reader more likely to connect the document to the Việt Minh than to the Party. The impression of Việt Minh-ICP separation and the connection of Military Order No. 1 to the Việt Minh rather than to the Party are strengthened in the opening sentence of the second paragraph where Marr depicts the ICP’s All-Country Conference as something that “also” happened at Tân Trào.

The third of the three documents to which Marr refers, the ICP Uprising Committee’s Operation Plan, contains no date in the version that appears in *Chặt xiềng*, Marr’s only cited source for the document. Thus it is unclear on what grounds (possibly some other unmentioned source?) Marr bases his claim that the document was written “several days later” (i.e., after the main events connected with the seizure of power, and therefore not to be taken as evidence of ICP agency).

#### 4. THE ICP UPRISING COMMITTEE’S OPERATION PLAN

From a strictly scholarly perspective, Marr’s lack of enthusiasm for the ICP’s Operation Plan seems unusual. Why not provide a description of that plan, which covers in some detail the specific steps that ICP leaders wanted Party members to take in the seizure of power? Had the Party not been at the center of the revolutionary action, as Marr argues, the content of the Operation Plan might provide strong negative evidence for that argument. My sense, however, is that the plan’s directions correspond well with official DRV descriptions of the local seizures of power in the countryside and with the broad outlines of Marr’s own descriptions. The second section of the plan, titled “Politics,” seems particularly important:

OPERATION PLAN  
OF THE UPRISING COMMITTEE

[ . . . ]

II. POLITICS

In successfully occupied places, do the following:

1. Break up the enemy administration, destroy documents, seals, tax documents, etc. (hand land and tax registers over to the People's Committee).
2. Liquidate Vietnamese traitors.
3. Establish a people's government, carry out the ten Việt Minh policies.
4. Establish a headquarters for the Vietnamese People's Liberation Committee. That committee should establish a new ruling apparatus, (Central Government along with regional, provincial, and district People's Committees, etc.). The committee should take power and then announce Vietnam's independence.
5. Send armed squads to carry out propaganda in areas where the army does not pass through.
6. Occupy and make use of the enemy's propaganda organs; requisition publishing houses and private radios.
7. Mobilize the masses to maintain a spirit of determination to seize complete independence and to resist all difficulties.<sup>54</sup>

An interesting aspect of this Operation Plan, as opposed to the first and second orders mentioned above, is its focus on enemy Vietnamese (*Việt gian* [Vietnamese traitors]) rather than on the Japanese. Indeed, the word "Japan" appears nowhere in the document. The fact that the actual seizure of power throughout the country involved the careful avoidance of any serious conflict with the Japanese strongly suggests that this ICP document, the third of the three covered by Marr, contains the most influential ideas.

It would have been useful to position this document at the beginning of the chapter "Beyond Hanoi," which moves from province to province,

detailing how the seizure of power unfolded. Toward the end of that chapter, Marr reflects on the uprisings throughout the country: “Finally, as we have seen, there was, in fact, a fair amount of bloodshed, although not by prior design by the leaders of the insurrection and less than in many such affairs elsewhere.”<sup>55</sup> This assessment does not cohere well with the Operation Plan, which plainly instructs Party members to “liquidate Vietnamese traitors.” Moreover, such liquidations are a common feature of DRV histories of the August Revolution. An account of the revolution in the northern border province of Cao Bằng, for example, describes the Party’s response to French repression in 1944: “Many enemy informers or cruel despots had to pay for their crimes. A number of large-scale waves of ‘red terror’ were organized such as the siege of Hà-vị village (Hòa-an), where we decapitated twenty-seven running dogs at one time.”<sup>56</sup> This may have been an exaggeration, but its inclusion in a standard DRV history book published in 1960 suggests that the Party leadership saw this type of violence as a normal part of revolution.

##### 5. DRV/SRV<sup>57</sup> AUGUST REVOLUTION HISTORIES AS SOURCES

A problem with Marr’s downsized version of the Party’s role in the August Revolution is his narrative’s heavy reliance on DRV/SRV (i.e., Communist Party-sponsored) histories. Within days of the August 1945 seizure of power, the ICP leadership began to police public representations of what had happened, making interpretation of these official August Revolution accounts difficult.

Apparently concerned that many people saw the August Revolution as a well-orchestrated top-down grab for power, the Party general secretary, Trường Chinh, published in early September 1945 his famous article “Revolution or *coup d’état*?” He wrote:

Who dares to call our August Revolution a *coup d’état*? A *coup d’état* occurs when two ruling groups in a country fight against each other. One group knocks the other out in order to establish a new government, but basically the old regime is left intact. In our case, repressed people rose up and liberated themselves, seizing power. Now, why is that called a *coup d’état*?<sup>58</sup>

“However,” Trường Chinh also noted in the article, “. . . the government did not just naturally fall into the hands of our people. This happened because of

the organized actions of the armed masses, because of the timely and rapid attack of the revolutionary vanguard force [*đội tiên phong cách mạng*].”<sup>59</sup>

Trường Chinh’s article established the ground rules for subsequent accounts of the August Revolution. On the one hand, they were to celebrate, not downplay, the role of the “revolutionary vanguard force,” that is, of the ICP. On the other hand, though, they could not push too far in this direction, for it would risk making the August Revolution seem like a *coup d’état*. Thus, in official depictions, the “vanguard force” would need to be balanced by joyous throngs of revolutionary peasants, acting in ecstatic support of the Party’s leadership.

In the preface to *Vietnam 1945*, Marr explains his interpretive approach to these DRV/SRV histories, making clear which of these two narrative elements, the “revolutionary vanguard force” or the joyous throngs of revolutionary peasants, he prefers:

Sections of this book are heavily dependent on publications released under Communist Party imprimatur. I have routinely excluded large amounts of hyperbole and cross-checked accounts wherever possible, but almost surely failed to avoid some pitfalls resulting from deliberate Party efforts to manipulate the past. Ironically, certain of the more flamboyant assertions in Hanoi publications may be accurate, yet have been set aside unintentionally because of the larger pattern of official mystification. Earlier Party publications are generally more useful than later ones, which tend toward ideological bombast or minor additions to the authorized historical record.<sup>60</sup>

This explanation raises more questions than it answers. What does “authorized historical record” mean in the context of DRV intellectual production? How does Marr determine which aspects of these DRV histories we should ignore as “hyperbole” or “official mystification” and which we should embrace as “accurate”? How can Marr say that he has “unintentionally” set aside possibly “accurate” assertions of the Party’s role in events when his book’s key argument holds that the Party’s role has been exaggerated?

## 6. TWO VERSIONS OF REVOLUTION IN TIỀN-HẢI

Arguably the most important of those DRV/SRV histories for Marr’s narrative is the two-volume set titled *Cách mạng tháng tám: Tổng khởi nghĩa ở Hà Nội và các địa phương* [The August Revolution: The General Uprising in

Hà Nội and Other Localities], edited and published in 1960 by the high-ranking Party historian Trần Huy Liệu. In *Vietnam 1945*'s key chapter, "Beyond Hanoi," in which Marr briefly describes the August seizure of power in different localities around the country, forty-seven of the chapter's seventy pages contain a note citing Trần Huy Liệu's two-volume history.

Though *Cách mạng tháng tám* generally attempts to maintain a balance between the actions of the Party and the actions of the revolutionary peasant masses (lest the book slide toward an image of *coup d'état*), the top-down Party-focused character of the narrative still emerges strongly. The vast majority of the named characters in the account are Party members and the prominent local elites whom they co-opt, chase out of town, or kill as part of the seizure of power. Rarely does one encounter a named character from the throngs of revolutionary peasants. With such an approach, it is not surprising that the actions of Party members tend to have a more spontaneous and authentic quality to them than the actions of the revolutionary peasants, which tend to appear formulaic and clichéd. Thus Trần Huy Liệu's history of the August Revolution does not lend itself well to the creation of "revolution from below."

Below, I have translated a passage from *Cách mạng tháng tám* with its corresponding passage from *Vietnam 1945*.

Passage from Trần Huy Liệu's two-volume history:

### Taking Tiền-hải District

Before seizing power in the district, Tiền Hải's [revolutionary] movement had developed strongly. In July 1945, pro-Japanese reactionaries such as Trần Kiên and Trần Tất in Đông-cao were executed together at the Đông-cao banyan tree for helping the Japanese attack [*phá hoại*] our revolutionary bases. These two had been warned a number of times yet still refused to change their ways. The punishment of pro-Japanese residents infused the district with a revolutionary atmosphere. On August 8, the district [Party branch] received a letter from the provincial [Party branch] calling for mobilization of the people to carry out protests and to seize weapons from civil guard soldiers. On August 13, the district [Party branch] received from the provincial [Party branch] an official order calling for the establishment of a revolutionary government. Comrade Ngô Duy Xổn organized a meeting, which included the district Việt Minh and a number of party members serving as self-defense corps in order to

discuss a specific plan for seizing power. Cadres spread out among villages of the district to carry out propaganda and to organize forces for the uprising. Hundreds of people from Đông-cao, Thư-diễn, Tiểu-hoàng, An-khang, Đại-hữu carrying machetes [*giáo mác*] flocked enthusiastically to the district capital. People on the streets expressed their enthusiastic support, with many people setting off fireworks. The district chief fled in terror, and civil guard soldiers surrendered, turning over eight rifles. The revolutionary army advanced toward the district capital, and the red flag with the yellow star was flown from the house of the local mandarin. On August 17, a meeting was held, attended by tens of thousands of people from the surrounding villages who had come to the district capital to celebrate the formation of the Provisional District Committee and to execute a Vietnamese traitor named Hà Ngọc Hiến. After that, the villages all organized meetings to establish Provisional Commune Committees and demonstrated continuously their determination to protect the revolutionary government.<sup>61</sup>

Passage from Marr's *Vietnam 1945* citing the above passage from *Cách mạng tháng tám*:

From 17 August on, news of Japan's capitulation and the dramatic events in Hanoi precipitated action in every province of the Red River Delta. In Thai Binh province, southeast of Hanoi, word arrived on the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup> that the city was "in the midst of an uprising." Some local ICP members urged immediate action, while others wanted to wait for orders. Already on the 13<sup>th</sup> in Tien Hai, scene of the worst starvation only four months earlier, a crowd had marched on government offices, causing the district mandarin to flee and six civil guardsmen to surrender after firing token volleys into the air. Three days later the captured district mandarin, Ha Ngọc Hien, was brought before a crowd of about five thousand people, accused of helping the "Japanese pirates" during the famine, sentenced to death, and shot on the spot. Other "henchmen of the Japanese" were dragged out of their homes, forced to lower their heads, beaten, and imprisoned.<sup>62</sup>

We can see that Marr has removed the Party from the action in Tiền Hải described in Trần Huy Liệu's 1960 history. In fact, Marr's one sentence about the Party, "Some local ICP . . .," followed by the sentence, "Already on the 13th . . .," encourages the reader to view the ICP as having been caught off guard and indecisive before a spontaneous revolutionary upsurge in Tiền Hải—the opposite of the impression given by Trần Huy Liệu's account. In *Cách mạng tháng tám*, the terrible famine of 1944–1945 is discussed earlier

in the chapter as backdrop to the revolution. But the actual events related to the seizure of power result from the direct initiative of the Party, namely the execution of two allegedly pro-Japanese local leaders for having helped in the suppression of the Party's "revolutionary base." Marr pulls this detail out and replaces it with the famine as the implied revolutionary trigger.

Trần Huy Liệu's placement of Hà Ngọc Hiến's public execution immediately before the establishment of Provisional Commune-level People's Committees in the district also contributes to the *Cách mạng tháng tám's* general emphasis on the crucial role played by carefully organized executions. After the people witness the execution, they show their "determination to protect the revolutionary government." In Marr's version, the sending out of cadres, the meeting, the Provisional District Committee, and the subsequent organization of Provisional Commune Committees after the execution—all signs of planned, top-down initiative—have been removed. The reader is subtly encouraged to see Hà Ngọc Hiến's execution as the result of spontaneous mob violence, with the Party uninvolved.

In his footnote to the passage above, Marr cites (in addition to *Cách mạng tháng tám*) an unpublished seminar paper titled "Vietnam's August Revolution: The Origins of Legitimacy," which was written by David Elliott in 1972. Did Elliott use some different source of information on the events in Tiền Hải that somehow sanctioned Marr's adjustments of the *Cách mạng tháng tám* narrative? There is no explanation.

