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VIETNAM 1945: SOME QUESTIONS

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Although it is generally accepted that 1945 was a crucial year in Vietnamese history, no consensus exists on why this should be so. Moreover, Western and Vietnamese writers tend to approach 1945 from very different angles. In the West, the emphasis is on international involvements, with 1945 the prelude to thirty years of warfare. In Vietnam, domestic developments receive first priority, with the 'August 1945 Revolution' assuming heroic, almost mythological significance. Forty years after events, the time has come for reevaluation based on all available sources.

The barebones history of 1945 in Vietnam is reasonably well known, but perhaps deserves recapitulation. French Indochina escaped most of World War II, largely due to a **modus vivendi** worked out in 1940 between the Japanese and Vichy French governments. From late 1944, however, American bombers visited Vietnam with increasing frequency, Japanese generals endeavored to prepare for a possible Allied invasion, and French colonial officials argued about whether or not to transfer loyalty to Gen. de Gaulle's provisional government in Paris. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese tried to deal with runaway inflation and, in Tonkin and northern Annam, the spectre of starvation.

On 9 March 1945 the Japanese violently terminated their arrangement with the French, disarmed most colonial troops without serious resistance, and chased the remainder into China. Emperor Bảo Đại was allowed to declare Vietnam's independence and a new cabinet was installed in Hue, headed by Trần Trọng Kim, a retired primary school inspector and historian. However, on 19 August, four days following Tokyo's announcement of unconditional surrender, the communist-led Việt Minh took power in Hanoi. Bảo Đại decided to abdicate, turned over his symbols of authority to Việt Minh representatives, and declared his readiness to be a simple citizen of an independent republic. On 2 September, before a huge crowd in Hanoi, Hồ Chí Minh proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV).

Within a week, as the result of a big power agreement in faraway Potsdam, Chinese and British troops began entering Indochina from north and south to take the Japanese surrender. The British, already committed to restoring French authority, proceeded to release and rearm the colonial troops in Saigon, who then joined with incoming Gaullist units to attack Vietnamese loyal to the DRV. For the next fifteen months Vietnamese and French nationals fought, co-existed and talked with each other—often simultaneously. Eventually it boiled down to war, lasting more than seven years, and ending with the battle of Điện Biên Phủ, the Geneva Accords, and French withdrawal south of the seventeenth parallel.

This article does not presume to sweep across Vietnam in 1945. It is organized around discrete historical questions which I think need further detailed investigation. A number of important questions are omitted because they have received attention already. Thus, I do not discuss why the Japanese overturned the French in March 1945,[1] or why President Roosevelt's desire to preclude post-war French control of Indochina was being ignored by some US officials even before he died.[2] I do not try to explain the reasons for Việt Minh survival under intense French pressure before March 1945, or its success in organizing a five-province liberated zone before the Japanese capitulated to the Allies in August.[3] Finally, I cannot deal at any length with the activities of several significant non-communist Vietnamese groups, since reliable sources remain extremely scarce. It is hoped that Vietnamese who possess personal experience of 1945 but now reside abroad can help shed light on this and other questions.

1. WHY DID THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT ESTABLISHED IN APRIL 1945 CEDE POWER IN AUGUST WITHOUT A STRUGGLE?

Many historians consider the answer to this question so obvious as to require no further discussion. In their opinion, both Bảo Đại and Trần Trọng Kim, as puppets of the Japanese, could not possibly garner popular support. Hence the minute Tokyo capitulated they became historically irrelevant. Yet this did not prove true in Indonesia, where Sukarno, despite his similar relationship to the Japanese, easily survived the post-surrender confusion and became president of an independent Indonesia. Admittedly neither Bảo Đại nor Trần Trọng Kim possessed Sukarno's charisma, but someone like Phan Anh, the dynamic Youth Minister, could have taken over together with several Vietnamese

commanders of Civil Guard (Bảo An) units. With the arrival of Chinese troops they might have invited members of the Vietnam Nationalist Party (Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng) and other non-communists to join them. Instead, Phan Anh joined the Việt Minh and became DRV Defense Minister in 1946. A number of Civil Guard members joined the Liberation Army.

This question leads us to deal with complex forces at work in Vietnam from March 1945. Many Vietnamese cheered Japanese humiliation of the French and joined a variety of mass organizations dedicated to advancing nationalist aspirations within the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity sphere. They had no idea the Japanese were about to be humiliated in turn. Even some members of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) favored a united front with Japanese-sponsored groups, to be able to take advantage of immediate circumstance, rather than operate on the basis of an Allied intervention or Japanese surrender which might be a year or more away.[4] Trotskyists certainly favored such a united front, and may have engaged in discussions with Japanese officials to that end.

From the beginning the Japanese appeared uncertain as to how much power to delegate, and to whom. This reflected persistent differences of opinion among Japanese military and civilian officials as to what was being attempted, and why. Just prior to the 9 March coup de force, a bureaucratic compromise had been achieved whereby the native monarchs of Annam, Cambodia and Laos would be allowed to make token declarations of independence, but Japanese officials would take over all the top-echelon French colonial positions. Some Japanese planners expected middle-level French administrators and other government employees to remain faithfully at their posts following the coup. A large number of French engineers, technicians, teachers and doctors did precisely that. However, the blood shed in March made close cooperation problematical. Also, the fact that French nationals could no longer keep firearms, nor necessarily expect protection from Vietnamese policemen, left them vulnerable to verbal and physical abuse—a new and very disorienting experience. By June, all French personnel had been withdrawn to the cities to live under varying degrees of Japanese guard. A few continued to work right up to the time of Japanese surrender, for example as prison wardens or PTT technicians.[5]

General Tsuchihashi Yūichi, 38th Army commander, had been designated to replace Admiral Decoux as governor general of Indochina. In practice, he appears to have conducted

much business via his established military chain-of-command, which extended to platoon-size garrisons in most province and district seats. Secondarily, he worked through a melange of civilian bureaus from the colonial period, plus new institutions designed to meet growing native political aspirations. Acutely aware that he lacked qualified Japanese personnel to replace the French, Gen. Tsuchihashi gradually allowed Vietnamese to take over more offices, if not necessarily to assume authority. Censorship was relaxed, some political prisoners were released, occasional peaceful demonstrations permitted. For the first time since 1939 it was possible to talk openly of past French colonial exploitation and plans for an independent future. However, the Japanese did not hesitate to intervene vigorously in all matters deemed relevant to defense and public order.

The wave of patriotic euphoria that swept Vietnam after the 9 March coup had its own logic, unrelated to policy decisions taken by the Japanese, the Trần Trọng Kim government, or the Việt Minh. Ordinary people were amazed that the French, after eighty years of seeming invincibility, could be defeated in a mere two days. They respected raw Japanese power, but had little interest in Japanese ideology and no identification whatsoever with the Japanese Emperor. They wanted a united, independent, powerful and prosperous Vietnam, and often travelled many miles to listen to speeches by prominent intellectuals and to view commemorations of Vietnamese who had led past patriotic struggles. Some of the more enthusiastic proceeded to replicate such gatherings in local market towns and villages.

The Trần Trọng Kim cabinet, composed mostly of teachers, lawyers, and physicians, went about its work in a typically professional manner, reading reports, answering correspondence, drafting proposals, discussing alternatives. Eventually it issued a number of decrees condemning corruption, reducing taxes, loosening censorship, introducing the Vietnamese language to the civil bureaucracy, and substituting its own political symbols (e.g., flag, anthem, street names, commemorative holidays) for those of the French colonial period. Undoubtedly the government would also have liked to deal with the runaway inflation that plagued the country, but it had no power to stop the Japanese from printing huge new quantities of money to meet day-to-day purchasing requirements, nor could it increase the quantity of goods in the marketplace. Instead, it promulgated more decrees exhorting merchants not to speculate and creditors not to collect debts.

From the beginning the government's most acute dilemma lay in Tonkin and northern Annam, where tens of thousands of citizens were dying of starvation every week. Nothing like this had occurred in Vietnam for many decades. The causes of the famine were cumulative, and major tragedy had been foreseen in November 1944. The only short-term solution was to transport immmediately several hundred thousand tons of grain from Cochinchina, where silos were overflowing and rice was being distilled into alcohol to fuel motor vehicles as a substitute for gasoline. However, the Japanese, who had seen much worse famines in China, did not want to risk losing militarily valuable junks or trucks to American submarine and air attacks on the 1600 kilometre trip northward. They did agree to a government request to stop confiscating rice in famine-stricken areas, and eventually, in July and early August, 68 junk-loads of rice did arrive from Cochinchina.[6] Neither response even began to cope with the overall problem, nor did government decrees aimed at ensuring faster, more equitable marketing of rice do much good. No one knows how many people died of starvation, but the figure may have reached over one million.[7]

A variety of non-government groups in Tonkin tried to help famine victims. Immediately following the coup, Nguyễn Văn Tô, well-known member of the research staff of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient, met with Maruyama, new mayor of Hanoi, to seek permission to organize and lead a General Association for Relief (Tổng Hội Cứu Tế). After a copy of the bylaws and a membership list (complete with individual signatures) had been provided, authorization was given on 10 April. Then, however, it was necessary to undergo a similar process with Nishimura, the Resident Superior.[8] Presumably the Boy Scouts, Red Cross, Catholic Youth Organization and other groups involved in famine relief had to endure similar screenings.[9] In reality, there was not much any of them could do except try to persuade wealthy citizens to donate some hoarded food for use in soup kitchens. Precisely because of this impotence in the face of widespread death, however, many participants began to seek more radical solutions. Nguyễn Văn Tô, who not long before had been mocked by young intellectuals for his conservative habits, accepted an invitation in late August to join the Việt Minh's provisional government, with responsibility for social welfare.