#### 7. "VIỆT MINH TỔNG BỘ" OR "ICP LEADERSHIP":

##### THE TOP-DOWN VIEW

What was the nature of the Việt Minh as an organization at its upper level? Was it an independent ally of the ICP, an appendage, or something in between? The following quote from *Vietnam 1945* suggests that the upper-level Việt Minh was more independent ally of the Party than appendage:

The proliferating revolutionary committees gave the Revolution a depth and resilience that no amount of top-level planning or maneuvering could have provided. The vitality of the local level would also impose restrictions on higher-echelon leaders, whether in the ICP Central Committee, the Viet Minh General Headquarters, or the nascent provisional government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.<sup>63</sup>

Is it accurate to speak of an “ICP Central Committee” and a “Viet Minh General Headquarters” [*tổng bộ*] as two separate organizations? Could we realistically state, for example, that “members of the ICP Central Committee requested a meeting with their counterparts in the Việt Minh General Headquarters to discuss revolutionary strategy?” Is there any record in the *Văn Kiện Đảng* series of a joint ICP-Việt Minh meeting?

The notion that the Việt Minh was always a front organization for the Party, never having had an independent existence, is reflected in DRV/SRV histories of the August Revolution. Below is a passage from a 1970 history of the August Revolution that focuses on the activities of the ICP Northern Regional Committee [Xứ ủy Bắc kỳ] responsible for carrying out the seizure of power in Hà Nội and other areas of the Red River Delta. Like other histories of the period, this account does not explicitly claim that the Việt Minh front was entirely under the direction of the ICP. But the passage strongly encourages that interpretation:

On August 15, the [ICP] Northern Regional Committee also met at the village of Vạn-phúc (Hà-dồng province). Based on the spirit of the Party Standing Committee’s directive “Our Actions Should Fighting Break out between Japan and France,” and based on the spirit of the development mentioned above, the Regional Committee decided to carry out an uprising piece by piece within the bounds of the ten provinces of the [Red River] delta region. In the name of [*nhân danh*] the [northern] region Việt Minh, the [ICP] Regional Committee issued an emergency communiqué ordering the concentration of district-capital forces to capture [*đánh chiếm*] provincial capitals, to confiscate enemy weapons, and to compel the surrender of provincial governors through persuasion and intimidation. The communiqué also stressed that we “cannot yet strike areas where Japanese forces are concentrated.”<sup>64</sup>

In the above passage, “Việt Minh” appears to be little more than a name that ICP members had been instructed to attach to public and semi-public announcements. The passage is followed by a footnote that informs the reader where the communiqué can be found: “See *Việt Minh Regional Committee Emergency Communiqué of August 16, 1945* in *Party Documents* (1939–1945), Truth Publishing House.” Thus the communiqué’s title, which attributes the document to the “Việt Minh,” should not be

taken as evidence that it was produced separately from the ICP. Moreover, the note, combined with the passage above, indicates that “Việt Minh Regional Committee” was the ICP Northern Regional Committee under a slightly different name.

Trần Huy Liệu’s above-mentioned two-volume history of the August Revolution also has sections strongly suggesting that, at its upper echelons, “Việt Minh” was simply an alternative name for the Party’s political apparatus. The following passage from his 1960 history describes the August seizure of power in the Central province of Nghệ An:

In May 1945, in Vang village, the [ICP] Action Committee convened a meeting with nearly every district [Party] representative of the two provinces. At the meeting, the name Inter-Provincial Action Committee was changed to Provisional Party Executive Committee of Nghệ-Tĩnh, which, at the same time, served as the Inter-Provincial Việt Minh Executive Committee, with comrade Nguyễn-xuân-Linh serving as secretary.<sup>65</sup>

In his biography of Hồ Chí Minh, the historian Pierre Brocheux (one of the four H-Diplo reviewers of Marr’s book) seems to draw a similar conclusion about relationship between the ICP and the Việt Minh. Describing Hồ Chí Minh’s actions in mid-August, just before the seizure of power, Brocheux writes:

Ho Chi Minh showed that he was able to keep pace with the “acceleration of history” taking place before his eyes. Even more, he wanted to be in the forefront of events, rather than carried along in their wake, and be prepared instead of caught off guard. He asked the Executive Committee of the Viet Minh—in fact, of the ICP—to call for a national congress. There was no question of holding elections to choose delegates since there was no time. As a result, the delegates who arrived in Tan Trao [the revolutionary headquarters] were mostly Communists or members of the Viet Minh, or sympathizers like the leader of the Vietnamese scouts in Tonkin. The Communists of Cochinchina invited a representative of the Hoa Hao religion to join them, but they arrived at the congress after it was over.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, for Brocheux, the Executive Committee of the Việt Minh and that of the ICP were basically the same.

My guess is that every important policy document that appears under the name “Việt Minh” was written by a Party member. And any non-Party

member attached publicly to the Việt Minh leadership was there primarily for the sake of appearances, having little real influence on the overall direction of that organization. What, ultimately, was the Việt Minh General Headquarters? It was probably anything that Hồ Chí Minh and other Party leaders wanted it to be at any particular moment.

#### 8. "VIỆT MINH GROUPS POPPING UP": THE SPONTANEOUS BOTTOM-UP VIEW

When studying Vietnamese history, the village-level perspective is usually the most difficult to determine. For the August Revolution, particularly in the northern half of the country, Japanese, French, or even Empire of Vietnam sources cannot be relied upon to determine whether a Việt Minh organization in a village arose spontaneously or as a result of Party initiative. For this information, Marr and all of us are almost totally dependent on DRV/SRV sources.

Toward the end of *Vietnam 1945's* chapter "The Viet Minh and the Communist Party," Marr writes that, in the summer of 1945, "Viet Minh groups were popping up in hundreds of villages and district towns, often with no ICP involvement whatsoever."<sup>67</sup> Two paragraphs later, he builds upon that characterization, making the following broader assessment: "In many ways the 'Viet Minh' in late July was more an amorphous movement, possessing its own momentum and trajectory, than a functioning political organization."<sup>68</sup> In his more recent book, Marr pushes this argument slightly further, claiming that, after the Japanese had ousted the French from power in March of 1945, "[s]imultaneously, hundreds of self-styled Việt Minh groups that lacked any ICP involvement sprung up around the delta and down the central coast."<sup>69</sup> Marr's citations for these crucial assessments in *Vietnam 1945* are limited entirely to Trần Huy Liệu's above-mentioned two-volume history, *Cách mạng tháng tám*.

Among the thirty northern and central Vietnamese provinces covered in Trần Huy Liệu's two-volume set, however, I have found only three places where the narrative seems to support Marr's image of spontaneous Việt Minh development outside of Party initiative. The first appears in the description of events in Bắc Giang Province, which lies to the northeast of Hà Nội.

If before, the Việt Minh front had only existed in a few regions that had Party cells, then after March 9 [1945], the front had spread throughout the entire province, even in areas where the movement had been weak such as Việt-yên, Sơn-đông, Hữu-lũng. In many places the masses demanded [help from the front], but we did not have enough people to help them immediately.<sup>70</sup>

The second occurs in the book's description of events in Hà Đông Province, just to the south of Hà Nội:

Every day the movement grew stronger, with the national salvation associations in the Việt Minh front being consolidated and further developed in all places. There were places, such as the villages of Bắc-mã and Hồ-lao, where almost all of the people either entered the National Salvation Organization or were sympathetic to the revolution. There were many places where youths organized themselves on their own initiative and then went to find a cadre to organize their commune.<sup>71</sup>

The third instance occurs in the section covering the province of Yên Bái, to the northwest of Hà Nội. Commenting on anti-tax protests and efforts to break into local rice stores by ethnic minority communities in the province, the author explains:

The above struggles [*đấu tranh*] had a spontaneous character, lacking tight organization, but they show that under the cruel repression of the French colonialists and the Japanese fascists, our people always hold high the indomitable spirit of struggle against repressive exploitation, against the Japanese fascists . . . Indeed, it was through those very struggles that, within the people, the flame of hatred for the Japanese and French fascists was further kindled. And the struggles made our compatriots see more clearly than ever the need to follow the Việt Minh and the Party—for only in this way could warm clothing and a full stomach be ensured. At that time, the prestige of the Việt Minh grew among the ethnic minorities, who mobilized each other to participate in and support the Việt Minh.<sup>72</sup>

The rest of the accounts in *Cách mạng tháng tám* tend to have a straightforward focus on the unity between the Party and the people it led. In the Central province of Quảng Trị: “Also during that night, along with an armed demonstration to seize power in the provincial capital, the people in district capitals throughout the entire province, under the leadership of Party members and the local uprising committees, all seized power during that same

night.”<sup>73</sup> In the Fourth Military Zone (northern Vietnam): “The people enthusiastically welcomed and thanked the revolutionary army for returning order and security to their community.”<sup>74</sup> In Hải Phòng: “As the people’s revolutionary zeal caught fire, it burned through every obstacle; from that moment, under the leadership of the Party, authority was formally returned to the people of Hải Phòng and a revolutionary people’s committee was established in the city.”<sup>75</sup> And finally, in Hà Nội:

The uprising in Hà Nội succeeded spectacularly. Not a drop of blood was spilled on August 19, 1945, but a great deal of blood of the revolutionary masses, of communist party members, was spilled during the period of covert struggle. The August Uprising was the product of a long and difficult revolutionary struggle that the people of Hà Nội carried out under the Party’s leadership. As a result, the subjective conditions of the revolution were sufficiently prepared. When the opportune moment came, the Party led the people to rise up at the right time when success would be easiest.

As Stalin wrote: “Revolutionary victory does not come on its own; it has to be prepared for and then seized.”<sup>76</sup>

Marr’s characterization of the Việt Minh front during the summer of 1945, *before* the August seizure of power, as having been an “amorphous movement, possessing its own momentum and trajectory” with many Việt Minh groups spontaneously “popping up in hundreds of villages and district towns” *sans* Party guidance, runs counter to the overall picture of Party agency that appears in the key source Marr cites, Trần Huy Liệu’s *Cách mạng tháng tám*.

One practical reality pointed out by Marr that supports his stress on the limits of ICP control is the Party’s small size (allegedly only about five thousand members) at the time of the August Revolution. How could such a small group, no matter how well organized, gain control over large sections of a country whose population was around twenty million? As skeptical as I am of Trần Huy Liệu’s two-volume history of the August Revolution, I have to acknowledge that it presents a plausible description of how the Party may have pulled this off. The account, along with other more regionally specific histories, details how Party members allegedly made the most of their limited numbers, how they thought strategically about popular perceptions of power, how they employed public and private terror, how they frequently

cajoled support from local power holders, how they tailored their propaganda to local issues, and how they benefited from the near total breakdown of political authority after the Japanese surrender in August 1945. (To be clear, later, during the post-August Revolution period, spontaneous surges of support for the new Hồ Chí Minh government, with its inspiring propaganda delivered from a position of power in Hà Nội, strike me as entirely plausible.)

Ultimately, though, I have no reliable evidence to prove whether or not large numbers of Việt Minh branches sprang up spontaneously without Party initiative during the months before the August seizure of power. I agree with Marr's overall point about the limits of Party control over the Vietnamese people. However, it seems possible that this patchy control stemmed more from the limited reach of the Việt Minh front than from the Party's ability to control their front. Future research in Vietnamese archives, focused on internal Party documents rather than on historical accounts produced by the regime for public consumption, may prove Marr correct. But for now, the nature of Việt Minh growth during the summer of 1945, before the August Revolution, should be considered an open question.

#### Part IV: The Early DRV State: Vietnam 1946: State, War, Revolution

Marr's 2013 book, *Vietnam 1946*, builds on the basic arguments of its predecessor, *Vietnam 1945*. The close relationship between the two books in terms of content (the years 1945 and 1946), structure (thematic rather than chronological), and approach (more top-down than bottom-up), makes them a well-matched two-volume set on the Vietnamese Revolution. From Volume I to Volume II, Marr shifts from the August Revolution to the early DRV state, which Hồ Chí Minh and his lieutenants began constructing—partly from remnants of the old colonial state and partly from newly created institutions—immediately after the August seizure of power. Marr's removal of the Communist Party from the center of the action during the August Revolution (*Vietnam 1945*) meant that he would either have to continue that theme in the early DRV state (*Vietnam 1946*) or go in a different direction, potentially undermining the central argument of his preceding book. Having chosen the first option, Marr, in his recent book, faces the same basic

challenge that he faced in his earlier study: how to keep the overall balance of agency in the early DRV state from shifting too much in favor of the Party?

#### 1. "VIỆT MINH ADHERENTS" OR ICP MEMBERS?

Looking back at some of the earliest accounts of the Vietnamese Revolution produced by Vietnam specialists in the 1950s such as Paul Mus, Philippe Devillers, Ellen Hammer, and Bernard Fall, one sees the beginnings of the general scholarly preference for the term "Việt Minh" to describe the group that seized power in Vietnam during the August Revolution. For example, in his 1952 book *History of Vietnam: 1940–1952*, Devillers titled his fifth chapter "The Origins of the Viet Minh." Immediately after describing the ICP's establishment of the Việt Minh front in 1941, "Việt Minh" becomes the name of the Vietnamese Revolution's main character. A similar semantic shift from "ICP" to "Việt Minh" occurs in Hammer's and Fall's accounts. Indeed, Fall's 1954 book was titled *The Viet Minh Regime*.

Here the historian is presented with a semantic dilemma. The group that came to power during the Vietnamese Revolution publicly self-identified as "Việt Minh," not "ICP." Thus the former of the two terms is an important historical reality pointing to how Hồ Chí Minh and other revolutionary leaders were most commonly identified by the Vietnamese people and foreign observers during that period. Yet a no less important historical reality is the role of the ICP in the Việt Minh. Therefore, Devillers, Hammer, Mus, and Fall (along with many later scholars), to varying degrees, interrupt their Việt Minh narratives with reminders of the Party's key role. Regardless of how numerous or insistent these reminders may be, though, repeated use of the term "Việt Minh" tends to breathe independent life into that front organization.

Unlike those earlier works, however, *Vietnam 1945* and *Vietnam 1946* both contain large chapters (eighty-eight pages and fifty-six pages, respectively) titled, "The Communist Party and the Viet Minh." Moreover, in his preface to *Vietnam 1946*, Marr provides a brief discussion of the different meanings that the term "Việt Minh" acquired during the Vietnamese Revolution. He writes, "I try to alert readers to which meaning of Việt Minh I am referring." (*Vietnam 1946*, xviii.) Marr's readers could reasonably interpret the presence of these chapters and his prefatory comments on the term "Việt Minh" as signs that his two books, in their entirety, would provide the most specific

information on this topic. Thus it seems contradictory from a scholarly perspective that Marr would so frequently refer to ICP members as “Việt Minh,” not telling us of their ICP background, or waiting until later in the narrative to do so after an initial non-communist impression had been made.

With the possible exception of some confusion and factionalism among Party members in Cochinchina during the early days of the revolution, it is obvious that every single ICP member was considered to be a part of the Việt Minh. But not every person who followed the Việt Minh was an ICP member. There seems to be no sound scholarly reason, therefore, not to identify Communist Party members immediately as ICP, ensuring that the reader has this information in mind as he or she considers a particular character’s actions and words. In the first two chapters of *Vietnam 1946*, “Forming the DRV Government” and “The Government at Work,” I counted at least nineteen important ICP members who were not immediately identified as such in the narrative<sup>77</sup> and another four whose extremely close, but unclear, relations with the Party in 1946 were also not immediately made known.<sup>78</sup> Marr’s decision not to disclose immediately the ICP background of these DRV leaders in his first two chapters makes the early DRV state seem much less communist-dominated than it would have seemed had this information been provided.

## 2. “VIỆT MINH NEWSPAPERS” OR ICP NEWSPAPERS?

In many cases, Marr also uses the term “Việt Minh” to describe ICP newspapers, which comprise a key source for his narrative. As we are introduced to the official Việt Minh organ, *Cứu quốc* [National Salvation], it would be helpful to know immediately that its editor-in-chief was the ICP-member Xuân Thủy and that two of the most prolific contributors to the newspaper were the afore-mentioned ICP member and Minister of Propaganda, Trần Huy Liệu, and the DRV leader himself, Hồ Chí Minh (usually writing under an alias). Three other key newspapers frequently used by Marr in his narrative, *Quyết thắng* [Determined to Win] and *Chiến sỹ* [Soldier],<sup>79</sup> which were based in Huế, and *Dân chủ* [Democracy], based in Hải Phòng, were also ICP-run.

From a scholarly perspective, it does no harm whatsoever to identify these newspapers as ICP organs—indeed, it could only help the reader to

better understand the relationship between “The Communist Party and the Viet Minh,” as Marr’s chapters are titled. To label *Quyết thắng*, *Chiến Sĩ*, and *Dân chủ*, along with *Cứu quốc*, merely as “Việt Minh,” opens up the real possibility that a reader would misconstrue them as non-communist or ideologically pluralistic.<sup>80</sup> It also contributes to the overall impression of the early DRV press as “relatively open.”

By referring to ICP-controlled newspapers as “Việt Minh” instead of connecting them to a particular political party with a particular agenda, Marr encourages us to see comments by the oppositional Vietnamese Nationalist Party, expressed in its newspaper *Vietnam*, as fundamentally different in character from the ideas expressed in “Việt Minh” publications. The effect of this can be seen in the following paragraph discussing the DRV regime’s “secret investigation units.”

From internal evidence, as well as details provided later by communist historians, we can be confident that many of these secret investigation units included experienced ICP members working together with young Việt Minh adherents, . . . No later than July 1946 the Northern Public Security Bureau included an Office of Political Secret Investigation. More complaints about secret investigators were coming in. Thus, the secret investigation committee of Giao Thủy district (Nam Định) was accused of unfair arrests and torture of prisoners, yet the Northern Region Committee merely ordered replacement of perpetrators if the charges were true. A member of the Bắc Ninh secret investigation unit was accused of “crooked dealings.” Only one newspaper, published by the Nationalist Party, condemned secret investigation units for striking fear in citizens, ignoring due process, and siphoning off resources better allocated to the military.”<sup>81</sup>

The fact that the “Việt Minh” newspapers have been presented as non-ICP colors the way a reader is likely to interpret the final sentence in the passage above. This presentation suggests that complaints about “secret investigation units” were rare and possibly motivated by the narrow concerns of party politics. “Only” the Nationalist Party complained, whereas Việt Minh newspapers (cast as mainstream, popular, and independent) were unconcerned.

An important aspect of the above passage is the notion that these “secret investigation units” had an origin that was independent of the ICP and therefore reflected broader popular concerns rather than ones specific to one

political party. This is the subtle but crucial implication of Marr's claim that only "many" (i.e., not all) of these units contained ICP members. The somewhat odd phrase "we can be confident" seems to have been inserted by Marr to cast exceptional light on the presence of "many" ICP members in "secret investigation units." Such a presence is so unexpected and extraordinary that one would not believe it without the most concrete evidentiary basis.

The phrase also seems intended to reassure his readers that Marr the historian has his eye out for ICP members in dark places and that the reader also "can be confident" of the author's determination to point them out wherever they lurk. This is an image starkly at odds with Marr's general preference for identifying important ICP members and ICP newspapers as "Việt Minh" when the balance of agency risks shifting decisively in the Party's favor.<sup>82</sup>

### 3. HANDLING OF COMMUNIST TERMINOLOGY

Marr's apparent desire to downplay the communist aspect of the DRV regime appears frequently in his treatment of communist terminology employed by "Việt Minh" writers. Terms such as "model villages,"<sup>83</sup> "special inspectorate,"<sup>84</sup> "new democracy,"<sup>85</sup> "democratic centralism,"<sup>86</sup> and "people's assessors,"<sup>87</sup> often appear in the text alone, unaccompanied by any clear explanation of their roots and meaning in the international communist movement. A person unfamiliar with Marxist-inspired movements could conclude, for example, that "new democracy" was simply a term coined by Vietnamese revolutionaries, having nothing to do with Mao Zedong's theories.

On page fifty-eight, as Marr describes the "Government at Work," he writes: "The principal Việt Minh newspaper in central Vietnam positioned the National Assembly within the "new democratic revolution" (*cách mạng tân dân chủ*), which in this context meant that the minority must obey the majority, and lower elected bodies must obey higher ones." That sounds like the Leninist notion of "democratic centralism," which, in the context of 1946, almost certainly indicates authorship by a Communist Party member. On page 484, with his narrative safely away from the allegedly non-Communist early DRV state and focused on the Party itself, Marr provides the reader with a much more revealing definition of the term "new democracy." Quoting an ICP member, he explains that it refers to a political system in which "the

entire people cooperat[e] from a position of complete equality and freedom without class distinction.”<sup>88</sup> It is obvious that “new democracy” was the Party’s code word for socialism or for a polity under Communist Party rule.

The following passage from the book’s second chapter describes an article written about the DRV’s draft constitution. It shows how Marr’s avoidance of communist explanations potentially distorts the reader’s understanding of the ideas described:

One article analyzing the draft constitution stands out for its sweep and political frankness. Two Hué writers employing pseudonyms saw five principles at work in the draft. First, the interests of all the people (*nhân dân*) underpinned everything. Secondly, there were to be no distinctions by ethnicity, gender, class, or religion. Thirdly, democratic centralism was to prevail, thus ensuring that state machinery functioned vigorously and expeditiously. The authors contrasted democratic centralism with separation of powers, which would “make the state weak, prone to run awry, tardy, and vulnerable to exploitation by big capitalists.” At this time of danger, the authors emphasized, it would be suicidal for the legislature to interfere constantly in executive matters, as was proven in the current French political system. Fourthly, there should be provision for amendment or even complete replacement of the constitution, thus taking into account future progress (*tiến hóa*). Finally, central and local powers should be coordinated (*điều hòa*), with province and commune people’s councils able to issue their own instructions and to elect administrative committees, while having both councils and committees subject to higher level orders. The statist assumptions behind these principles were shared by many non-Việt Minh adherents, and would be reflected in the constitution eventually agreed upon.<sup>89</sup>

First, Marr does not tell us that this article came from an ICP newspaper, instead describing the ideas as coming only from “two Hué writers,” as though the article might have been written by any patriotic Hué resident in the newspaper business. Second, there is no identification of “democratic centralism” as a Leninist term that would have been strongly associated with Vietnam’s communist movement. Third, by using the term “non-Việt Minh adherents,” Marr again downplays the specificity of the article’s ideas in exactly the opposite way that he highlighted the specificity of the Nationalist Party’s criticisms of the regime. A fairer version of the statement might be phrased as follows: “The statist assumptions behind the

Leninist principles expressed by these two ICP writers were shared by many non-Communists.”

#### 4. THE DRV'S 1946 CONSTITUTION AND THE 1936 STALIN CONSTITUTION

On November 10, 1945, about two months after the founding of the DRV, its leaders published a “draft constitution” [*dự thảo Hiến pháp*] for public consideration. The draft, which had been produced by a seven-person drafting committee (whose membership will be discussed presently), was debated to some degree during the National Assembly’s first meeting held on March 2, 1946. Over the ensuing months, a new eleven-person drafting committee, comprised of National Assembly members, edited the draft to prepare it for ratification, which was to occur at the upcoming second meeting of the National Assembly scheduled for late autumn (October 28 to November 9, 1946). Compared to the original 1945 draft, the later version approved by the National Assembly a year later shows minimal substantive change.<sup>90</sup> Because a key theme of Marr’s book is the democratic beginnings of the DRV and because of the more high-powered composition of the original seven-person drafting committee, I base my analysis primarily on that original draft released in November 1945. For the sake of simplicity, though, I still refer to it as the “DRV 1946 Constitution.”

To Marr’s credit, despite his eagerness to depict the early DRV state in a democratic light, he describes a number of things that foreshadow the corrupt and powerless National Assembly of today. These include the regime’s rejection of bicameralism, the meager bi-annual schedule proposed for National Assembly meetings, the imperious manner in which the regime’s leaders treated the assembly, and the DRV leadership’s insistence that the majority of the National Assembly’s work be carried out by a small “Standing Committee” [*Ban thường vụ*]. But Marr seems to take special care to avoid linking these undemocratic tendencies to communist ideals and models, not exploring the clear Soviet inspiration for the DRV’s 1946 Constitution, which Bernard Fall had noted in 1954.<sup>91</sup>

As Fall pointed out, the most obvious and arguably most important example of DRV borrowing from the Soviet Union’s 1936 Stalin Constitution was the National Assembly Standing Committee. This institution,

which will be discussed in more detail below, was a small-scale replica of the Soviet Union's Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. In a nutshell, both institutions were small committees derived from much larger "elected" bodies (the USSR's Supreme Soviet and the DRV's National Assembly). Soviet and DRV leaders invested these small committees with the power to vote on behalf of their larger elected bodies. This made the Presidium and the Standing Committee convenient instruments for obtaining nominal democratic (in the Western or "bourgeois democratic" sense) approval for Party policies.

Article 48 of the 1936 Stalin Constitution explains: "The Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., at a joint meeting of both Chambers, elects the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., consisting of a President of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., sixteen Vice-Presidents, a Secretary of the Presidium and twenty-four members of the Presidium."<sup>92</sup> Articles six and seven of the original DRV document explain: "(6) The People's National Assembly shall elect a 15-person Standing Committee. (7) The Standing Committee shall then elect a Chairman and two Vice-Chairmen of the People's National Assembly. The Chairman and the Vice-Chairmen will also hold the position of Chairman and Vice-Chairmen of the Standing Committee."