With urgent problems to tackle, and a renewed sense of patriotic commitment, it was inevitable that some Vietnamese

officials would come into conflict with the Japanese. One incident will suffice. In late June a Vietnamese employee of the Tonkin Office of Agriculture went to the Meteorology Service to obtain weather data. Much to his surprise, he was accosted and slapped by a Japanese soldier, who further gestured as if to cut off his head. This episode resulted in a formal protest from the Agriculture Office to the Tonkin Viceroy, Phan Kế Toại, suggesting that the government's honor was at stake.[10] Obviously the soldier had been stationed there to prevent weather information being secretly transmitted to the Allies, yet the employee was equally within his rights to obtain data for agricultural purposes.

Although the Trần Trọng Kim government was not short of good intentions, and possessed some useful technical experience, it didn't have the foggiest notion of how to implement policies in the extraordinary circumstances of April-August 1945. It simply expected province and district mandarins to execute decrees bearing the solemn letterhead 'Imperial Vietnam' (Việt Nam Đế Quốc), and for village officials to ensure that ordinary people obeyed. Caught between orders descending from above and local realities, some functionaries chose to resign or take leave. Already in April the Resident Superior of Tonkin, Nishimura, was sending messages to province chiefs instructing them to stop government employees from departing the upland region, and demanding lists of all those who had gone already, so that they could be located and made to return. No leaves were to be authorized except on grounds of serious illness. By June, Japanese officials were trying to tighten regulations on sick leave because too many employees were using that as a loophole.[11] It does not seem to have occurred to either the Japanese or most Vietnamese government ministers that the problem was more fundamental, and could not be solved by fiat.

One member of the Trần Trọng Kim cabinet who acted differently was Phan Anh, the Youth Minister. He seems to have spent little time in Hue, instead travelling from one town to the next, exhorting students and any others who would listen to form paramilitary groups, practice marching, heighten each other's patriotic awareness, and serve as exemplars for the citizenry at large. His close associate, Tạ Quang Bửu, took a similar approach when expanding the Boy Scout network. It is possible to criticize these groups for too much talking and marching, while compatriots died of starvation, and one doubts they had many followers in

the villages. However, to have become more directly involved in administration would have either brought them into conflict with, or made them pawns of, the local Japanese commanders.

This was precisely the problem faced by the Civil Guard, which remained small and under close Japanese supervision. In his memoirs Trần Trọng Kim complained that each province seat had only about fifty guardsmen, and each district about twenty, all with antiquated firearms and unreliable ammunition.[12] On the other hand, being experienced non-commissioned officers and enlisted men from the colonial Garde Indigène, they could be used to encadre the youth groups promoted by Phan Anh, once Japanese policy changed and more weapons became available.

In June 1945 the Việt Minh increased its harassment of Japanese units stationed in the hills north of the Red River delta, causing Gen. Tsuchihashi to abandon a number of smaller posts. He also seems to have instructed units elsewhere to avoid aggressive patrolling. It soon became clear that, providing the Việt Minh did not threaten lines of communication, supply points and military bases, Japanese commanders were prepared to let political affairs in the countryside go their own way. This immediately put pressure on the small Civil Guard units at district level, and caused local officials and members of the elitist Đại Việt Party to fear for their lives. As early as 30 June, a group of government employees and citizens of Hà Giang forwarded an eight-page letter to the Tonkin Viceroy explaining the 'degenerating situation' in their province due to increased Việt Minh activity. Among other things, they called for replacement of the incumbent province chief, alleging that he never did anything but push papers around in his office.[13] A district chief in Lạng Sơn province was cashiered for abandoning an operation to suppress the Việt Minh.[14] In July, the Việt Minh targeted a number of Civil Guard posts, first endeavoring to win over soldiers by a combination of quiet persuasion and ruse. If that failed, Việt Minh activists usually backed off, but several attacks were mounted and quantities of weapons seized.[15]

Trần Trọng Kim does not seem to have understood the nature and magnitude of the Việt Minh threat until very late. In June, he allegedly told a Vietnamese visitor he would give power to the mysterious 'Việt Minh Party' if that would help alleviate starvation.[16] In July, he interceded with Gen. Tsuchihashi to seek release of several hundred recently arrested Việt Minh suspects.[17] In early August

he endeavored to persuade members of the Việt Minh to join his government, but was bluntly informed that they intended to seize power, not have it given to them.[18]

Trần Trọng Kim's increasing preoccupation was trying to win concessions from the Japanese that would enable his government to present a more convincing face to the public. Already in June nationalist groups were publicly criticizing the government for failing to reintegrate Cochinchina with the rest of Vietnam, for not obtaining administrative control of the cities of Hanoi, Haiphong and Đà Nẵng (Tourane), and for allowing the Japanese to retain the functions of the former Gouvernement Général de l'Indochine (Sûreté, PTT, Finance, Railways, Public Works, Education, Justice). In July, Gen. Tsuchihashi and Trần Trọng Kim worked out a timetable for transfer by 15 August of all the above powers except control of Cochinchina. Finally, in the first days of August, Gen. Tsuchihashi agreed to appointment of a Vietnamese viceroy for Cochinchina, and Bảo Đại officially designated Nguyễn Văn Sâm to that position on 14 August. Also in early August the Japanese released some interned Vietnamese personnel of the regular French Army for use in the Civil Guard, together with 2000 firearms and appropriate quantities of ammunition.[19]

Neither Gen. Tsuchihashi nor Trần Trọng Kim expected de facto control of the above territories and institutions to be relinquished immediately by the Japanese. Aside from continuing Japanese military requirements, the Vietnamese government wanted time to plan an orderly transition. Committees had been established to prepare a draft constitution, work out administrative reforms, and discuss changes in the educational system.[20] Expansion and training of the Civil Guard was due to take place over a six to twelve month period. As it turned out, of course, this time did not exist.

For some weeks Trần Trọng Kim had been irritated by growing dissension in his cabinet, as well as the unsatisfactory performance in his opinion of the Tonkin Viceroy, Phan Kế Toại. The issue which apparently brought cabinet differences to a head was a request from the province chief of Thanh Hóa to the Minister of Interior for instructions on whether to order still loyal Civil Guard units to fire on Việt Minh groups who were disarming other guardsmen and tying up village chiefs. Unable to achieve consensus on this issue, Trần Trọng Kim took the entire cabinet's resignation to Bảo Đại on 8 August, and received authorization to form a new cabinet. However, when most of Trần

Trọng Kim's candidates either did not receive their cables or chose not to reply, it became necessary to reconstitute the old cabinet on a provisional basis. As late as 18 August Trần Trọng Kim was trying to form a Committee for National Salvation to buttress a new government.[21]

On 19 August, however, the Việt Minh seized power in Hanoi, and the focus immediately shifted to the status of the Vietnamese monarchy itself, not merely the fate of Trần Trọng Kim or any other ministers. For one week already the Privy Secretary, Phạm Khắc Hòe, acting on instructions from Tôn Quang Phiệt, a prominent Hue teacher and undercover ICP member, had been quietly counselling Bảo Đại to consider voluntary abdication. On the 20th the King told Phạm Khắc Hòe to prepare a draft abdication document. On the 23rd the local Việt Minh committee took control in Hue with the exception of the citadel containing the royal palace and government bureaus. Although the committee sent the court an ultimatum to turn over all military and political authority, it apparently did not demand Bảo Đại's abdication.[22]

By this time, however, Trần Trọng Kim and others were worried about the monarch's personal safety. Cables had now arrived from groups in Hanoi that did demand abdication, and anti-monarchist slogans were increasingly evident among local demonstrators. Civil Guard and Palace Guard units defending the citadel numbered only a few hundred, and Trần Trọng Kim discovered those too were infiltrated and demoralized by the Việt Minh. Significantly, he took it upon himself to turn down a Japanese offer to defend the palace, fearing that would risk bloody confrontations with the crowds and also give a bad impression to Allied forces when they arrived. Instead he went to Bảo Đại to urge him to abdicate, adding ominously that otherwise he might be killed like Louis XVI in France or Czar Nicholas II in Russia.[23] On 24 August Bảo Đại informed the royal family council of his intention to abdicate. The next day the moving statement originally drafted by Phạm Khắc Hòe was promulgated, and on 30 August a public ceremony was arranged to transfer the royal regalia to representatives of the Việt Minh provisional government who had come from Hanoi for this purpose.[24]

Why didn't a more vigorous nationalist leader move to replace Trần Trọng Kim before the Việt Minh seized power? In retrospect, the best time would have been in June, before Civil Guard units came under serious pressure in the hills north of Hanoi, and after many previous civilian supporters

of the government had become jaded by its inability to accomplish much. However, the government would not have resigned without popular demands to that effect, presumably in the form of mass demonstrations. Taking to the streets in that way almost surely meant violent Japanese counteraction. Those patriotic Vietnamese ready to die saw more sense in departing the cities to link up with the Việt Minh, who at least were operating on more favorable terrain.

The last possible time for a nationalist coup was immediately upon hearing news of the Japanese capitulation. Several such groups did organize public meetings and demonstrations on 16 and 17 August, but they were easily outmaneuvered and many of their followers co-opted by the Việt Minh. It seems likely that the Việt Minh had already promised prominent positions to men like Phan Anh, Tạ Quang Bửu, Nguyễn Văn Tố, and Phan Kế Toại.

In summary, the Vietnamese government established in April 1945 failed to survive beyond August not merely because it was 'collaborationist', but because it had only the faintest notion of the revolutionary forces already at work, and because there was an alternative government being formed in the mountains that did understand revolution and indeed was doing everything possible to give the revolutionary wheel a firm push. When Trần Trọng Kim warned Bảo Đại that he risked the fate of Nicholas II, it apparently didn't occur to him that he was Vietnam's Kerensky.

2. WHY DID THE JAPANESE ALLOW THE VIỆT MINH TO SEIZE POWER?

There is no doubt that Japanese troops could have prevented the Việt Minh from taking power in the cities, and made matters much more difficult in the countryside. The fact that they did not led to angry French charges of a Japanese-Việt Minh conspiracy to destroy the position of the white man in Indochina just at the moment British and Free French troops were poised to 'liberate' the colony. While such allegations reveal far more about French attitudes than Indochina realities, Japanese behavior is puzzling in some respects and deserves more investigation than it has received to date.

Up until 9 March 1945 the French military and Sûreté were responsible for law and order in the colony, including attempted suppression of the Việt Minh. Ironically, a major campaign against the Việt Minh had been scheduled to begin in the hills north of Hanoi on 12 March.[25] After the coup de force the Japanese felt no need to pick up those French plans. Indeed, they proceeded to release hundreds of politi-

cal prisoners, including some ICP members. Presumably Japanese officials expected Bảo Đại's proclamation of independence and the general loosening of political restrictions to short-circuit support for the Việt Minh. Meanwhile, however, by means of routine military patrols and their own well-developed political intelligence network, the Japanese kept a weather eye on the Việt Minh and other potential security threats. Above all, they monitored the northern frontier for any signs of a Chinese attack into Indochina.

Immediately following the Japanese coup the ICP reiterated its anti-fascist stance. Indeed, the Japanese now became the 'principal, *concrete*, immediate, and unique enemy', whereas the French were potential allies.[26] After eighty years of French colonial rule this was an important shift, often not fully grasped by local cadres. It was even more difficult to disseminate among cityfolk engaged in humiliating French nationals and enjoying Japanese military drill with wooden rifles. The Việt Minh in Tonkin tried to punctuate its policy with new small-scale attacks on Japanese and Civil Guard patrols, but early results were minimal. More effective were surprise sorties against local government or landlord granaries, and several ambushes of riverboats carrying rice. Although local Japanese commanders did respond to such 'provocations'—quite violently if any of their own men had been killed or wounded—there was no systematic campaign of repression. In June, as indicated previously, Gen. Tsuchihashi withdrew a number of units from exposed locations.

Determined to publicize its anti-fascist credentials, gain tactical experience and hopefully capture desperately needed firearms, the Việt Minh continued to probe for enemy weak spots. Generally this meant a small Vietnamese Civil Guard post 'stiffened' by the presence of a few Japanese. On 16 July the fledgling Liberation Army scored a notable success at Tam Đảo, a colonial resort only sixty kilometres by road from Hanoi. Most of the Civil Guard platoon defected before the shooting began. The eleven Japanese present rejected calls to surrender; after a two-hour firefight all were dead except a major and one soldier taken prisoner. Twenty French civilians interned by the Japanese at Tam Đảo were taken to a Việt Minh camp, from whence an American OSS team arranged to fly the women and children to China, while the able-bodied men began the long trek to the frontier.[27]

We do not know exactly when the Japanese Southern Area

Command in Saigon received word of Tokyo's intention to surrender, but it would not have been later than 13 August. The news must have been a bombshell, causing confusion and emotional trauma all the way down the chain-of-command. For a few days there was probably talk of carrying on the struggle, if necessary by retreating into previously selected defense zones in Cambodia and Laos. However, those who listened to the Emperor's broadcast on Radio Tokyo on 15 August could be under no illusions: he wanted them to accept the unbearable and stop fighting. The next day the Imperial rescript was posted. On 18 August Gen. Tsuchihashi ordered all 38th Army units to cease hostilities by the morning of the 21st. Any further thoughts among high-ranking officers of continued resistance must have been scotched on 22 August, when Prince Kanin delivered the imperial surrender decree personally to Marshal Terauchi.[28]

Most Japanese commanders had already shifted attention to protecting their men from senseless harm, arranging dignified surrender procedures, and attempting to get everyone home as soon as possible. No one had any way of knowing how Japanese forces would be treated in defeat. Nonetheless, the general staff could put forth some educated guesses. There was particular reason to fear the Nationalist Chinese, who began crossing the frontier on 23 August. One solution, they hoped, was to rely on incoming American officers from the China Theatre as honest brokers.[29] They could also predict that the French, especially those humiliated and in some cases maltreated between March and August in Indochina, would seek retribution. However, Chinese forces were not likely to show much sympathy for French demands, and British forces, upon first face-to-face contact in Rangoon on 26 August, showed every sign of taking their Potsdam responsibilities seriously and not delegating surrender and repatriation tasks south of the 16th parallel to the French.[30]

Pending repatriation, the Japanese would need to survive amidst 22 million Vietnamese in a state of increasing agitation, who suddenly knew that local evidence of Japanese power was deceptive. Groups prepared to employ force and violence were everywhere, yet the Japanese did not know if the Allies would permit them to retain small-arms for self-protection. Nor could they predict how long they would have to depend on the local populace for food.[31] It may be that the first concrete Japanese reaction to news of possible surrender involved withdrawal on 10 August and several days later of large quantities of piastres from

the Bank of Indochina to cover future food purchases.[32]

In this tenuous situation, the Japanese naturally would have liked the Vietnamese government established following the 9 March coup to remain. Aside from honest feelings of sympathy for people who rejected Western colonialism, and who in some cases had become personal friends, Japanese officials needed to keep dealing with someone in authority if mob violence was to be avoided, food obtained, epidemics contained, units regrouped peacefully, and military supplies and equipment preserved for disposition according to Allied orders. If the Chinese or British then chose to overturn the existing Vietnamese government, the onus would be on them to avoid disaster. Between 14 and 16 August the Japanese tried in a number of ways to bolster the government and sympathetic political organizations, but the results were meager. Significantly they released only a tiny portion of the weapons and ammunition captured from the French in March.

ICP leaders at Tân Trào, the liberation zone headquarters, may have obtained word of probable Japanese surrender even before Marshal Terauchi, due to the presence of an OSS team that received very up-to-date intelligence by short wave from Kunming.[33] On 12 August orders started going out to Việt Minh units to engineer immediately a general uprising. As had been agreed months earlier, basic tactics involved local shock teams mobilizing crowds to march on district and province seats, detain mandarins, ransack files, hang out Việt Minh flags, collect whatever firearms were available and organize revolutionary committees. Japanese units in the area were often called upon to surrender to the Việt Minh as representatives of the victorious Allies, but the Japanese almost always refused, in which case they were generally bypassed. The mood was one of spontaneous excitement at dumping the 'puppet government' and setting up alternative institutions, not of seeking violent retribution against the Japanese, which probably would have proved suicidal.

Before receiving the order from Tân Trào, but immediately after hearing Allied radio stations on 15 August report Tokyo's acceptance of unconditional surrender terms, the Northern Region (Tonkin) Committee of the ICP, meeting a few kilometres from Hanoi, decided to seize power in the city. One committee member had already met secretly with the Tonkin Viceroy, Phan Kế Toại, and on the 16th a more formal discussion was held. The Viceroy allegedly tried to persuade the Việt Minh to join the existing govern-

ment so as to avoid any clash with the Japanese and present a united front to the Allies when they arrived. This idea was firmly rejected, and the next day Việt Minh cadres, backed up by a large crowd, took control of a meeting of the General Association of Government Employees to publicize their demand that the 'puppets' resign in favor of an organization possessing Allied backing and truly capable of mobilizing everyone for national salvation. Groups of demonstrators then roved the city until nightfall. A large printing house was commandeered to ensure that written word of the demonstrations reached the suburbs and adjacent provinces the next morning. Throughout these events the Civil Guard stood by in confusion and Japanese forces remained aloof.[34]

At this point the Việt Minh in Hanoi possessed a maximum of eighty firearms, divided among some 700 activists who had undergone very short military training courses before being organized into three detachments. It was decided to convene a mass meeting on 19 August, which would then be converted to several demonstrations led by armed Việt Minh, with missions to liberate a series of key government installations in different parts of the city. Although there were several tense confrontations with Japanese troops and Vietnamese civil guardsmen, bloodshed was averted by referring problems to higher echelons for negotiated settlement. While firm evidence is lacking, it seems probable that Phan Kế Toại, who had resigned as Viceroy on the evening of the 17th, served as valued intermediary.

On 20 August crowds looted French houses and terrorized some French civilians in Hanoi. The Việt Minh reacted firmly, stationing guards and issuing public warnings against further such actions. In the process they apparently convinced the Japanese general staff of their capacity to maintain public order. On the 22nd, that capacity was put to a further test when word swept the city that French officials had arrived in an American airplane. Angry Vietnamese crowds had to be restrained by both Việt Minh and Japanese personnel.

Meanwhile, in the surrounding countryside Japanese commanders had to make spot decisions on whether to withdraw or fight. As might be expected, small, isolated units tried to extricate themselves with dignity, while larger units on major communication routes stood their ground awaiting further orders from Hanoi. One of the first encounters, on 16 August, took place at the mountain village of Hàm Yên in Tuyên Quang province, where a local Việt Minh unit

apparently convinced a Japanese platoon to surrender. The next morning an armed crowd converged on the province seat, where the mandarin and his civil guardsmen promptly capitulated, leaving eight Kempeitai agents isolated and eventually compelled to lay down their arms. However, the main Japanese garrison at Tuyên Quang refused calls to surrender, as well as a subsequent Việt Minh proposal that troops withdraw carrying only one firearm each. A Japanese relief column coming downstream from Hà Giang was successfully ambushed. Running short of food, the Tuyên Quang commander eventually withdrew his unit towards Hanoi on the 24th, leaving behind a quantity of French weapons and ammunition.[35]

Eighty kilometres to the southeast, at the Thái Nguyên province seat, occurred the sharpest encounter between Việt Minh and Japanese forces. On 20 August, a Liberation Army unit, trained and partially equipped by the OSS, surrounded the Japanese garrison and mounted repeated attacks. Hồ Chí Minh, Võ Nguyên Giáp and other ICP leaders at nearby Tân Trào had decided on the 15th to test this elite force in battle, apparently hoping to gain a clearcut victory for political purposes and then push through quickly to liberate Hanoi (unaware that the Regional Committee had already taken the initiative). They may have been further influenced by Major Allison Thomas and other members of the OSS team, who felt cheated by the sudden Japanese capitulation and wanted at least to be involved in demanding surrender of some local garrisons.[36] The persistence of these attackers must have puzzled Gen. Tsuchihashi, especially if the involvement of white soldiers was reported to him. If the Thái Nguyên garrison had been wiped out, or if Gen. Tsuchihashi had sent reinforcements and expanded the battle, the cautious **modus vivendi** developing in Hanoi and other locations might have evaporated. As it was, Việt Minh leaders in Hanoi met with Japanese officers, a joint delegation was dispatched to Thái Nguyên to arrange a cease-fire, and the garrison withdrew unhindered on the 25th. The Liberation Army unit arrived to a joyful public reception in Hanoi the next day. The presence at that reception of Major Archimedes Patti, senior OSS officer to arrive by plane on the 22nd, must have convinced the Japanese that the Americans and the Việt Minh enjoyed close relations, which might come in handy in following weeks.[37]