The similarity is even more striking in the corresponding passages quoted below:

Stalin Constitution of 1936:

Article 49: *The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR*

- a) Convenes the sessions of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R.
- b) Interprets the laws of the USSR in operation, issues decrees.
- c) Dissolves the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in conformity with article 47 of the Constitution of the USSR and orders new elections.
- d) Annuls decisions and orders of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and of the People's Commissars of the Union Republics in case they do not conform to law.
- e) In the intervals between sessions of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, proclaims a state of war in the event of armed attack on the U.S.S.R. or whenever necessary to fulfill international treaty obligations concerning mutual defense against aggression.<sup>93</sup>

DRV 1946 Constitution:*Article 15: The Power of the Standing Committee*

- a) Calls the People's National Assembly to session.
- b) Explains laws of the country [to the people].
- c) When confronted with a problem that the Representatives cannot solve, the Standing Committee may dissolve the People's National Assembly and request [a solution] from the President of Vietnam.
- d) Abolishes decrees and resolutions of the government that are not correct.
- e) During the time when Representatives are not meeting, the Standing Committee has the power to declare war or, if already at war, to carry out an armistice.<sup>94</sup>

Reading through the two versions, we can see that the original drafters of the DRV 1946 Constitution must have had a copy of the 1936 Stalin Constitution in hand as they framed Vietnam's political system.

## 5. THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE

In his book, Marr appropriately devotes several interesting pages to the National Assembly Standing Committee. Woven skillfully through his narrative are pieces of information about the committee that, when viewed together, raise questions about Marr's insistence that the DRV leaders had been imbued with the "serious intent of creating representative government."<sup>95</sup> First, Marr tells us that the head of the Standing Committee, a non-communist intellectual named Nguyễn Văn Tố, received little respect from members of the government.<sup>96</sup> Second, we learn that Hồ Chí Minh's explanation of the committee's role depicted it as an instrument of the government's executive branch rather than vice-versa.<sup>97</sup> Third, Marr tells us of concern among some members of the National Assembly that the Standing Committee had too much power.<sup>98</sup> Fourth, we learn that the fifteen members of the committee had been selected by some higher power and then presented to the National Assembly for approval through a show of hands (i.e., rubber stamped).<sup>99</sup> And fifth, we learn that some people were uncomfortable with the Standing Committee's power to dissolve the

National Assembly.<sup>100</sup> Marr provides his readers with enough clues to connect the dots and realize the undemocratic character of this Soviet institution. But despite these ominous signs, Marr remains adamant that the National Assembly had *not* been “conceived and implemented as a mere propaganda exercise.”<sup>101</sup>

Aside from the clear Soviet inspiration for the Standing Committee, the issue of who actually wrote the original draft of the DRV Constitution is a vital piece of information missing from the narrative. Marr tells us in his first chapter that on September 20, 1945, a “seven-person constitution drafting committee was announced, composed almost entirely of ICP and Việt Minh members.”<sup>102</sup> In the second chapter, when he discusses the content of the constitution at some length, Marr becomes vaguer still, writing that “in early September 1945 the provisional DRV government named a Constitution Drafting Committee composed almost entirely of Việt Minh adherents.”<sup>103</sup> Again, no names—which seems odd considering the importance of the constitution, the attention it receives in Marr’s narrative, and the generally detail-rich character of his book. As it turns out, the drafting committee was comprised of Hồ Chí Minh, Trường Chinh, Nguyễn Lương Bằng, Lê Văn Hiến, Đặng Thai Mai, Vũ Trọng Khánh, and, entirely for the sake of appearances, the former emperor, Bảo Đại.<sup>104</sup> (For those less familiar with DRV history, a roughly equivalent Soviet version of this seven-person committee’s first four members would be Lenin, Stalin, Alexei Rykov, and Georgy Pyatakov.) Why not let the reader know that these ICP heavyweights were on the drafting committee?

According to the original version of the DRV’s 1946 Constitution, the Standing Committee was to act in the National Assembly’s place when that larger body was not in session—which was most of the time since the constitution called for only two National Assembly meetings a year. Though these bi-annual meetings were part of a set schedule, they were still to be officially “summoned” [*triệu tập*] by the Standing Committee. Time would show that the word “summoned” also carried the meaning “managed.” Additional “irregular” sessions of the National Assembly could be “set” [*định*] by the Standing Committee or “demanded” [*yêu cầu*], not “set,” by the assembly itself through a majority vote. In the latter case, though, the irregular meeting would still need to be “summoned” by the Standing

Committee. Moreover, since the Standing Committee had the power to dissolve the National Assembly (article 15c above), the constitution provided a legal means for blocking such a demand advanced by regular assembly members.

Would the election of a new National Assembly be followed by the prompt election of a new Standing Committee? In other words, would dissolution of the National Assembly by the Standing Committee bring about any adverse effects to the fifteen people who had done the deed? As article 17 explains: “No later than two months after the reelection, the Standing Committee must meet with the new National Assembly.”<sup>105</sup> Since there is no further information, it appears that the new assembly, for the foreseeable future, would inherit the old Standing Committee.

The general theme of these laws, which were created under the supervision of Hồ Chí Minh, Trường Chinh, Nguyễn Lương Bằng, and Lê Văn Hiến, appears to be cooperation between the fifteen-person Standing Committee and the president for the avoidance of any spontaneous unscripted behavior on the part of regular National Assembly members. This was a self-evident aspect of the proposed constitution that editors of the Nationalist Party newspaper *Vietnam* pointed out to their readers—something that Marr does not explore in his review of the document’s press coverage. It seems historically meaningful that this opposition newspaper, after only a few weeks’ observation of how the DRV regime operated and after some careful analysis of the proposed constitution, was able to predict with remarkable accuracy the fate of representative democracy in the DRV.<sup>106</sup>

Marr’s preferred press coverage of the DRV’s 1946 Constitution and the National Assembly is that produced by Party-controlled newspapers such as *Cứu quốc* and *Dân chủ*, which, not surprisingly, provide glowing accounts of scintillating and meaningful debates occurring within the National Assembly. Apparently reluctant to undermine the credibility of these accounts, which help him make his case for a democratic beginning to the DRV, Marr provides no discussion of their connection to the Party and their obvious propaganda function—make arbitrary and undemocratic aspects of the DRV government appear as products of an exciting democratic process.

Marr writes that the DRV’s 1946 Constitution was “substantially influenced by French legal precedent,” which meant that “[a]lmost surely, the

1946 drafting committee canvassed the French constitution that had been defeated by popular referendum on 5 May, and managed to peruse the text of the constitution that was eventually ratified on 27 October.” Marr goes on to point out the differences between the French and DRV versions, how the former had a bicameral system and the latter a unicameral, how the former had a “much stronger judiciary” than the latter did, and how the French constitution “contained provisions regarding the legislative process, annual budget, auditing, and citizenship not found in the DRV constitution.”

And the Stalin Constitution of 1936? Marr provides one sentence: “There were a few borrowings from the Soviet constitutional model in the DRV text, notably people’s councils and administrative committees meant both to serve their constituencies and to obey directives from above.”<sup>107</sup> The comparatively greater focus on the French constitutional precedent (even if to point out differences) and the vague single sentence devoted to the Soviet precedent (having the character of an afterthought) present the early DRV state as lying firmly, if imperfectly, within the Western democratic tradition rather than within the Soviet one.

#### 6. THE EARLY DRV AS PLURALISTIC

The image of the early DRV as relatively democratic and pluralistic comes through strongly in Marr’s treatment of the regime’s tiny “Democratic Party,” which he depicts as having been close to an actual independent political party. To me, the circumstances of the Democratic Party’s formation and its careful management by the Communist Party show, to the contrary, how undemocratic and wary of political pluralism the Party leaders were.

The aforementioned ICP directive from November 25, 1945, for example, speaks of the Democratic Party in the following manner: “Help the ‘Vietnamese Democratic Party’ unify and develop in order to pull patriotic members of the bourgeoisie and landlord classes into the front.”<sup>108</sup> We see scare quotes used around the term “Vietnamese Democratic Party” in the same way they appear to have been used around the term “Việt Minh Executive Committee”—as an indication that these organizations were independent of the Party in name only. In the DRV historian Trần Huy Liệu’s 1960 history, *Cách mạng tháng tám*, the beginning of the Democratic Party is described as follows: “Carrying out orders from the [ICP] Central

Committee, the Hà Nội Party branch strengthened its leadership in the mobilization of intellectuals, taking advantage of/winning over [*tranh thủ*] the upper classes in order to broaden the Unified People's Front. On June 30, 1944, the Democratic Party was founded and joined the Việt Minh front."<sup>109</sup>

After the August seizure of power, the Democratic Party would make the DRV seem like a multi-party democracy, increasing the possibility of gaining official recognition from Western democracies. Marr himself tells us that the “[g]eneral secretary of the Democratic Party was Hoàng Minh Chính, who ran the Hanoi office, forwarded citizen petitions to relevant bureaus, and liaised with other political organizations.” As Marr explains, “[o]ther Democratic Party leaders understood Chính to be the principal ICP insertion to the Party executive.”<sup>110</sup> The wording of the second sentence, with its focus on the non-ICP executive members’ act of understanding rather than on the ICP leadership’s act of controlling, seems to be an awkward use of semantics to salvage as much agency as possible for the relatively powerless non-ICP members of the Democratic Party.

In his earlier book, *Vietnam 1945*, Marr had provided in a footnote the key detail that Hoàng Minh Chính was a “founding member” of the Democratic Party,<sup>111</sup> not just a “principal ICP insertion,” (with the word “insertion” suggesting an independent, non-ICP beginning for the Democratic Party). Hoàng Minh Chính would later become the head of the Nguyễn Ái Quốc Party Academy’s Institute of Marxist-Leninist Theory. “If war had been averted,” Marr writes, “the Democratic Party would have played a much more significant role in Vietnam’s history than proved to be the case.”<sup>112</sup> I wonder. Did the Democratic Party, at any time, have the right to insert one of its members into the ICP Politburo? Did the Democratic Party, at any time, have the power to expel Hoàng Minh Chính from its executive committee? Did the Democratic Party, at any time, have the power to override the ICP agenda transmitted to it by Hoàng Minh Chính? The answer to these questions must be an unequivocal “no.”

#### 7. THE HỒ CHÍ MINH-TRƯỜNG CHINH RIFT THEORY: “ACCESS” TO THE PRESIDENT

An important and intriguing aspect of Christopher Goscha’s recent book on the First Indochina War<sup>113</sup> is its rejection of a contentious relationship

between Hồ Chí Minh and Party general Secretary Trường Chinh—long a “sacred cow” of the field. As Goscha expressed to me during an exchange on this issue a few years ago, the notion of a rift between the two DRV leaders originated from “wishful thinking” on the part of French intelligence analysts and the political leaders they served during the early months of the DRV regime. The French had hoped to exploit divisions within the Party leadership as a means of weakening the DRV’s resistance to French re-colonization. Later, during the Vietnam War and after, the theory was adopted and repurposed by scholars (usually, but not always, of an antiwar bent) as an explanation for unsavory aspects of the DRV that seemed contrary to Hồ Chí Minh’s public image.<sup>114</sup>

As noted, Marr’s narrative of a good early DRV versus a bad later one hinges on the image of a moderate Hồ Chí Minh under pressure from a radical Trường Chinh. Thus Marr’s latest book provides us with an opportunity to see the rift theory presented in its highest form by arguably the most knowledgeable and experienced scholar in the field.

One fact that would seem to work against this rift theory is the close physical proximity of Hồ Chí Minh and Trường Chinh in Hà Nội. It would have been easy for them, along with Phạm Văn Đồng and Võ Nguyên Giáp (the ruling quadrumvirate of the DRV until 1956–1957) to meet daily in the small city. Marr’s rift narrative, though, is more plausible if some physical and professional distance between the two DRV leaders is established or, at least, suggested:

Hồ Chí Minh conducted his activities at the Bắc Bộ Phủ (Northern Region Office), relying on a small team of party and nonparty lieutenants to help him evaluate events, make decisions, and monitor implementation across a wide range of organizations. Trường Chinh had access to the president’s office, but was not involved in day-to-day affairs. He routinely met with senior ICP members active in the central government and provincial party committees.<sup>115</sup>

The phrasing of the above passage, particularly Marr’s use of the impersonal and bureaucratic-sounding word “access” (almost as though Trường Chinh, an outsider, had needed to obtain a security clearance and make an appointment at the presidential office to visit Hồ Chí Minh) suggests that the two DRV leaders moved in different professional worlds. Hồ Chí Minh

led the government and Trường Chinh, the Party. Marr appears to be setting the stage for Trường Chinh to become a “separate pole of power from President Hồ Chí Minh.”<sup>116</sup>

The evidence Marr cites for this crucial characterization is a four-page section of Archimedes Patti’s book, *Why Vietnam: Prelude to America’s Albatross*. The cited section describes a meeting that Patti, the Office of Strategic Services representative in Hà Nội from August 23 to September 30, 1945, had with Hồ Chí Minh on August 29. In Marr’s citation, which appears after the above passage’s second-to-last sentence, he provides a one-sentence explanation: Patti “mentions Trường Chinh’s presence at his 29 August 1945 meeting with Hồ Chí Minh.” Apparently, we are to see the general secretary’s presence at this meeting as the exception that proves the rule of Trường Chinh’s distance from the DRV leader.