In some provinces negotiations lasted several days before any understanding was reached. In Sơn Tây, for example, Việt Minh demonstrators rapidly convinced the Civil Guard commander to turn over weapons and the province mandarin

to cede authority in a formal signing-over ceremony, but the Japanese refused to budge. The next day they withdrew from several small posts, leaving an 81 mm mortar, two machine guns and several hundred rifles. Two days later the local Việt Minh leader persuaded the Japanese commander of the Sơn Tây fortress not to destroy a large stock of French military supplies when they departed.[38]

In Thái Bình province a lone Japanese soldier panicked at the sight of a crowd of 4000 approaching the town. His shooting killed one person, but leaders were able to prevent other demonstrators armed with rifles and grenades from retaliating. Several days later, when two Japanese soldiers were killed, a company of troops was sent in to retaliate. Eventually a Việt Minh representative convinced them not to fire. Unfortunately the two bodies had been tossed in the river, but the swords were turned over apologetically, together with the person responsible for the killings.[39]

In Quảng Ninh province there was no question of Việt Minh units taking action against the Japanese, as the latter were far too numerous. However, a Japanese colonel did give the Việt Minh some weapons, presumably French, rather than turn them over to approaching Chinese forces.[40]

Events went differently in Cochinchina, where news of the Japanese surrender seems to have caught all groups by surprise. A wide range of intellectual and religious leaders who had cooperated with Governor Minoda Fujio continued to tout their recently formed United National Front (Mặt Trận Quốc Gia Thống Nhứt), connected via the new viceroy with the royal court and government in Hue. However, ICP cadres were equally busy telling people that it was foolish and irresponsible to join a Japanese-sponsored coalition. Better to join the Việt Minh, form a provisional administration, and prepare to meet the incoming Allies free from collaborationist taint. This logic proved especially convincing to members of the Japanese-sponsored, 40,000-strong Vanguard Youth (whose leader, it turned out, was already a clandestine member of the ICP). With most of this paramilitary organization behind it, the ICP's Southern Region Committee moved to seize power. A dress rehearsal to test Japanese reactions was staged at Tân An, 45 kilometres from Saigon, on 24 August. That same day word arrived of Bảo Đại's decision to abdicate and identify himself with the Việt Minh's provisional government in Hanoi. On the 25th, huge demonstrations became the vehicle for the Việt Minh to take control in Saigon, with no opposition offered by either the Japanese or the United

National Front.[41]

After that euphoric moment, however, ICP leaders in Saigon were beset with far more problems than they could handle. Besides the quick arrival of British and French troops in September, the lack of reliable communications with Hanoi, the still shaky operational status of the Party in the South, and the embarrassment of being criticized as pro-French by former members of the United National Front, the ICP Regional Committee had to deal with two religious movements, the Cao Đài and Hòa Hảo, which possessed large grassroots followings of their own, and which came to acquire fully as many firearms as units directly identified with the Việt Minh.

When it proved impossible for British and French troops to contain the fighting they had precipitated on 23 September, Gen. Gracey was quick to order Japanese units into action as well. Although the vast majority obeyed, some Japanese officers and soldiers deserted, particularly in the direction of the Cao Đài center of Tây Ninh. Already the French had taken to labeling opponents seen wearing any item of Japanese uniform as Japanese. Out of those encounters, more than any analysis of events between March and August, came the myth of a Japanese-Việt Minh conspiracy to thwart French grandeur. Obviously this myth came in handy when mounting propaganda attacks against the Việt Minh, especially with British and French audiences in mind. However, many French officials actually believed it, as the 'annamites' were deemed quite incapable of leading disciplined military operations.[42]

3. WHY DIDN'T THE CHINESE, LIKE THE BRITISH IN SAIGON, MOVE TO ELIMINATE THE DRV-VIỆT MINH?

Units of the Nationalist Chinese army began arriving in force in Hanoi on 9 September, having been slowed down by floods and poor logistics. They included about 60,000 regular troops, 90,000 ragged, ill-disciplined provincial soldiers, and a large number of civilian profiteers and camp followers. As agreed at Potsdam, they then fanned out to prepare to take the Japanese surrender everywhere north of the 16th parallel. Beyond that, no one was quite sure what they would do.

Up until the death of President Roosevelt in April 1945, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek had associated himself with the President's ideas for some sort of postwar trusteeship in Indochina. By August, however, trusteeship was a dead letter and both Washington and Chungking had publicly reaf-

firmed French sovereignty. Chiang expressed the vague hope that the Vietnamese people would 'gradually reach independence from self-governance in accordance with the provisions of the Atlantic Charter'.[43] For internal purposes, the Chinese government formulated a 14-point occupation policy that emphasized close coordination with American and French officials, French responsibility to finance the Chinese occupation, and a hands-off attitude concerning Franco-Vietnamese relations.[44] Almost surely Chungking was already compiling a list of concessions to extract from the French in exchange for eventual Chinese troop withdrawal.

However, the occupation was not merely an international initiative under Chiang Kai-shek's direction, but a complex extension of southern Chinese politics. Command of Chinese occupation forces was assigned to Gen. Lu Han, a member of the Yunnan clique led since 1928 by Lung Yun. This represented a rebuff to Marshal Chang Fa-kwei, commander of the Fourth War Area encompassing Kwangsi and western Kwangtung, who nonetheless contributed some troops and his chief political officer, Gen. Hsiao Wen, to the occupation.[45] Marshal Chang may have counted himself lucky six weeks later, when the Generalissimo took advantage of Lung Yun's preoccupation with turning Indochina into an economic plum to forcibly depose him as Yunnan governor.[46] Lu Han was appointed Lung's replacement and thus had to spend most of his time in Kunming, which gave Hsiao Wen more room for maneuver. Both Lu Han and Hsiao Wen possessed several thousand armed Vietnamese allies, the former centered on Vũ Hồng Khanh and his Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNQDĐ), the latter on Nguyễn Hải Thần and the Vietnam Revolutionary Alliance (Việt Nam Cách Mệnh Đồng Minh Hội).

Differences in policy implementation began to surface even before Chinese troops crossed the frontier. Whereas Gen. Ho Ying-chin, chief of the Chinese General Staff, had assured the French that some of their troops would be able to accompany the Chinese forces, Gen. Lu Han denied them that privilege. On 11 September, Lu Han had Jean Sainteny, the senior French representative in Hanoi, evicted from the governor general's palace so that he himself could take up residence there. By this time the French government was thoroughly confused, particularly since American officers in Hanoi appeared to be supporting both Lu Han and Hồ Chí Minh against Paris.[47] As the ultimate snub, Lu Han offered position number 115 at the 28 September Japanese capitulation ceremony to Gen. Alessandri, who had flown from Kunming to represent Gen. de Gaulle. Gen. Alessandri

refused to attend.

Ironically, Hồ Chí Minh declined to attend 'for reasons of health', a diplomatic way of indicating displeasure at being invited only as a personal guest of Lu Han, not as head of the DRV. He was under increasing pressure from Lu Han and Hsiao Wen to form a coalition government with the Nationalist Party and the Revolutionary Alliance. The British and French had just driven DRV supporters out of downtown Saigon, and he had to consider the possibility, despite Lu Han's assurances, that the Chinese might do likewise in Hanoi. On the other hand, Hồ Chí Minh had no desire to share power in the longer term with Nationalist Party and Revolutionary Alliance leaders, and there is evidence they felt the same way. He thus proceeded to accommodate them slowly, and only to the degree necessary to prevent Chinese retaliation. His basic strategy was to project himself as Vietnam's first patriot, a head-of-state above party, while his trusted lieutenants moved to extend and deepen authority at every level from Hanoi bureau to village revolutionary committee. This strategy culminated in the general elections of 6 January 1946, which put Hồ Chí Minh beyond reach as the embodiment of national resistance, consigned Nationalist Party and Revolutionary Alliance leaders to figurehead status in the government, and left the Việt Minh militia (tự vệ) and secret police (liêm phóng) increasingly free to repress anti-communist opposition at the local level. Although many Nationalist Party and Revolutionary Alliance leaders sensed what was happening, they had no effective counter-strategy.[48]

We still do not have access to enough Chinese documentation to explain with confidence why Lu Han did not topple the DRV in late 1945, despite Hồ Chí Minh's assurances.[49] It probably had to do with practical assessments of what might follow in the wake of such a coup. Unlike Gen. Gracey in Saigon, Lu Han had no French officials in his entourage eager to take over 'law and order' responsibilities, nor did he wish any. Vietnam Nationalist Party and Revolutionary Alliance cadres had managed to displace the Việt Minh in a number of provincial towns along the Chinese routes of march to Hanoi, but they found it impossible to replicate that success in the surrounding countryside, or in towns lacking a Chinese presence. Dumping the DRV in Hanoi would surely result in guerrilla warfare elsewhere, with Chinese troops bearing the brunt of pacification duties.[50] Lu Han's generals had come to Indochina to make money, not to lose it in a bottomless pit of counterinsurgency. Besides, any

outburst of fighting would immediately strengthen the hands of those in Chungking who argued for early settlement with the French. All in all, Hồ Chí Minh made a better ally, however temporary, than an enemy.

The price for the DRV was high. Chinese troops bivouacked in the choicest locations, confiscated property, strode up and down the streets as if they owned them. Chinese officials pegged the exchange rate to sharply favor their 'gold-unit dollar' over the piastre, then flooded the market with Chinese currency. Overseas Chinese took advantage of the protection offered by Lu Han's forces to pressure Vietnamese competitors out of business, buy up property at incredible discounts, and develop sophisticated smuggling operations. Deep Vietnamese fears of Chinese recolonization began to surface. The DRV pleaded for people to be patient, while publicizing historical victories against the Sung, Yuan, Ming and Ch'ing dynasties to make its long-term position clear.

All of this was occurring when famine again stalked the land, due to continuing market disruptions, breaches in the dikes in mid-August, and a poor autumn harvest. Both the DRV and the Chinese sought rice from Cochinchina, but the French were slow to respond.[51] From September the DRV mounted a mass campaign to put unused land under cultivation, plant dry season crops and improve food distribution. Although millions went hungry, there was no repetition of the mass starvation of early 1945.

Meanwhile, the French frantically tried to persuade the Chinese government to let their troops return to northern Indochina. The most obvious course of action from the French point of view was to send immediately some portion of the troops who had fled to Yunnan in early 1945 marching back towards Hanoi. Another plan called for Chinese assistance in rearming the 5000 French soldiers still under protective custody in Hanoi, probably combined with a surprise paratroop drop. Still another aimed at debarking new units from the metropole at the port of Haiphong. Gen. Lu Han opposed all these proposals, and Chungking was inclined to agree with him until a larger diplomatic package was close to being wrapped up. In early February 1946, 2000 French troops were allowed to cross into Laos and the Thai minority region of northern Vietnam. Covert rearming of French units in the Hanoi citadel may have been winked at by Lu Han at the same time.[52]

On 28 February, two agreements were signed in Chungking whereby France relinquished all territorial concessions

and extraterritorial privileges in China, agreed to finance Chinese purchase of the Yunnan railway, and promised both the Chinese government and overseas Chinese in Indochina a wide range of special economic benefits. In return, arrangements were to be made for French troops to relieve the Chinese armies of occupation between 1 and 15 March. Those 'arrangements' proved very difficult on the spot, indeed involving several violent Sino-French altercations, but by the end of June most Chinese troops were gone.[53] The future of Vietnam was now solely in the hands of the Vietnamese and the French.

4. WHY DIDN'T FRANCE ACCEPT THE EVENTS OF MARCH-AUGUST AS *FAIT ACCOMPLI* AND OPEN NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE DRV?

In this day of satellite cameras and computerized intelligence data banks, it is hard to imagine how little French policymakers in Paris in August and September 1945 knew about what had happened in Indochina during the previous five months. Before 9 March, although it was obviously not possible to communicate directly between Saigon and Paris, Free French agents did send out a stream of information by shortwave radio.[54] After 9 March those agents were either under Japanese detention or too preoccupied with escape and survival to spend much time collecting and transmitting intelligence data. Some new teams were dropped in, but by the end of May only those in Laos were still operational. It was left to agents along the Chinese frontier to gather rumors on what was happening to the south. A fair amount of information could also be gleaned from Japanese radio broadcasts, yet there is no indication that French analysts paid them much heed.

French intelligence reports continued to assume that the vast majority of Vietnamese were loyal colonial subjects. Of course, there were always troublemakers, particularly among the urban intellectuals, and it could not be doubted that the Japanese coup had hurt French prestige, but early and firm restoration of French authority would overcome such problems. Occasional anachronisms did appear that ought to have given Parisian policymakers pause. Thus, a 9 July report alluded to "some bands of anti-Japanese pirates supported by the population", and another of the same month mentioned that the 'Việt Minh Party' possessed one million followers in the hills north of Hanoi. Nonetheless, yet another July report argued that agitation in Tonkin was limited to youths in the towns, whereas "the rural population of farmers and fishermen do not interest

themselves in political questions". To make matters worse, it was not unusual for summaries of events in Indochina to reach desks in Paris two months later, in this case September.[55]

The mood in Paris was not conducive to critical appraisal of Indochina's present or future. On the one hand, people still felt deeply humiliated by the 1940 defeat and subsequent German occupation. On the other hand, they were reminded of what they had been taught in school about the early 19th century martyrdom of French priests in Vietnam, the heroic conquest by French admirals, the **mise en valeur** accomplishments of French governors general. The Cross of Lorraine, having been planted first in the African colonies, then carried triumphantly in the liberation of Paris and Strasbourg, now demanded fulfilment in Saigon and Hanoi. Just as so much of the Empire had rallied to the motherland, now France had to rally to liberate the jewel in the imperial crown, Indochina. To abandon Indochina would be to give up France's international position, to retreat into parochial continentalism and petty domestic quarrels.[56] It is hard to imagine a mood less suited to what was happening on the other side of the world. Gen. de Gaulle unwittingly epitomized this perceptual gap when on 19 August, in a radio broadcast to Indochina, he uttered the famous words: "In this hour of deliverance, the mother country addresses its children..."[57]

This is not the full story, of course. For example, a meticulous 1 June 1945 intelligence analysis of 'anti-French activities' in the mountains north of Hanoi predicted that it would take at least five or six battalions to regain control there even assuming the Japanese were out of the picture. The analyst added that it might be possible to negotiate with the Việt Minh, providing France put forth more conciliatory policies. In any event, the Việt Minh had to be considered not only a political party but "un mouvement général de la population".[58] In a revealing memorandum dated 1 August, Paul Mus, long resident in Indochina and recently returned from a Free French mission there, warned that popular 'annamite' attitudes had changed dramatically, so that French military force applied without symmetrical civil initiatives, offering new institutions in response to new problems, could be disastrous. He criticized de Gaulle's 24 March declaration on Indochina as insufficient, condemned the Ministry of Colonies for outmoded thinking, and pleaded with the government to select a civil representative of great prestige, imagination and flexibil-

ity.[59] Another intelligence officer urged that the future governor general be "a man of left-wing political persuasion, whose name and whose past would be, to the Indochinese, a pledge of our liberalism".[60] One imagines that both had someone in mind, and it certainly was not Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu, appointed High Commissioner of France for Indochina on 17 August.

An interministerial committee on Indochina had been established in February 1945, partly to overcome routine bureaucratic barriers, but also to ensure that upon liberation a 'new' France could make its will felt over the 'old' France of narrow-minded colons, sûreté agents, and Vichy collaborators. The secretariat of this committee became the focus of whatever debate developed about the future of individual states within the Indochina Federation and the French Union. Yet, in late August, when Sainteny in Hanoi and Cédile in Saigon desperately needed clear instructions on how to deal with Việt Minh representatives, none were forthcoming. One problem was erratic and cumbersome radio communications, with messages being relayed via Calcutta and Kunming. More fundamentally, the government did not wish to commit itself prematurely to any native partner in the new relationship. Nothing demonstrates this better than Gen. de Gaulle's top secret scheme to accompany to Indochina Prince Vĩnh San, who had been deposed as boy emperor (Duy Tân) by the French in 1916, exiled to Reunion for 25 years, then enrolled in the Free French forces. It seems that Vĩnh San was to be touted as the monarch who had never abdicated, a symbol of both Vietnamese patriotism and Franco-Vietnamese cooperation. The fact that he was completely out of touch with events in his homeland must have been considered an asset. The project aborted when the Prince was killed in an airplane crash in Africa in December.[61]

In trying to define new relationships a great deal of confusion developed over terminology, particularly such words as 'independence', 'self-government', 'autonomy', and 'federation'. Up until mid-August it seems that de Gaulle and key members of his staff had no problem using the term independence to characterize the status of new states in Indochina, providing they became part of a (still undefined) French Union. However, by the end of the month instructions had been sent to Sainteny and Cédile not to use the term independence in discussions with Vietnamese.[62] One can speculate that Sainteny's first messages from Hanoi had conveyed to Paris the political excitement, indeed

the magic surrounding the word **Độc Lập!** (Independence), hence the danger of conceding its applicability.

The really key word, which had little emotive capacity in either French or Vietnamese, was 'sovereignty'. On 24 August, at a press conference in Washington, de Gaulle stated, "the position of France in Indochina is very simple. France claims the right to recover its sovereignty over Indochina."[63] In the 2 September DRV 'Independence Declaration', drafted and read by Hồ Chí Minh, the term sovereignty was not used, but it was argued that "our people have seized back Vietnam from the hands of the Japanese, not the French." If that was somehow inadequate, Hồ Chí Minh went on to abrogate "all colonial relations" with France, all treaties signed between France and Vietnam, all "special privileges" of France on Vietnamese territory.[64] The battle lines were already drawn, or so it seemed.

Actually, both de Gaulle in his 24 March Declaration, and Hồ Chí Minh in subsequent communications with American and French officials, had made it clear they were prepared to negotiate on the basis of *shared* sovereignty. The problem lay in de Gaulle's insistence on reestablishing French authority throughout Indochina before getting down to serious talk with anyone. This was an attitude shared by even de Gaulle's most liberal subordinates (Laurentie, Leclerc, Sainteny, Mus). From 10 August, perhaps recalling Francis Garnier's daring exploits of the 1870s, Sainteny in Kunming had ordered two Free French patrol boats to approach the coast near Haiphong and try to move upriver to Hanoi. They were fired upon, forced to retreat to Haiphong, and there detained by the Japanese. However, by the first days of September the boats were on the prowl again, getting involved in a shooting incident with a junk, seizing two small islands, sowing fear among local residents, eventually having one boat captured by the Việt Minh.[65] Although such actions were hardly a threat to the DRV government, they occurred in a strategically sensitive region, and they would have been taken by Hồ Chí Minh as a measure of French intent once larger naval forces became available. The Haiphong-Hongay area remained volatile for the next 14 months, until, on 23 November 1946, French warships opened fire in Haiphong harbor, killing an estimated 6000 people and making full-scale war inevitable.[66]

In September 1945, however, the most ominous events were occurring in Saigon. Cédile engaged in some preliminary discussions with Trần Văn Giàu and other members of the Nam Bộ Executive Committee, but his main preoccupation

was rearming the interned French soldiers and employing them side-by-side with British troops pending arrival of Gen. Leclerc's forces. Upon receiving weapons the internees went on a terrorist spree that outraged Vietnamese and deeply embarrassed both Cédile and Gen. Gracey. This was followed by a Bình Xuyên partisan attack on a French compound filled with unarmed civilians that left at least 150 dead. Henceforth the element of vicious revenge and counterrevenge became a vital part of events in Cochinchina, whatever leaders on both sides may have wished. News of the British-French coup in Saigon reached Hanoi very quickly, provoking large demonstrations, an increased sense of national solidarity, and deep concern among the DRV leadership about Allied intentions.