Patti’s narrative, however, contradicts Marr’s above-quoted passage and accompanying citation in key ways. First, since Marr’s citation immediately follows his discussion of the “president’s office,” not specifying the location of the August 29 meeting, the reader is led to assume that it occurred in the president’s office. But looking at Patti’s account, we see that the meeting had nothing to do with the president’s office, instead taking place in Hồ Chí Minh’s secret temporary house in Hà Nội’s Old Quarter.<sup>117</sup>

Second, Patti’s narrative contradicts the exceptional character Marr attributes to Trường Chinh’s presence at the August 29 meeting, for the general secretary had also been present at a meeting held in the same secret house three days earlier. Patti writes, “I have tried to recall with exactitude who was present [at the August 26 meeting] but my only memory is of Ho, Giap, Truong Chinh, and possibly Nguyen Khang.”<sup>118</sup>

And third, Patti’s account does not support Marr’s subtle implication that Hồ Chí Minh and Trường Chinh, in addition to being professionally separate, were roughly equivalent in power. As Patti describes the meeting, “Ho sent a car to pick me up and by 10:30 I was at the house on Hang Ngang Street. Truong Chinh showed me to Ho’s quarters where several people were coming and going in euphoric activity.”<sup>119</sup> The small but telling detail of Trường Chinh’s meeting Patti on the street and bringing him to see Hồ Chí Minh for a discussion, which was entirely dominated by the DRV leader, looks like the action of a trusted loyal lieutenant, not of a cagey rival.

More generally, Patti's scene of clandestine intimacy in the secret Old Quarter house contrasts with Marr's image of impersonal separation in the Northern Region Office. Patti's account suggests that Trường Chinh's "access" to Hồ Chí Minh went far beyond the confines of the president's office and that the former was working entirely under the leadership of the latter, not moving toward a "separate pole of power."

8. THE HỒ CHÍ MINH-TRƯỜNG CHINH RIFT THEORY:  
"EXTRAORDINARY" ABSENCES AND "CURIOUS" SUPPORT

One important reality that works against the Hồ Chí Minh-Trường Chinh rift theory is the general secretary's internal policy statements, which are highly supportive of the DRV leader's policies. Unable to find strong evidence for subversion in the content of a report Trường Chinh wrote about the Party's policies in June 1946, shortly after Hồ Chí Minh's May 31, 1946 departure for France, Marr shows us how we might twist the former's straightforward defense of Hồ Chí Minh's policies into evidence of subversion:

In a curious paragraph addressed to party members alone, Trường Chinh acknowledged that some comrades accused the Organization (*Đoàn thể*) of "unprincipled agreements," and of "flattering the bourgeois, landlord, and priestly gang." However, these "bombastic criticisms" demonstrated a poverty of reason (*lý trí*), according to Trường Chinh. Such comrade-critics lost control when faced with adversity, allowing sentiments to take over their heads, thus failing to grasp the tactical imperative of "internal agreement in order to cope with those outside."<sup>120</sup>

Trying to tease out some subversive strain from the paragraph, Marr writes: "We don't know whom Trường Chinh was referring to, but it is notable that he did not label them 'left deviationists' or threaten them with party discipline."<sup>121</sup> Is it really "notable?" Does this absence show that Trường Chinh was only pretending to support Hồ Chí Minh's policies? Ultimately, the paragraph, with its defense of the DRV leader's moderate tactical approach, is only "curious" if one subscribes to the Hồ Chí Minh-Trường Chinh rift theory.

When Marr does not find solid evidence for scheming where it would be expected, he attempts to present the absence in a manner that still affirms

the rift theory. For example, if the general secretary had had conspiratorial designs against Hồ Chí Minh, why did he not call a meeting of top ICP leaders to assert his control during the DRV leader's 140-day mission to France from May 31 to October 18, 1946? Marr writes: "Available sources make no mention of any ICP Standing Bureau meeting in Hanoi during September or October 1945, an extraordinary absence considering the aim of Trường Chinh and others to strengthen party control over the DRV state."<sup>122</sup> Actually, it is only "extraordinary" if one subscribes to the rift theory and to the idea that Hồ Chí Minh was not interested in strengthening Party control over the DRV state. Otherwise, Trường Chinh's lack of action looks like the normal behavior of a loyal subordinate awaiting the return of his leader.

#### 9. THE HỒ CHÍ MINH-TRƯỜNG CHINH RIFT THEORY: THE AUGUST REVOLUTION TRACT

The notion of a Hồ Chí Minh-Trường Chinh rift also emerges in Marr's discussion of the latter's tract "The August Revolution," which was written for the event's first anniversary. Marr writes that "Trường Chinh's criticism of August revolutionaries for not killing more Vietnamese traitors and French reactionaries contradicted Hồ Chí Minh's stated policy of leniency, whereby a line was drawn between evil actions committed before 19 August 1945 and malevolent behavior subsequently."<sup>123</sup> But the key word in Marr's sentence is "stated." Why not just write "Hồ Chí Minh's policy?" I think Marr knows all too well that "Hồ Chí Minh's stated policy" is one thing and "Hồ Chí Minh's policy" is another—the two may or may not be similar.

Plenty of compelling circumstantial evidence suggests that the DRV leader held typical Leninist views about the importance of terror in revolutions and in the establishment of political control. We know that Hồ Chí Minh's four years spent in Moscow from 1934 to 1938, during the height of Stalin's Great Terror, inspired no known crisis of faith in the desirability of the Soviet system. We know that the ICP's aforementioned Operation Plan included the "liquidation of traitors." We know that Trần Huy Liệu's two-volume history of the August Revolution, as it moves from one province to the next, refers repeatedly to the "elimination of traitors" as a normal part of the Party's seizure of power. We also learn in *Vietnam 1946* that Hồ Chí

Minh had near-daily meetings with the Deputy Head of Public Security, Lê Giản, who oversaw the assassination campaigns in Hà Nội.<sup>124</sup>

By plucking Trường Chinh's criticism out of his August Revolution tract and showing it to us alone, Marr enables the general secretary's "too-few-killings" comment to have an anti-Hồ Chí Minh meaning that is contrary to the tract's overall tone. In particular, Marr does not tell the reader of the high praise (frequently enhanced by the lavish use of italics) that Trường Chinh showers upon Hồ Chí Minh in the tract.

For example, in the introduction, the general secretary writes: "... we present the path of saving and constructing our people's country during this phase, *a glorious path that Chairman Hồ has set out for our people.*"<sup>125</sup> In another section of the tract, subtitled "The Historical Meaning of the August Revolution," Trường Chinh writes: "... Hồ Chí Minh, the first Chairman of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the person who led the August Revolution, is very deserving of being known as a hero of our people."<sup>126</sup> Speaking on the United Vietnam front organization, Trường Chinh writes: "The *United Vietnam front* is supported by the national salvation and democratic bloc – the *Việt Minh* – it also enjoys the brilliant [*tài ba*] leadership of Chairman Hồ. Thus it will certainly succeed in its task of mobilizing the whole people to smash reactionary forces and march forward, overcoming all difficulties and barriers."<sup>127</sup> With respect to Hồ Chí Minh's moderate, not radical, strategy of "Great Unity," Trường Chinh writes, "Therefore, Hồ Chí Minh's policy of *great unity* must be implemented in a broad and absolute manner."<sup>128</sup> In another section of the tract, the general secretary enthusiastically and reverently quotes the DRV leader in the way that Soviet revolutionaries had learned to quote Stalin. "*Chairman Hồ often says: We are not afraid of the enemy: we are only afraid that our comrades will act incorrectly [làm bậy]!*"<sup>129</sup>

In Marr's account, we hear nothing of these passages, which render implausible his interpretation of the "August Revolution" tract as evidence of a Hồ Chí Minh-Trường Chinh rift.

10. THE HỒ CHÍ MINH-TRƯỜNG CHINH RIFT THEORY: THE  
SEPTEMBER 1946 MODUS VIVENDI

Another place where the rift theory appears is in Marr's description of an October 19, 1946 Party document titled "Resolution from the Party's

All-Nation Military Conference.” With the “extraordinary absence” of a high-level ICP meeting in September and October to present as evidence of Trường Chinh’s conspiratorial tendencies, Marr looks for proof of subversion in this military conference. The resolution produced at the conclusion of the conference provides Party members with guidelines on how the French were to be handled during the tense months of late 1946, when the DRV regime and conquest-minded French forces coexisted in Hà Nội. Marr writes of the October 19 Resolution, “Disseminating such detailed rules of engagement to ICP members without reference to Franco-Vietnamese mixed commission operations, or the National Guard chain of command, was an audacious power play by Trường Chinh.”<sup>130</sup>

Marr attributes authorship of the resolution to Trường Chinh, but the document, which was published in the *Văn Kiện Đảng* series, does not indicate an author. In fact, its style suggests a secretary’s summary of the conference’s main points. One section states: “Comrade N. concludes: during this difficult stage, our Party must be unified in thinking, action, and discipline. . . . Comrade G. adds: when working, naturally we cannot avoid mistakes, so we must use the weapon of *self-criticism* and *method of study* to correct ourselves.”<sup>131</sup> “N.” is probably the shortened form of “Nhân,” which was Trường Chinh’s familiar name. And “Comrade G.” may refer to “Giáp,” as in Võ Nguyên Giáp.

Whoever the author, though, we may safely assume that Trường Chinh and “Comrade G” fully approved of the resolution’s content, including the comment Marr singles out as evidence of the general secretary’s subversion: “Sooner or later, the French will attack us and we certainly will have to attack them.”<sup>132</sup> According to Marr, this statement was “audacious” because Hồ Chí Minh was still working to find a peaceful resolution to the standoff with France. Marr writes, “Significantly, Trường Chinh and other organizers of the ICP meeting felt the need to take a position on the vital issue of war or peace one day *before* President Hồ Chí Minh arrived in Haiphong harbor, after more than four months of diplomatic labors [emphasis in original].”<sup>133</sup>

Does such an internal statement about the inevitability of war, assuming for a moment that it did belong solely to Trường Chinh, actually amount to a challenge of Hồ Chí Minh? In his introduction, Marr notes that some Vietnamese, observing France’s handling of Cochinchina (re-conquering it

in September 1945 and refusing to acknowledge that it formed part of a single Vietnamese nation), became “suspicious of the entire negotiating process” and perhaps came to regard negotiations “as a mere tactical expedient, a means to gain time in which to improve the DRV’s fighting capabilities.”<sup>134</sup> It is hard to imagine that Hồ Chí Minh himself, while open to all possibilities, and at least outwardly respectful of the French Communist Party’s electoral dreams and Stalin’s “Peace Movement,” had not viewed the negotiations mostly in this same skeptical way.

The image of Trường Chinh as shifty rival to the peaceful and earnest Hồ Chí Minh also conflicts with the coverage of the Vietnamese-French negotiations in the Party organ, *Sự thật*, which the general secretary oversaw. That newspaper completely supported Hồ Chí Minh’s leadership, his negotiating efforts, and his controversial *modus vivendi* signed with the French political leader, Marius Moutet.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, a key *Sự thật* editorial on the agreement, which would have at least been checked by Trường Chinh if not actually written by him, in addition to arguing the benefits of the *modus vivendi*, refers to Hồ Chí Minh as *Người* [He] with a capital “H.”<sup>136</sup> Within that article’s sober but supportive assessment of the *modus vivendi* lie the most plausible reasons for Hồ Chí Minh’s willingness to spend such an extraordinarily long period of time in France, even if he believed war to be virtually inevitable:

He knows that signing the September 14, 1946 *modus vivendi* with France can delay tensions between Vietnam and France, winning for us more time to bolster our real forces [*thực lực*] and put ourselves in a stronger position. It also shows the French people that our people very much desire to compromise with them . . . and as a result, has led them and other free peoples to be more sympathetic toward us.<sup>137</sup>

An article signed by Trường Chinh from that same issue of *Sự thật* expresses similar ideas about the benefits of negotiations.

Chairman Hồ’s and the Government delegation’s trips to France, though they did not accomplish the goal of signing an official and comprehensive treaty with France, did achieve a worthy result for us. They helped the French people to understand us and support us more; they made international opinion pay attention to Vietnam and understand the Vietnamese people’s sacrifice and struggle, understand their great aspirations.<sup>138</sup>

In Marr's narrative, we hear nothing of this entirely supportive discourse from Trường Chinh and the newspaper he oversaw, *Sự Thật*, which was as enthusiastic as any Party-controlled newspaper in its promotion of Hồ Chí Minh's policies in particular and of his leadership in general.

11. THE HỒ CHÍ MINH-TRƯỜNG CHINH RIFT THEORY: THE  
DECEMBER 19, 1946 HÀ NỘI ATTACK

Moving to the final act of the drama, the December 19, 1946 DRV attack against the French in Hà Nội, which signaled the official beginning of the First Indochina War, Marr once again promotes the notion of a Hồ Chí Minh-Trường Chinh rift.