In his 24 March Declaration Gen. de Gaulle affirmed that "the five countries which make up the Indochinese Federation, and which are marked off from each other by civilization, race and traditions, will preserve their particular features within the Federation".[67] Already in April, however, an organization of Vietnamese residents in France had criticized the presumption that Vietnam should remain divided into three parts, Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina. Léon Pignon, collecting intelligence in Kunming in July, reported Việt Minh dissatisfaction on this same point.[68] De Gaulle was not closed to the idea of a single Vietnamese state, as can be seen from the secret plans he harbored for Prince Vĩnh San. However, when Laurentie, a key member of the interministerial secretariat, proposed in September that Adm. d'Argenlieu be allowed to grant the principle of Vietnamese unity, this was rejected by the Committee for Indochina.[69] Again, it was probably thought necessary to first reassert authority, then identify a suitable partner, and finally make appropriate concessions.

The Potsdam decision to let China occupy Indochina north of the 16th parallel caused some French analysts to give renewed attention to the politics of territorial subdivision. Thus, a 5 September telegram from the French Embassy in Chungking suggested that the Chinese occupation might offer an unforeseen opportunity to "exploit Cochinchinese particularism", and to establish a 'Moi' (tribal) district in the highlands of Annam.[70] Once Adm. d'Argenlieu established himself in Saigon and began taking counsel from old Indochina hands this sort of thinking gained ground rapidly. Even Paul Mus could be found travelling in Col. Massu's column to Tây Ninh to try to split the Cao Đài away from the Việt Minh.[71] On 16 November the Parti Cochin-

chinois materialized in Saigon, dedicated to regional autonomy. On 1 December an armored column swept into Ban Mê Thuột, dubbed the 'Moi' capital by the French.[72] It was an article of faith among administrators that the backward tribal peoples would need French protection from the Vietnamese in any future Indochina Federation.

When trying to fathom French intentions, Hồ Chí Minh could also look towards Cambodia and Laos. What he saw must have been chilling. On 10 October a small Anglo-French detachment landed by surprise at Phnom Penh, forcibly disbanded the government that had taken power in August, and jailed the Premier, Sơn Ngọc Thành. By early January King Sihanouk had formally recognized French sovereignty once again.[73] In Laos immediately following Japanese capitulation, remnant French units under Col. Imfeld were reinforced by air in order to push into Luang Prabang to reestablish the status quo ante 9 March. They also approached the northern Annam border, causing Việt Minh units to mobilize.[74] However, in late September Col. Imfeld was in turn unceremoniously pushed aside by Chinese troops. That still left the French a small portion of Laos below the 16th parallel. With the help of their old client Prince Boun Oum, they soon established an airbase at Pakse, essential to any plans for a sudden coup in Hanoi. In February 1946, as mentioned previously, the Chinese allowed French troops from Yunnan to enter northern Laos and northwestern Tonkin. Hồ Chí Minh now had to reckon with French princers threats from south, west and east.

There is no doubt that the French would have tried to depose Hồ Chí Minh at any time prior to March 1946 if the Chinese had let them, and if it was possible to amass sufficient military force. The latter was no minor problem. At the optimum time in late August or September, the French had no ships or fighter aircraft of their own, only a handful of transport airplanes, and a few motley colonial infantry battalions in Yunnan. Only the United States could have provided the ships and transport aircraft to permit a rapid French buildup. Washington did gradually yield a few Liberty ships and C-47 aircraft, but in February Gen. Leclerc still had reason to worry about the size of his forces. Although a no-nonsense tactician, not a strategist, Leclerc was coming to realize that French means did not measure up to French ambitions in Indochina.

Gen. de Gaulle resigned on 20 January 1946, but the new government in Paris did not give new instructions. Among old French Indochina hands clustered around d'Argenlieu

it remained an article of faith that oriental peoples could not be persuaded without "le prestige de la puissance".[75] Ironically, in early August 1945 Paul Mus had argued almost the opposite, that force would not be accepted if it was devoid of virtuous context.[76] In the end, virtue never had a chance against the 'whiff of grape' mentality. Already in mid-October a member of Leclerc's staff had put the case unambiguously.[77]

> Why these public disturbances which are so deep-seated, so serious and so widespread? [...] because France was, and still is, thought of as a defeated country. Defeated in '40 and defeated in March '45. How do we go about dispelling this conviction, the sine qua non condition for reestablishing ourselves in this country? By showing our strength. It would therefore be a complete mistake to negotiate seriously with the representatives of the Việt-Minh before having shown this strength...

5. HOW DID THE DRV MANAGE IN ITS FIRST FOUR MONTHS TO SURVIVE NOT ONLY FOREIGN PRESSURES BUT FAMINE, BANKRUPTCY, POLITICAL DISPUTES AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONFUSION?

August 1945 was in the first instance a giant outpouring of emotion, and only secondarily a well-engineered seizure of power. Millions of Vietnamese considered the colonial period a bad dream and now looked passionately to a better future. Meanwhile, they took part in the festival of revolution, joining demonstrations, chanting slogans, cheering government representatives, mocking or abusing enemies, electing committees, participating in work brigades and literacy classes. A great deal of this activity was spontaneous, in the sense that individuals or small groups took the initiative on the basis of what they thought the revolution was all about, not in response to instructions from above. In a hundred different ways people indicated how the world had been turned upside down—burning local administrative records, jailing (and occasionally killing) former mandarins or police agents, flouting old laws, appropriating government property, wearing an assortment of clothing of recent French or Japanese vintage. Sometimes their behavior mystified revolutionary leaders of intellectual background, as when peasants in Hải Dương province hung "Down with French Colonialists!" banners upside down to make their point.

From their Leninist teachings, but also from practical experience with Vietnamese peasant upheavals in 1930-1931, ICP leaders were acutely aware of the need to channel revolutionary energy in appropriate directions without stifling

it, to encourage local initiative without jeopardizing nationwide objectives. The most immediate danger was that some citizens would try to kill unarmed French men, women and children in their midst. Perhaps fortunately for the DRV, the Japanese retained ultimate responsibility for protection of French nationals until relieved by Allied forces. However, because French civilians continued to live in scattered locations in each city they remained vulnerable to Vietnamese attack, as the killings at the Cité Heyrault in Saigon demonstrated in late September. It was thus a major DRV accomplishment in the other cities to avoid such incidents. Significantly, the government did not rely simply on armed guards or prohibitory edicts, but on vigorous public explanations of how any such behavior was inhumane, counterproductive and indeed counterrevolutionary. Needless to say, isolated killings when they did occur were blamed on provocateurs.

Another danger lay in revolutionary adherents taking such a millenarian view of their own society as to make a united front impossible. If there was too much mass hysteria, pompous moralizing, dichotomous reasoning, settling of old scores and quarrelling over local decisions, the revolution could tear itself apart from within before the foreigner attacked from without. One solution, of course, was to try to focus everyone's attention on the foreign threat(s). This was by no means a panacea, however, as all too often the charge of treason was levelled against individuals for reasons that had nothing to do with any current links with the enemy, or even evidence of future intent. In the South, particularly, individuals were jailed or executed as traitors on grounds that any outside adjudicators would have found preposterous, but which seemed quite adequate to the local cadres or villagers responsible. Sometimes the charge had nothing to do with politics per se, as when a member of the youth association of the Việt Minh in Sơn Tây (northern Vietnam) was hauled in front of a revolutionary court and sentenced to death for merely having expressed his love for a married woman. In this case the head of the newly formed Sơn Tây People's Committee (an ICP member) intervened in the nick of time, arguing that the man should instead be sent first to a hospital for sanity tests.[78]

Although ICP members played an important part, there simply were not enough of them to redirect and sustain people's energies nationwide. In August 1945 the ICP had about 5000 members, or one for every 4400 citizens.[79] Pos-

sibly one-third of those were still trying to reestablish contact with provincial or regional Party committees, having only recently emerged from jail or encountered difficulty in finding someone in authority who could vouch for them. It would take months for the Party to reorganize, much less recruit and train new members. Significantly, the ICP refused to sacrifice established membership criteria when shifting from being a communist party trying to seize power to one intent on defending it. For example, the Hanoi Party branch went from about sixty members in July to 200 in late 1945, to 400 in late 1946.[80] In November 1945, the ICP declared itself disbanded, pictured at the time as a substantial concession to foster national unity. In reality, however, a portion of the Party membership returned to strictly covert operations, both as contingency protection against Chinese or French attack, and to deal with domestic opposition.

In late 1945 the fate of the revolution lay with the mass organizations, local people's committees and the fledgling DRV state structure. Although ICP members were sprinkled through all these bodies, they did not yet have the capacity to control them. The vast majority of leaders saw themselves as unaffiliated with any political party, as selfless patriots eager to mobilize their followers in defense of the motherland. Many had joined Việt Minh "national salvation" (cứu quốc) associations just before seizure of power, often via Phan Anh's youth organizations. In rural areas it was more common for young, self-declared Việt Minh adherents to demand formation of people's committees to replace the colonial-tained village councils, though in practice the new body might include many from the old, with only the most obvious former lackeys of the French or Japanese being excluded. In the South there does not appear to have been much of a Việt Minh organization until August, and it faced almost overwhelming problems immediately. Nonetheless, by December 'the Resistance' in the South (not yet coterminous with the Việt Minh) had weathered the shock tactics of Gen. Leclerc and Col. Massu, and was beginning to sort itself out for a protracted guerrilla struggle. Although public attention in 1946 shifted increasingly to the North, both Hồ Chí Minh and Leclerc understood the importance of continued southern resistance in limiting French room for maneuver.

In the North, even before formation of the provisional government in late August, ICP leaders were cautioning subordinates that holding power was more difficult than

seizing it.[81] Nonetheless, the provisional government had a number of advantages not shared, for example, by the new Indonesian government taking shape at the same time. It already had a disciplined, experienced party at its core, a united front movement (the Việt Minh) of four years duration, a central army in existence for nine months, and a quasi-government functioning in six provinces since June. With roots in the countryside it had more reason to put confidence in mass action, less reason to fear mass chaos or sectarianism. Hồ Chí Minh thus had more capacity to shape events even before mounting the podium in Hanoi to declare independence than Sukarno and Hatta did after their similar proclamation.[82]

It is not generally known that most employees of the former colonial and Trần Trọng Kim administrations continued to work for the DRV in late 1945.[83] The provisional government apparently instructed Vietnamese public sector personnel to remain at their posts until further notice, and most complied. They included not only office workers but teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers, agronomists, technicians, drivers, and skilled laborers. Without their services it would have been impossible to keep the railroads, ferries, PTT, electric power and water pumping stations functioning. Some of these government personnel were also assigned to help reopen private French companies, for example mines, sawmills and plantations. Presumably most of the output of these enterprises was appropriated by the DRV until arrival of French forces in March 1946.

There was remarkable bureaucratic continuity in certain sectors.[84] As before, provincial officials sent a host of routine paperwork to Hanoi, including personnel rosters, government property audits, budget statements, and monthly and semi-annual operational reports. Because wartime shortages persisted, a considerable amount of time and effort was spent receiving and acting on requests for rationed supplies of rice, salt, petrol and cloth. For example, at some point prior to 19 August the government had assumed responsibility for allocating cloth to Indochina-Yunnan Railway employees and their families. Although a 2 August request for 5655.1 metres of silk cloth was politely rejected by the new government, it did agree to provide 5000 metres of rugged cotton cloth if accurate personnel rosters were submitted first.

In late September, employees of the train repair facility in Hanoi were allocated sufficient cloth to make one pair of shorts and one shirt per person. Just prior to the Việt

Minh taking power the Hanoi Industrial School had requested 1500 metres of blue cloth to uniform its 300 pupils; it was able to acknowledge delivery on 20 September. The Ministry of Youth was not so fortunate: an October request for 60 metres of red cloth and ten metres of yellow to make two huge DRV flags brought the reply that only 4.9 metres of red and one metre of yellow remained in government stocks. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs received 65 metres of unbleached linen to make five mattresses for the American delegation.

Money was a critical problem for the new government. Both the Japanese in August and the Chinese in late September firmly refused to turn over either the coffers or the currency printing plates of the Bank of Indochina. The Bank even possessed the national treasury of the former royal government, but when DRV representatives received an account statement on 3 September they discovered it amounted to only 1,230,720 piastres.[85] Nine days later the French director of the Bank, who had been permitted to continue at his desk, announced curtly that the DRV was bankrupt and hence ineligible to receive additional funds.[86] From a strictly financial point of view the DRV made matters worse for itself by abolishing the hated head tax, market and slaughter taxes, trade licenses, school fees, and land taxes for holdings below five mẫu (about 1.8 hectares). Given conditions of the day, however, the government would have encountered great difficulty collecting such taxes even if it wished.

Actually, government finances were not quite as dismal as the French hoped. When seizing provincial offices Việt Minh cadres had sometimes discovered sizable quantities of currency. In Thái Bình, for example, three million piastres was liberated from the provincial treasury and sent to Hanoi; Hồ Chí Minh returned 900,000 to help repair the dikes. As the money had originally been meant to reimburse landlords for rice already sold to the Japanese, some landlords remained unhappy, even when told that collective dike maintenance was in their own interest.[87] In Sơn Tây, the former head magistrate turned over one million piastres while declining an offer to join the new province revolutionary committee.[88] In early September an 'Independence Fund' was established, for groups and individuals to make patriotic contributions. Each government bureau encouraged its employees to donate. The Northern Region Surete Bureau, for example, contributed a total of 2154.21 piastres, with individual donations ranging from 4 to 20 piastres. Later

in September a 'Gold Week' was declared, citizens being urged to come forth with family valuables, have their names recorded, and receive public praise for helping defend the country. Most of the funds collected went to purchase arms and ammunition from the Chinese.[89]

Although such revenues helped to meet highest priority security needs, there was little or nothing left over for the government payroll. Employees had to get accustomed to living from week to week on the generosity of relatives, friends and sympathetic citizens. By November the strain was beginning to tell, at least for some. The government tried to address the problem by announcing that henceforth employees could apply for leave without pay in six months increments. Two months later, however, the Ministry of Interior cautioned bureau directors against recommending leave for employees without sufficient cause. By mid-January 1946 the flood of leave requests prompted another warning, which was repeated in May, June and November with increasing severity.

In November 1945, an embarrassing scandal surfaced in the Ministry of Finance, with the northern Vietnam director of taxation being arrested for trying to arrange sale of 500 tons of government sequestered salt to a Chinese company in exchange for a private commission of 150,000 piastres. Subsequent investigations revealed a whole network of shady dealings centered on some 12,000 tons of salt collected and stored in Nam Định province by the colonial gabelle prior to the March coup. Although a large dossier of incriminating documents was forwarded to the public prosecutor several months later, it seems the case had still not come to trial when the entire government evacuated the capital in December 1946.[90]

By the end of 1945 the DRV was already relying heavily on the Việt Minh mass organizations (militia, youth, workers, peasants, women, welfare, elders) for quasi-government tasks. Participation was part-time and voluntary, no one expected to be paid, and leaders tended to be highly motivated if not necessarily obedient or experienced. Not surprisingly, these local voluntary organizations often came into conflict with district and provincial administrative committees, who saw themselves as more authoritative. Much of the time of ministers and bureau heads in Hanoi was spent trying to resolve such disputes.

With foreign attack a constant concern, it is not surprising that the militia (tự vệ) assumed increasing importance. Besides drilling, attending training sessions, standing

guard and patrolling, militia men and women were expected to keep an eye out for spies, saboteurs and other enemies of the revolution. Although each village or neighbourhood militia unit was supposed to obey the local elected people's committee, it seems clear that some militia leaders marched to their own drum until well into 1946. Units in the Haiphong-Hongai-Mongcai area posed persistent problems for the authorities, perhaps because of the earlier proliferation of bandit gangs (thổ phỉ) and smugglers.

Rather than try to impose tight control on all militia personnel, which would have been impossible, the ICP quickly devised a system for identifying and recruiting suitable individuals for promotion to elite shock units, armed by the Ministry of Defense, quartered in key locations, and dependent on popular donations of food. In late 1945 this strategy was still limited to Hanoi, which already had a pool of more than 10,000 militia men and women to draw from.[91] A training school was established, and graduates took part in propaganda work and training of other militia units. Some individuals were further promoted into either the regular army (Vệ Quốc Đoàn) or the DRV's new secret civilian intelligence and security organization (Trinh Sát), which appears to have concentrated in late 1945 and early 1946 on neutralizing the Vietnam Nationalist Party and Vietnam Revolutionary Alliance.

The ICP did not rely solely on organization to channel revolutionary impulses. Of equal importance was direct communication by means of radio, newspapers, leaflets, mass meetings and small group encounters with top-level leaders. The master of all forms of direct communication was Hồ Chí Minh, who, by means of voice inflection, mannerism, pithy phrases, undeniable logic, and sincere interest in each person he talked to, quickly became uncontested 'uncle' to the entire nation.[92] Thousands of personal petitions were mailed directly to Hồ Chí Minh, asking for redress of grievances past or present; the government organized a special inspectorate to try to follow up on each one. Stories about Hồ Chí Minh also circulated widely by word-of-mouth, some humorous but none uncomplimentary. People desperately wanted a symbol of Vietnamese character in the face of adversity, an expression of their unity; Hồ Chí Minh not only understood this need but played the role with consummate skill. Without him, it is most unlikely that such long-standing enemies of the ICP as the Catholic bishops, members of the royal family, wealthy merchants and landlords would have repeatedly affirmed their support

for the DRV.

Hồ Chí Minh's Minister of Propaganda was Trần Huy Liệu, a nationally known writer, indeed in many ways the personification of the new intelligentsia which had done so much to prepare the ideological ground for revolution during the previous two decades. His office poured out a steady stream of patriotic hyperbole and anticolonial invective. Music, poetry, art and drama were also put at the service of the state. The French in Saigon tried more than once to persuade the Chinese to close down or censor Radio Hanoi, arguing that it made their work south of the 16th parallel all the more difficult, which was undoubtedly true. Doubtless Trần Huy Liệu's propaganda line was provocative, but no more so than many French statements emanating from Saigon or Paris. Both sides became prisoners of their own rhetoric to some degree, a fact that would make implementation of any future diplomatic accord most difficult.

The DRV survived its trials of late 1945 because it had the capacity to take some effective actions and to discourage disastrous behavior on the part of people celebrating the end of the old regime. More fundamentally, it conveyed a sense of momentum, of future promise, of growing ability to deal with a most threatening environment. It could not control what the Chinese and French might do in 1946, but it was methodically creating the context whereby either a negotiated settlement or war would preserve Vietnamese independence.

NOTES

1. Kiyoko Kurusu Nitz, "Japanese Military Policy towards French Indochina during the Second World War: the Road to the **Meigo Sakusen** (9 March 1945)", **Journal of Southeast Asian Studies** (JSEAS), vol. xiv, no 2 (Sept. 1983), pp. 328-53. Masaya Shiraishi, "La Présence Japonaise en Indochine (1940-1945)", in Paul Isoart (ed.), **Indochine Française 1940-1945** (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982), pp. 215-41. Ralph B. Smith, "The Japanese Period in Indochina and the Coup of 9 March 1945", JSEAS, vol. ix, no 2 (Sept. 1978), pp. 268-301.
2. Walter La Feber, "Roosevelt, Churchill and Indochina, 1942-45", **American Historical Review**, vol. 80, no 5 (Dec. 1975), pp. 1277-95. Christopher Thorne, **Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain and the War against Japan, 1941-1945** (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978), pp. 332-54, 450-73, 497-633. William R. Louis, **Imperialism at Bay, 1941-1945: The U.S. and the Decolonization of the British Empire** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 27-47, 274-86, 475-96, 532-47.