On 14 or 15 December, Hồ had penned an undated national call to armed resistance and sent it first to Võ Nguyên Giáp and then to Trường Chinh on 19 December for comment. Trường Chinh made several pen amendments, probably changing "We must make concessions" to "We made concessions," and adding the date 20 December. That night, typed copies of the text were sent to the telegrapher and to the printer. The morning of 20 December, Radio Vietnam, now located at Trầm pagoda outside Hanoi, had a staff member read Hồ's proclamation over the air. The die was cast, whatever Hồ's intentions.<sup>139</sup>

Marr's phrase, "whatever Hồ's intentions," suggests that the attack had been carried out against the DRV leader's will, which fits with the book's overall picture of an embattled Hồ Chí Minh (leader of the early DRV state) having been pushed aside by an ascendant Trường Chinh (leader of the Party).<sup>140</sup>

For Marr's narrative, three things about Hồ Chí Minh's "National Call to Armed Resistance" seem to be problematic. First, that the DRV leader had written the appeal four or five days before the actual attack makes more likely his full involvement in its initiation, planning, and execution. Second, the actual content of the appeal strongly suggests a full commitment to war, not a desire for more negotiations as Marr implies:

Compatriots throughout the country!

We want peace, so we must make concessions. But the more we make concessions, the more the French colonialists encroach upon us, because they are determined to steal our country again.

No! We would rather sacrifice everything; of course we are determined not to lose our country, not to serve as slaves.

Compatriots!

We must stand up!

Any man, woman, whether old or young, whatever religion, political Party, or ethnicity—if you are a Vietnamese you must stand up and strike the French colonialists in order to save the fatherland. If you have a gun, use a gun. If you have sword, use a sword. If you have no sword then use a hoe, spade, or stick. Everybody must contribute to opposing the French colonialists and saving the country.

Soldiers, self-defense units, and people's militia!

The time to save our country has come. We must sacrifice to the last drop of blood in order to keep our country.

Even if we have to endure grueling hardships in a resistance war, with hearts united our determination to sacrifice, our people are certain to win!

Long live a united and independent Vietnam!

Long live a victorious resistance war!<sup>141</sup>

And third, Hồ Chí Minh's having sent a draft of his appeal to Võ Nguyên Giáp and Trường Chinh suggests that the relationship between these three was as warm, trusting, and respectful as ever.

Finding no evidence for the Hồ Chí Minh-Trường Chinh rift theory in the straightforward content of the appeal, Marr seems to manufacture subversion by speculating that Hồ Chí Minh had “probably” written “We must make concessions” (indicating that he thought peace efforts should continue) and that the scheming Trường Chinh had changed it to “We made concessions” (in other words, the time for negotiations was over). However, it is debatable whether the final version should be translated in the past tense as “We made concessions,” as Marr claims, and not in the present tense as “We must make concessions [*phải* (sic) *nhân nhượng*].” More importantly, though, when the “concessions” part of Hồ Chí Minh's appeal is viewed in the context of the entire passage (see above), it becomes apparent that changing the sentence from “We must make concessions” to “We made concessions,” as Marr speculates, does not alter the meaning in the fundamental way that he implies by showing us these phrases out of context.

An original copy of this speech in Hồ Chí Minh's handwriting has become a national treasure for Vietnam, and dozens of pictures of the document may be found on the internet. The body of the text appears to have been written by

the DRV leader in black ink, with his characteristic “f’s” and “z’s” in place of “ph’s” and “d’s”. Trường Chinh’s edits appear in blue ink.

There are four total edits on the document, all on the second page, far away from Hồ Chí Minh’s opening lines about having to “make concessions.” First, Trường Chinh added the word “colonialists” in the sentence ending with “opposing the French colonialists and saving the country.” This was in keeping with Hồ Chí Minh’s policy of distinguishing between the French people and those in the French government who advocated re-colonization. Second, Trường Chinh added the words “and unified” [*và thống nhất*] between “independent” and “Vietnam” in the appeal’s second-to-last slogan. No doubt this was a reference to France’s attempt to separate Cochinchina from the DRV, a major sticking point in negotiations. Third and fourth, in the original version, Hồ Chí Minh had not included either the date or his name, probably as a security precaution lest the speech, while being passed around, come under the gaze of the wrong person. Trường Chinh added the date, “December 19, 1946,” and signed Hồ Chí Minh’s name at the bottom.<sup>142</sup> It is obvious that these four edits were minimal and did nothing to change the overall thrust of the appeal.

Stepping back somewhat and looking at the big picture, the implausibility of a Hồ Chí Minh-Trường Chinh rift seems no less apparent. Would the former have dared spend four months overseas negotiating with the French during the summer and autumn of 1946 had he not felt absolutely confident of the loyalty of Trường Chinh and Võ Nguyên Giáp, whom he had entrusted with holding the fort in Hà Nội during his absence? It seems extremely unlikely given Hồ Chí Minh’s legendary political instincts.<sup>143</sup>

## Conclusion

I sympathize with Marr’s desire to challenge the Vietnamese Communist Party and its self-serving official accounts of the Vietnamese Revolution (and many other episodes in the country’s modern history). I also appreciate the fact that reading between the lines of sources, pulling from them meanings that depart from or even contradict the original intentions of those who created the sources, is a normal part of historical production. When this is done by the historian with little or no explanation, though, the reader is left to wonder what determines which pieces of information from a source are

selected and which pieces are passed over. In some (certainly not all) important instances, examination of Marr's sources reveals compelling countervailing evidence that has not been addressed. This gives the impression of an imposed historical narrative rather than one emerging naturally from the available sources.

Like others, I question the plausibility of Marr's assertion that there was no "guiding hand" for "Vietnamese revolutionaries" and that the ICP had "little control over the Việt Minh front organization and the DRV government in the early months of the Revolution." I see the ICP as having had an effective "Operation Plan" for seizing power in key places around the country. Despite its small numbers, the Party appears to have been able to execute its plan well enough in enough important places, particularly in northern and central Vietnam, to seize the political initiative in the country. Who in Vietnam had more agency during this period than the Communist Party did? Looking at Party documents from the period, I argue that Hồ Chí Minh and other top ICP leaders never abandoned the party-committee system of ensuring control over their mass organizations and over the DRV state itself. ICP leaders had the will to control political life in Vietnam and an "agreed plan" to achieve that control, both of which were critical to the Party's successful bid for power.

In many cases, what Marr describes as the limits of Party control over the Việt Minh and the DRV state may be better understood as the limits of these organizations' reach nationwide. Regime preservation, which was surely Hồ Chí Minh's foremost goal in the early days of the Revolution, did not require tight control over Vietnam. For the time being, chaos and political vacuum were tolerable in large areas of the country as long as they did not see the emergence of alternative political organizations that could, one day, hinder the extension of Party control. Such a calculation about the realities of political power on the part of the Party leaders may help to explain both their single-minded zeal in attacking rival political parties and their relentless determination in indoctrinating the Vietnamese people to see the Party's rivals as "traitors."

I think a comparison of the DRV's 1946 Constitution with the 1936 Stalin Constitution shows the crucial influence of the latter on the former. It is true, as Bernard Fall pointed out in his 1954 book, that some aspects of the DRV

constitution gesture to the American and French constitutions as well. However, it is also true that the most significant, controversial, and (I would argue) undemocratic part of the DRV's 1946 Constitution, the National Assembly Standing Committee, was the one cribbed directly from the 1936 Stalin Constitution. The Soviet influence on the DRV constitution is not especially surprising when we consider the composition of the original Constitution Drafting Committee, comprised as it was not just of seven "Việt Minh adherents" but of four ICP stalwarts: Hồ Chí Minh, Trường Chinh, Nguyễn Lương Bằng, and Lê Văn Hiến.

Marr puts the DRV's Democratic Party forward as a hopeful sign of a possible multi-party democratic future for the early DRV state. This is the reasonable implication of his claim that the Democratic Party likely would have played a "more significant role" in DRV political life had war not come. The ICP impetus behind the Democratic Party's founding, though, and the former's subsequent control over the latter's activities make Marr's democratic interpretation of this institution's meaning hard to understand. A more reasonable interpretation, as it seems to me, would see the entire phenomenon of the Democratic Party as proof of the extent to which Hồ Chí Minh, Trường Chinh, Võ Nguyên Giáp, Phạm Văn Đồng, and other ICP leaders were, as committed Leninists, allergic to the idea of an actual multi-party system. However, they wisely recognized both the enduring appeal of a multi-party system to many Vietnamese elites and the democratic credibility that such a system would give the DRV regime in the eyes of the West. Thus the ICP leadership created and nursed along two powerless pseudo-political parties (the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party) for the sake of appearances.

I strongly doubt the widely accepted theory among Western scholars that Trường Chinh had a contentious relationship with Hồ Chí Minh, looking for ways to pull power away from the DRV leader and impose a radical agenda on him. I believe that a careful look at Trường Chinh's record reveals a tireless translator and promoter of Hồ Chí Minh's policies and the most important enabler of his personality cult (a legacy of the Vietnamese Revolution that continues to have enormous importance in Vietnam today but which receives little attention in *Vietnam 1946*). Marr's entire narrative of a good early DRV versus a bad later one depends on a contentious

relationship between these two DRV leaders. Thus the apparent reluctance to disclose the members of the original DRV Constitution Drafting Committee (referring to them obliquely as “Viet Minh adherents”) is understandable. In addition to making the DRV constitution seem like a document written by top ICP leaders, the presence of Hồ Chí Minh and Trường Chinh on the same committee, engaged together in something so crucial as the drafting of a constitution, contradicts both the image of mutual antagonism between them and the image of Trường Chinh as a shadowy peripheral player in the early DRV state.

Marr characterizes Hồ Chí Minh as a “flexible Leninist.” I would describe him as an orthodox Leninist, with his revolutionary approach closely following the two-stage strategic prescriptions put forward in Lenin’s 1920 “Theses on the National and Colonial Questions.” This is the tract that Hồ Chí Minh later credited as having been a key inspiration for his interest in communism.<sup>144</sup> Marr argues that “proletarian dictatorship for Ho would need to wait decades.” But Hồ Chí Minh was a founding member of the French Communist Party. He was unquestionably the father of Vietnamese communism. And during his career as a Comintern agent for the better part of two decades before founding the DRV, he was instrumental in the creation of “embryonic communist parties for Thailand, Laos, and Malaya.”<sup>145</sup> He was also, if anything, a man of action. Thus the notion that he would have been content to lead Vietnam “for decades” without implementing a Soviet-style political system strikes me as implausible. Indeed, since Hồ Chí Minh was in his mid-fifties when he took power in late 1945, Marr’s comment about him waiting “for decades” is tantamount to claiming that the DRV, under Hồ Chí Minh’s *true* leadership, would not have become communist.

In his contribution to the H-Diplo review, Marr responds pessimistically to Tường Vũ’s question about determining the relationship between Hồ Chí Minh and the ICP. According to Marr, “Hồ remains the most difficult topic to research in Vietnam. Only when Party and army archives are opened to independent scholars . . . can historians hope for breakthroughs on either the ICP or Ho Chi Minh. I am not holding my breath.” Marr’s pessimistic response echoes sentiments he expressed in a review of Christoph Giebel’s 2004 book on the ICP member Tôn Đức Thắng:

Giebel asserts that “control of the present is to some degree dependent on the control of, or at least dominance over, the exegesis of history” (150). Without saying so, he seems to have set himself the mission of debunking the official history of the Vietnamese Communist Party, perhaps hoping this will weaken its control. There are other Party travesties that await his labors, more substantial than those relating to Tôn Đức Thắng. But is it worth the effort? Many foreign students of Vietnam hope their critical analysis will have an impact in Vietnam, yet the batting average is dismal. Serious debunking will have to be accomplished by Vietnamese scholars, most likely after the demise of the communist Party.<sup>146</sup>

Such pessimism about conducting research in Vietnam is unwarranted. For the past fifteen years or so, the country’s National Archives Center III in Hà Nội (covering the period from 1945 to today) has been open for business. Vietnam’s provincial archives, still largely untapped by scholars, are mostly open now as well. Working in the country’s archives comes with frustrating limitations, of course. Many intriguing files remain off-limits. But the people who originally created the files held in the archives were not professionally trained historians, nor are the people who manage the archives today. They do not always understand the significance of material. Interesting things slip through the cracks. In other words, despite some challenges, the possibilities for research in Vietnam on important topics such as Hồ Chí Minh and the Communist Party are arguably more exciting than ever before and trending steadily in a positive direction.

In the final analysis, Marr’s narrative of the Vietnamese Revolution appears to be an attempt to reconcile two noble, but, in some ways, contradictory, causes related to Vietnam. The first is opposition to a brutal American military intervention in the country—one of the great causes of Marr’s generation. The second is support for democratic reform and its courageous native advocates in Vietnam today—a relatively obscure cause outside of Vietnam that is nonetheless *the* cause for many younger Vietnam specialists who came of age long after the war’s conclusion.

The first cause, the antiwar one of the 1960s and 1970s, has typically required an unambiguous refutation of the principles and calculations on which American intervention in Vietnam was based. Marr’s narrative of the Vietnamese Revolution satisfies this basic requirement by painting a picture

of the Việt Minh, the August Revolution, the early DRV state, and the early President Hồ Chí Minh as less than communist. In Marr's narrative, American-supported French re-colonization in the first half of 1946 opens the door for the Communist Party to hijack the early, moderate DRV led by Hồ Chí Minh. Thus American rejection, rather than embrace, of the fledgling DRV, on the grounds of communist containment, ends up facilitating communist advance.

The second cause, the democratic-reform one in Vietnam of the past few decades, demands an explanation of the country's non-democracy today. As we saw, at the beginning of *Vietnam 1946*, Marr depicts his study as a guidebook of sorts for Vietnamese democracy advocates. "Critics of the Party sometimes harken back to the relatively open press of 1945–1946, the January 1946 national elections, the Democratic Party, and the November 1946 constitution, yet they lack detailed knowledge of events."<sup>147</sup> Marr might have let his readers know that, in Vietnam, with the regime's continued maintenance of the Hồ Chí Minh personality cult as a disciplinary instrument, lauding "Uncle Ho" and the early DRV state as democratic is a way of advocating for democracy that reduces the risk of official repression. It is far from clear, though, whether many of Vietnam's intellectuals who, for the cause of democracy, advance this narrative, would bother to do so absent the threat of punishment.

From the Western antiwar perspective, the question of Vietnam's non-democracy poses difficulties because it requires, along with consideration of Vietnam's pre-colonial and colonial legacies, a rigorous exploration of the Marxist-Leninist ideology and the Soviet institutions favored by the founders of the DRV state. And such an exploration inevitably risks casting a few validating rays of light on the US Government's anticommunist wariness of the emergent Hồ Chí Minh regime. Marr's narrative of a good early DRV state, though, heading in democratic directions, versus a later dictatorial one, brought about by an anachronistic, American-backed French re-colonization after World War II, resolves the dilemma, enabling him to address the more recent democracy cause without fundamentally undermining the earlier antiwar cause. I hope this review has demonstrated how challenging it was for Marr to pull this satisfying narrative out of the available sources. Only a scholar of Marr's brilliance could come so close to

pulling it off—and teach us so many fascinating and valuable other things about Vietnamese history along the way.

### Notes

1. Marr was a captain in one of the first two helicopter units sent to Vietnam as part of Military Assistance Command Vietnam.
2. As described in one of its publications, *Vietnam: What Kind of Peace? Documents and Analysis of the 1973 Paris Agreement on Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: Indochina Resource Center, Feb., 1973): “The Indochina Resource Center is a private, non-profit educational organization established in July 1971 to help meet the crucial need for informing the American people about the war, as well as the cultural, socio-economic and historical realities of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. This information, often otherwise unavailable, is made readily accessible to journalists, students, congressional staffs, and concerned citizens around the country. The center publishes a newsletter, the *Indochina Chronicle*, which can be subscribed to for a minimum of \$5 per year. Center members also publish books and articles, regularly speak at community meetings and academic seminars, and try to respond promptly to all letters and phone calls requesting factual data on Indochina.”
3. Daniel Korn, “History in the Present Tense: David G. Marr and the Politics of the Vietnamese Past” (senior thesis for history major, Yale University, 2003), 3.
4. David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial: 1920–1945* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1981); *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995).
5. David G. Marr, *Vietnam: State, War, Revolution (1945–1946)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).
6. I use the term “quasi-peaceful” because British, Japanese, and French military forces in the southern part of Vietnam began to suppress independence-minded Vietnamese forces connected to the DRV regime shortly after its official establishment in Hà Nội on September 2, 1945. Also, throughout the country, plenty of sporadic small-scale fighting occurred between rival domestic political forces. But the fighting during these sixteen months from August 1945 to December 1946, though costing thousands of lives, never reached a level that forced the DRV regime to suspend operations and evacuate Hà Nội.
7. After the Geneva Accords partitioned Vietnam, the DRV became known in the West as North Vietnam and the non-Communist state in the South (by 1955, the Republic of Vietnam) as South Vietnam. On July 2, 1976, a little over a year

- after Hà Nội's victory in the Vietnam War, the top Party leadership renamed the now unified country the "Socialist Republic of Vietnam" (SRV), the name Vietnam continues to have today.
8. Stein Tønnesson, *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
  9. Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: Un Etat né de la guerre, 1945–1954* (Paris, Armand Colin, 2011).
  10. A large corpus of scholarship, to varying degrees and from varying angles, touches upon this period. Here are some noteworthy examples: Philippe Devillers, *Histoire du Viêt Nam de 1940 à 1952* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952); Paul Mus, *Viêt-Nam: Sociologie d'une guerre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952); Ellen Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940–1955: Vietnam and the French Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954); I. Milton Sacks, "Marxism in Vietnam," in Frank N. Trager (ed.); *Marxism in Southeast Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959); Trần Huy Liệu ed., *Cách mạng tháng tám: Tổng khởi nghĩa ở Hà Nội và các địa phương, 2 quyển* [The August Revolution: The General Uprising in Hà Nội and Other Localities, 2 vols.] (Hà Nội: Sự thật, 1960); Hoang Van Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism: A Case History of North Vietnam* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964); Dennis J. Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968); Ralph Smith, *Vietnam and the West* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968); King C. Chen, *Vietnam and China: 1938–1954* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1969); Robert F. Turner, *Vietnamese Communism: Its Origins and Development* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1975); William Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981); Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism: 1925–1945* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1982); Archimedes Patti, *Why Vietnam: Prelude to America's Albatross* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Vũ Ngự Chiểu, "Political and Social Change in Vietnam between 1940 and 1946" (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1984); William Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh* (New York: Hyperion, 2000); Peter Worthing, *Occupation and Revolution: China and the Vietnamese August Revolution of 1945* (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley Institute of East Asian Studies, 2001); Francois Guillemot, "Au cœur de la fracture vietnamienne: l'élimination de l'opposition nationaliste et anticolonialiste dans le Nord du Vietnam (1945–1946)," in Christopher E. Goscha & Benoît de Trégodé (Eds), *Naissance d'un État-Parti. Le Viêt Nam depuis 1945. The Birth of a Party-State. Vietnam since 1945* (Paris, Les Indes Savantes, 2004), 175–216; Christopher Goscha, "Courting Diplomatic Disaster? The Difficult Integration of Vietnam into the International Communist Movement (1945–1950), *The Journal of*

- Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1–2 (February/August 2006), 59–103; Shawn McHale, “Understanding the Fanatic Mind? The Việt Minh and Race Hatred in the First Indochina War (1945–1954),” *The Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Fall 2009), 98–138; Ngo Van, *In the Crossfire: Adventures of a Vietnamese Revolutionary* (Oakland: AK Press, 2010).
11. On the connection between war and DRV state formation, see Goscha, *Un Etat né de la guerre*.
  12. The “Indochinese Communist Party” was the name that Vietnamese Communists used to describe their party from October 1930 up until November of 1945. The various names for Vietnam’s Communist Party break down as follows: 1) February to October 1930: Vietnamese Communist Party. 2) October 1930 to November 1945: Indochinese Communist Party. 3) November 1945 to February 1951: Indochinese Marxist Study Society. 4) February 1951 to December 1976: Vietnamese Workers’ Party. 5) December 1976 to today: Vietnamese Communist Party.
  13. “Việt Minh” is short for the Vietnamese Independence Alliance (*Việt Nam Độc lập Đồng minh Hội*), an ICP front organization founded by the Party at their famous 8th plenum held in May 1941. The term “*minh*” is the second part of the word “*đồng minh*,” which means “ally.” Thus “Việt Minh” may have been heard by politically aware Vietnamese as “Vietnamese Allies,” meaning the Vietnamese who were on the side of the Allies in the war.
  14. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, xvi.
  15. “August Revolution” is the name that Vietnamese Communists gave to their seizure of power in August 1945.
  16. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, 578.
  17. Phạm Thị Bích Hải et al., *Guide to the Collections of National Archives Centre III* (Hà Nội: 2006), 11.
  18. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, xvi.
  19. Stein Tonnesson, Pierre Brocheux, Shawn McHale, Pham Quang Minh, Tuong Vu, David G. Marr, *H-Diplo Roundtable Review*, Vol. 15, No. 34 (2014). The review, available online at <http://h-diplo.org/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XV-36.pdf>, provides brief professional biographies of the four reviewers and Marr.
  20. *Ibid.*, 11.
  21. *Ibid.*, 12.
  22. *Ibid.*, 24.
  23. *Văn kiện Đảng toàn tập* [The Complete Collection of Party Documents] (Hà Nội: Chính trị quốc gia, 2001).
  24. *H-Diplo Roundtable Review*, 28.
  25. *Ibid.*, 30.
  26. *Ibid.*, 31.

27. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, 444.
28. *H-Diplo Roundtable Review*, 32–34.
29. *H-Diplo Roundtable Review*, 36.
30. Ibid.
31. Keith Taylor, review of *Vietnam: State, War, Revolution (1945–1946)*, by David G. Marr, *The Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (December 2014), 669–672.
32. Ibid., 670–671.
33. Ibid., 669.
34. Ibid., 670.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 671–672.
37. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 239–240.
38. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, 7.
39. Ibid., 444.
40. “Nghị quyết của Hội nghị Trung ương ngày 6, 7, 8, 9-11-1940” [Resolution of Central Committee Plenum, 6–9 November 1940], *VKDTT 1940–1945* (Hà Nội: Chính trị quốc gia, 2000), 78.
41. These policies were the Việt Minh front with its Chinese-Communist-inspired National Salvation Associations.
42. Trường Chinh, “Chính sách mới của Đảng,” in *Trường Chinh tuyển tập vol. 1 (1937–1954)* (Hà Nội: Chính trị quốc gia, 2007), 175.
43. Ban Chấp hành Trung ương [Central Executive Committee], “Chỉ thị của Ban Chấp hành Trung ương về kháng chiến kiến quốc, 25/11/1945” [Party Central Executive Committee Directive on the Resistance Struggle to Build the Country], *VKDTT 1945–1947* (Hà Nội: Chính trị quốc gia, 2000), 30. Italics in original.
44. Đức Hoàng-đế, “Bức quốc-thư của Hoàng-đế Việt-Nam gửi sang Tổng-tổng nước Mỹ” [The Vietnamese Emperor’s Letter to the American President] and “Quốc-thư của Đức Bảo-Đại gửi cho đại tướng De Gaulle và quốc dân Pháp [The Honorable Bảo Đại’s National Letter to General de Gaulle and French citizens], *Việt Nam tân báo* [New Vietnam Newspaper], No. 123, August 20, 1945.
45. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 361.
46. Ibid., 440.
47. Phạm Khắc Hòe, *Từ triều đình Huế đến chiến khu Việt-bắc* [From the Huế Court to the Việt-Bắc Military Zone] (Hà Nội: NSB Hà Nội, 1983), 52–71. On page 71, Phạm Khắc Hòe describes an 11 p.m. visit from Tôn Quang Phiệt on August 26, two days after Bảo Đại’s abdication. Tôn Quang Phiệt asks Phạm Khắc Hòe to show him a copy of Bảo Đại’s abdication speech and then says, “This afternoon, I heard people who had returned after having read [the Abdication Speech] posted on Phu Văn Lâu. They praised the speech to the

- skies [*tám tắc khen hay*], saying it had brought many people to tears. My superiors told me to come here and thank you and request that you not stoke-up the sympathies of the old-fashioned masses anymore.” After reading the speech, Tôn Quang Phiệt apparently praised it but also (light-heartedly?) criticized its reference to the contributions of previous kings instead of the “laboring people” [*nhân dân lao động*].
48. Here, Marr is referring to an Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Deer Team comprised of twelve intelligence specialists who, as part of an arrangement worked out earlier between Hồ Chí Minh and a US intelligence officer based in China, were parachuted into the ICP’s secret base area, which they had named Tân Trào. The primary task of the US Deer Team was the gathering of intelligence on Japanese actions in Vietnam and especially the coordination of rescue efforts for Allied airmen shot down over the country.
  49. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 366–367.
  50. *Chặt xiềng* [Breaking the Bonds], 3rd. ed. (1945; repr., Hà Nội: Sự thật, 1960). The book’s preface (page 4) states that the collection of documents was put together as a “response to stubborn elements who refuse to acknowledge the broad character of a people’s revolution.” This probably refers to French and Vietnamese critics of the DRV, who were increasingly stressing that the polity was under Communist Party control. This may be why *Breaking the Bonds* contains several documents attributed to the “Việt Minh” rather than to the ICP and even has a document from the ICP-controlled Democratic Party.
  51. *Ibid.*, 78–79.
  52. *Ibid.*, 73–74.
  53. *Ibid.*, 75–77.
  54. *Ibid.*
  55. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 471.
  56. Trần Huy Liệu, *The August Revolution Vol. 1*, 92.
  57. I use the term DRV/SRV (Democratic Republic of Vietnam, 1945–1976/ Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 1976–today) to refer generally to books produced in Communist-controlled Vietnam.
  58. Trường Chinh, “Cách mạng hay đảo chính?” [Revolution or *coup d’état*?], *Cờ giải phóng* [Liberation Flag], no. 16, September 12, 1945.
  59. *Ibid.*
  60. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, xxiv.
  61. Trần Huy Liệu, *The August Revolution Vol. 1*, 435–436.
  62. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 406.
  63. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 472.
  64. Ban nghiên cứu lịch sử Đảng trực thuộc Thành ủy Hà Nội [Research Committee of the Hà Nội Party Branch], *Cuộc vận động Cách mạng tháng tám*

- ở Hà Nội [Mobilization for the August Revolution in Hà Nội] (Publication information not provided, 1971), 118–119.
65. Trần Huy Liệu, *August Revolution Vol. 2*, 10.
  66. Pierre Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, trans. Claire Duiker (2003; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 93.
  67. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 239.
  68. Ibid.
  69. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, 443–444. Marr cites his earlier book, *Vietnam 1945*, for this interpretation.
  70. Trần Huy Liệu, *The August Revolution Vol. 1*, 203.
  71. Ibid., 216–217.
  72. Ibid., 175.
  73. Trần Huy Liệu, *The August Revolution Vol. 2*, 56.
  74. Trần Huy Liệu, *The August Revolution Vol. 1*, 226.
  75. Ibid., 276.
  76. Ibid., 52.
  77. They included Hoàng Minh Chính, Nguyễn Khang, Đặng Kim Giang, Hoàng Hữu Nam, Phạm Văn Đồng, Trần Huy Liệu, Trần Hữu Dực, Nguyễn Duy Trinh, Nguyễn Chánh, Tôn Quang Phiệt, Lê Văn Hiến, Tạ Quang Bửu, Trần Độ, Lê Giản, Nguyễn Văn Tạo, Xuân Thủy, Khuất Duy Tiến, Ngô Thị Huệ, and Hoàng Anh.
  78. These four included Nguyễn Đình Thi, Cù Huy Cận, Đỗ Đức Dục, and Đặng Thai Mai.
  79. The managing editor of this weekly newspaper was Ngô Diên, an ICP member who would later serve as the SRV ambassador to Cambodia from roughly 1979 to 1991.
  80. The same could be argued about the Democratic Party's organ, *Độc lập* [Independence], which clearly was also under ICP control. This political party will be discussed below.
  81. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, 390–391.
  82. The phrase “no later than July” in the passage's third line seems to function in a similar way, delivering in a negative tone the positive message that the early (good) DRV did not contain an Office of Political Secret Investigation.
  83. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, 28.
  84. Ibid., 42.
  85. Ibid., 58.
  86. Ibid., 69–70.
  87. Ibid., 85.
  88. Ibid., 484.
  89. Ibid., 69–70.

90. Thông-cáo về dự-án hiến-pháp Việt Nam [Announcement on Vietnam's Draft Constitution], *Cứu quốc*, No. 88, November 10, 1945. Changes between the original draft and the final version approved in November 1946 include the removal of the originally proposed and Soviet-inspired "Special Inspectorate" (*Ban thanh tra đặc biệt*), removal of the DRV president's [chủ tịch nước] power to dissolve the National Assembly, removal of the National Assembly Standing Committee's power to dissolve the National Assembly, and the inclusion of guarantees to Vietnamese ethnic minority groups that they would enjoy "autonomy" in the DRV. For a useful analysis of the DRV 1946 Constitution and other Vietnamese constitutions, see Mark Sidel, *The Constitution of Vietnam: A Contextual Analysis* (Oxford and Portland, Oregon: Hart Publishing, 2009).
91. Bernard B. Fall, *The Vietminh Regime: Government and Administration in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam* (Ithaca: Published jointly by Cornell University's Department of Far Eastern Studies and Institute of Pacific Relations, 1954), 14.
92. J.V. Stalin, "Constitution (Fundamental law) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," accessed April 28, 2016: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1936/12/05.htm>.
93. Ibid.
94. "Vietnam's Draft Constitution," *Cứu quốc*, November 10, 1945.
95. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, 56.
96. Ibid., 57, 65–67.
97. Ibid., 63.
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid., 64.
100. Ibid., 69.
101. Ibid., 65.
102. Ibid., 21.
103. Ibid., 68.
104. "Sắc lệnh số 34 của Chủ tịch Chính phủ Lâm thời lập một ủy ban dự thảo và đệ trình Quốc hội một bản Hiến pháp cho Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa." [Decree 34 of the Chairman of the Provisional Government on Establishment of Committee for Drafting and Presenting to the National Assembly a Draft Constitution for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam], issued September 20, 1945, accessed April 28, 2016: <http://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Bo-may-hanh-chinh/Sac-lenh-34-lap-mot-Uy-ban-du-thao-de-trinh-Quoc-hoi-Hien-phap-Viet-nam-dan-chu-cong-hoa/35883/noi-dung.aspx>.
105. "Vietnam's Draft Constitution," *Cứu quốc*, November 10, 1945.

106. Ý kiến độc giả [A Reader's Idea], *Vietnam*, no. 27, December 15, 1945; Đ.T., "Dưới cái mặt nạ dân chủ, dự án hiến pháp VM chỉ là hiến pháp độc tài" [Behind a Democratic Façade, the Việt Minh's Draft Constitution is Only a Dictatorship Constitution], *Vietnam*, no. 32, December 21, 1945; "Vấn đề nội chính: quyền tư pháp phải giao trả tòa án" [The Issue of Domestic Governance: Judicial Power Must Be Placed in the Hands of the Judiciary], *Vietnam*, No. 9, November 24, 1945.
107. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, 106.
108. Ban Chấp hành Trung ương [Central Executive Committee], "Chỉ thị của Ban Chấp hành Trung ương về kháng chiến kiến quốc, 25/11/1945" [Party Central Executive Committee Directive on the Resistance Struggle to Build the Country], *VKDTT 1945-1947* (Hà Nội: Chính trị quốc gia, 2000), 29.
109. Trần Huy Liệu, *The August Revolution Vol. 1*, 15.
110. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, 478-479. A similar use of semantics to dilute Party agency appears in *Vietnam 1945* (p. 240) when Marr discusses why "no alternative leadership had any chance of emerging within the Viet Minh to rival the ICP." Marr explains: "Members of Viet Minh district or provincial committees who did not belong to the Party quickly came to understand that ICP activists might view their forming a group to advance their own interests as treason." Marr places the explanatory focus on the non-ICP members' act of understanding rather than on the deliberate actions of the Communist Party in the form of attacks on members of alternative political parties and the aggressive public stigmatization of these rivals as "traitors." In Marr's phrasing, the non-emergence of alternative leadership within the Việt Minh has an incidental quality to it, with ICP activists driven by broad patriotic motives as opposed to the narrow interests ("their own") of a group trying to challenge ICP hegemony.
111. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 200n.
112. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, 486.
113. Goscha, *Vietnam: Un Etat né de la guerre, 1945-1954*.
114. The primary unsavory aspects usually include the Maoist-inspired land reform campaign (1953-1956) and the Hồ Chí Minh personality cult.
115. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, 449-450.
116. *Ibid.*, 498.
117. Located at 48 Hàng Ngang, the house is now a museum.
118. *Ibid.*, 200.
119. Patti, *Why Vietnam*, 221.
120. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, 460.
121. *Ibid.*
122. *Ibid.*, 449.

123. Ibid., 462. Trường Chinh, “Cách mạng tháng tám: ưu điểm và nhược điểm” [The August Revolution: Strengths and Weaknesses], *Sự thật* [Truth], No. 50, August 24, 1946, 16. Here is the passage to which Marr refers: “A third shortcoming of the August Revolution was that the revolutionary regime, after having been established, did not resolutely wipe out [*kiên quyết tẩy trừ*] the ranks of Vietnamese traitors betraying the nation, did not resolutely deal with [*kiên quyết đối phó*] the French colonialists and their lackeys. With the exception of a few places, such as Quảng-ngãi, where the uprising troops implemented the policy of “cleaning out reactionaries” but implemented it excessively, in most places, the revolutionary regime showed itself to be flexible to the point of weakness [*nhu nhược*], not remembering that “a victorious regime is always a dictatorial one” [Le-nin].
124. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, 403.
125. Trường Chinh, “Cách mạng tháng tám” [The August Revolution], in *Trường Chinh tuyển tập, tập 1* [Selected Writings of Trường Chinh vol. 1], (Hà Nội: Chính trị quốc gia, 2007), 287.
126. Ibid., 325.
127. Ibid., 330.
128. Ibid., 342.
129. Ibid., 346.
130. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, 495.
131. “Nghị quyết Hội nghị Quân sự toàn quốc của Đảng, 19/10/1946” [Resolution from Party’s All-Nation Military Conference], *VKĐTT 1945–1947* (Hà Nội: Chính trị quốc gia, 2000), 133.
132. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, 495.
133. Ibid.
134. Ibid., 7.
135. The *modus vivendi*, signed by Hồ Chí Minh and Marius Moutet in France on September 14, 1946, was controversial from the Vietnamese perspective because of how little the French government seemed to concede to the DRV’s desire for independence.
136. Use of the capitalized “He” [Người] does not appear in Vietnamese folktales or in classic works of literature such as *Truyện Kiều* [*The Tale of Kieu*] or *Truyện Lục Vân Tiên* [*The Tale of Lục Vân Tiên*]. Within Vietnamese Catholic writings, the term would only refer to Jesus. It seems most likely, then, that the primary inspiration for this form of addressing Hồ Chí Minh came from the Soviet Union’s treatment of Stalin.
137. Sự thật, “Hồ Chủ tịch đã ký bản ‘thỏa hiệp tạm thời’ với chính phủ Pháp” [Chairman Hồ Signs Modus Vivendi with the French Government], *Sự thật* [Truth], No. 54, September 20, 1946.

138. Trường Chinh, “Tại sao cuộc đàm phán Việt-Pháp ở Fontainebleau bị bỏ dở?” [Why were the Vietnamese-French Negotiations at Fontainebleau Abandoned?], *Sự thật* [Truth], no. 54, September 20, 1946. Other articles on the negotiations that come from that issue of the newspaper include: Hồn Nhiên, “Từ lời nói . . . đến việc làm” [From Words Spoken . . . to Deeds Done] and X.X., “Mối quan hệ giữa Pháp và Việt Nam do ai quyết định?” [Who Determines French-Vietnamese Relations?].
139. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, 257.
140. In his recent book (p. 27), Stein Tønnesson recognizes that the “cohesion and discipline of the Vietnamese communists, enhanced by loyalty to Ho Chi Minh, proved to be extremely solid.” Yet Tønnesson’s narrative of the DRV’s December 19, 1946 surprise attack on the French in Hà Nội, like Marr’s narrative, hints heavily at the likelihood of an internal radical challenge (either from Võ Nguyên Giáp or from trigger-happy soldiers) having forced Hồ Chí Minh’s hand. See Tønnesson, *How the War Began*, 201–231.
141. “Lời kêu gọi toàn quốc kháng chiến” [National Call to Resistance War], *Wikipedia Tiếng Việt*, last modified April 13, 2016, [https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%E1%BB%9Di\\_k%C3%AAu\\_g%E1%BB%8Di\\_to%C3%Aon\\_qu%E1%BB%91c\\_kh%C3%A1ng\\_chi%E1%BA%BFn](https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%E1%BB%9Di_k%C3%AAu_g%E1%BB%8Di_to%C3%Aon_qu%E1%BB%91c_kh%C3%A1ng_chi%E1%BA%BFn) (accessed July 17, 2016).
142. Ibid.
143. The notion of a Hồ Chí Minh-Trường Chinh rift also appears in Marr’s description of the DRV’s United Vietnam front organization [Hội liên Việt quốc dân Việt Nam], established in May 1946, as “most likely the brainchild of Trường Chinh.” (p. 486). I see it as unlikely that this new front was not Hồ Chí Minh’s idea, that Trường Chinh would have stepped in front of the DRV leader on such an important policy initiative. Having made Trường Chinh responsible for the United Vietnam and the newly founded (ICP-controlled) Socialist Party, Marr is suddenly full of skepticism about their legitimacy as independent organizations, treating them as fake and Party-dependent counterparts of the genuine and independent Việt Minh and Democratic Party, which are associated with Hồ Chí Minh.
144. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, 64.
145. Christopher Goscha, *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012), 205.
146. David Marr, review of Christopher Giebel’s *Imagined Ancestries of Vietnamese Communism: Ton Duc Thang and the Politics of History and Memory*, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 1, No.1–2 (February/August 2006), 508–511.
147. Marr, *Vietnam 1946*, xvi. For examples of this Vietnamese intellectual discourse, see the Wikipedia Vietnam entry on the DRV 1946 Constitution.