3. Huỳnh Kim Khánh, **Vietnamese Communism 1925-1945** (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 256-325. Pierre Brocheux, "L'occasion favorable 1940-1945: Les politiques vietnamiennes pendant la seconde guerre mondiale", in Paul Isoart (ed.), **Indochine Française**, pp. 131-71. David G. Marr, "World War II and the Vietnamese Revolution", in Alfred W. McCoy (ed.), **Southeast Asia Under Japanese Occupation** (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1980), pp. 125-58.
4. Although it is still not possible to link this position with individual ICP leaders, we know it existed by the repeated condemnations in subsequent ICP publications. Also, Japanese sources speak of substantive discussions with Việt Minh leaders and/or intermediaries. Kiyoko Kurusu Nitz, "Independence without Nationalists? The Japanese and Vietnamese Nationalism during the Japanese Period, 1940-45", **JSEAS**, vol. xv, no 1 (Mar. 1984), p. 124. If the Pacific War had continued for at least another year, which was the top-level Allied strategic estimate as of June 1945, the ICP might well have been forced to reconsider its non-cooperation policy or risk being finessed by some coalition of entirely non-communist nationalists. Of course, successful testing of an atomic device at Alamogordo in July, and President Truman's decision to atom-bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki, suddenly changed everyone's calculations.
5. Archives Nationales [hereafter AN], DOM (Aix) C.R. 141, GF2 and GF4.
6. Various issues of **Opinion-Impartial**, as cited in Ralph B. Smith, "The Japanese Period", p. 290.
7. Messages sent to the Tonkin Khâm Sai by most province mandarins reported 401,306 deaths between 1 January and 20 May 1945. However, many officials emphasized their inability to obtain figures from particular districts or villages. Also, deaths occurring in northern Annam, where the famine struck severely as well, were not reported to Hanoi. AN, DOM (Aix) C.R. 141, GF2.
8. AN, DOM (Aix) C.R. 141.
9. Some of these groups may have worked under Komaki Oomiya, a Japanese Foreign Ministry officer who organized some food distribution and pick-up of dead bodies in the streets of Hanoi. Nitz, "Independence without Nationalists?", p. 127.
10. AN, DOM (Aix) C.R. 141, Phòng Viên Chức dossier.
11. AN, DOM (Aix) C.R. 141, Congés du personnel Indochine.
12. Trần Trọng Kim, **Một Cơn Gió Bụi** (Saigon, 1969), pp. 57-8.
13. AN, DOM (Aix), C.R. 141, caisse 147.
14. AN, DOM (Aix) C.R. 141, GF2.
15. Hoàng Quang Khánh, et al, **Căn Cứ Địa Việt Bắc** (Việt Bắc, 1976), pp. 117-24. Ban Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử Đảng Quảng Ninh, **Sơ Thảo Lịch Sử Cách Mạng Tháng Tám tỉnh Quảng Ninh** (Quảng Ninh, 1970), pp. 30-4.
16. **Du Việt Minh au Gouvernement Hồ Chí Minh**, as quoted in Ellen J. Hammer, **The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955** (Stanford, 1966), pp. 49-50.
17. Trần Trọng Kim, pp. 77, 82-3.

18. Ibid., pp. 86-8.
19. Smith, pp. 293-4. Trần Trọng Kim, pp. 78-84, 89-90.
20. Phạm Khắc Hòe, **Từ Triều Đình Huế đến Chiến Khu Việt Bắc** (Hanoi: NXB Hà Nội, 1983), pp. 37-8.
21. Pierre Brocheux, "L'occasion favorable, 1940-1945", in Paul Isoart (ed.), **L'Indochine Française**, pp. 166-7. Phạm Khắc Hòe, pp. 39-48. Trần Trọng Kim, pp. 84-5, 88-9. Philippe Devillers, **Histoire du Viet-Nam de 1940 à 1952** (Paris, 1952), p. 138.
22. Phạm Khắc Hòe, pp. 51-65.
23. Trần Trọng Kim, pp. 92-4.
24. Devillers, pp. 139-40. Trần Huy Liệu, "Tước ấn kiếm của Hoàng Đế Bảo Đại", **Ngiên Cứu Lịch Sử**, no 18 (Sept. 1960), pp. 46-51. Phạm Khắc Hòe, pp. 68-79.
25. AN, SOM Indochine NF C. 122, D. 1106. DGER report, "Activités anti-Françaises dans le 2è Territoire Militaire d'Oct. 1943 à Mai 1945", 1 June 1945.
26. Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam, **Chặt Xiềng** (Hanoi, 1960), p. 12.
27. Hoàng Quang Khánh, et al, p. 123. Archimedes Patti, **Why Vietnam?** (Berkeley, 1980), p. 128.
28. Devillers, p. 136. Patti, pp. 159, 553 n 14. Peter Dunn, "An Interpretation of Documentation and Oral Primary Source Materials for the Period Sept. 1945 until May 1946 in the Region of Cochinchina and Southern Annam", Ph.D. thesis, SOAS, 1980, ch. 5, p. 13.
29. Patti, pp. 167-8.
30. Dunn, ch. 5, pp. 15-9.
31. Nitz, "Independence without Nationalists?", p. 129, refers to the Japanese having already stored enough food to feed themselves for three years. This is questionable, unless they had in mind the overflowing Mekong delta silos. If they had already stored rice in remote contingency defense areas in Cambodia and Laos, there is no record of anyone carrying it back to where the troops stationed in August.
32. Patti, pp. 214, 556 n, suggests a different explanation: some branch of the Japanese establishment in Indochina was engaged in last-minute peculation.
33. Patti, p. 137, says he received unofficial word in Kunming on 10 August. The Tân Trào HQ issued a military directive at 2300 on 13 August stating Japan had capitulated eleven hours earlier. **Chặt Xiềng**, pp. 73-4.
34. Ban Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử Đảng Thành Ủy Hà Nội, **Cuộc Vận Động Cách Mạng Tháng Tám ở Hà Nội** (Hanoi, 1970), pp. 113-46.
35. Hoàng Quang Khánh, et al, pp. 138-41. Needless to say, it would help to be able to compare such Vietnamese accounts with Japanese sources if they exist.
36. Maj. Thomas, "Report on Deer Mission", 17 Sept. 1945, reprinted in **Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations U.S. Senate**, 9-11 May 1972 (Washington, 1973), pp. 251-64.
37. Patti, pp. 195-9. **Cuộc Vận Động**, pp. 144-5. Hoàng Quang Khánh, et al,

pp. 141-3. Trần Trung Thành, "Nhớ mãi Hà nội", in **Hà Nội Chiến Đấu** (Hanoi, 1964), pp. 13-6.

38. These stocks allegedly included six light aircraft, bombs, ammunition and petrol dumps, plus an equipment repair facility. Nguyễn Quốc Hồng, "Những ngày khởi nghĩa", in Ban Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử Hà Tây, **Hồi Ký Cách Mạng Hà Tây**, vol. 2, pp. 48-82.
39. Apparently the killer was later released by request of the DRV government in Hanoi. Ngô Huy Đồng, "Khởi nghĩa Thái Bình", in **Thái Bình Khởi Nghĩa**, pp. 129-59.
40. **Sơ Thảo Lịch Sử Cách Mạng Tháng Tám tỉnh Quảng Ninh** (Quảng Ninh, 1970), p. 42.
41. Either just before or just after those demonstrations, Marshal Terauchi told the head of the Southern Region Committee, Trần Văn Giàu: "Faites ce que vous voudrez, moi, de toutes manières, je serai pendu." Brocheux, p. 166.
42. Even as late as January 1947 the French 'Service de Documentation Extérieure et Contre-Espionnage' compiled a large study premised in part on alleged continuing Japanese efforts with the Việt Minh to undermine the white man's position in Indochina. AN, SOM Indochine NF C. 138-139. D. 1249.
43. **Chung yang jih pao** (Kunming), 25 August 1945.
44. Chu Hsieh, **Yueh-nan shou hsiang jih chi** (Shanghai, 1947), pp. 2-4.
45. Patti, pp. 287-8.
46. US National Archives, OSS (R & A) Report No 3275, 11 Ooctober 1945.
47. Archives Nationales, SOM (Paris) Indochine NF C. 134 D. 1229.
48. This is evident, for example, in the memoirs of Nghiêm Kế Tổ, **Việt Nam Máu Lửa** (Saigon, 1954), pp. 28-87.
49. King C. Chen, **Vietnam and China, 1938-1954** (Princeton, 1969), pp. 115-54, describes the Chinese occupation period with the benefit of some Taiwan archival sources and interviews, but unfortunately does not examine Chinese attitudes, intentions or policy debates in any detail.
50. Hồ Chí Minh told Maj. Patti in late September that contingency planning was under way for withdrawal from Hanoi and protracted guerrilla warfare. He phrased it in terms of a French coup, but the point could apply equally to the Chinese. Patti, pp. 348-9.
51. Apparently the first shipment of 2000 tons of rice arrived by sea on 8 November, and was mostly consumed by Chinese troops. Jacques Mordal, **Marine Indochine** (Paris, 1953), pp. 118-9.
52. AN, SOM Indochine NF C. 133 D. 1211. Also C. 209 D. 1572. Raoul Salan, **Mémoires: Fin d'un Empire**, vol. 1 (Paris, 1970), pp. 258-87, 359. Cầm Trọng, **Người Thái ở Tây Bắc Việt Nam** (Hanoi, 1978), pp. 522-6.
53. Salan, pp. 306-59.
54. In the month of February 1945 this message traffic peaked at 3000 codewords per day. Claude Hesse d'Alzon, "L'Armée française d'Indochine pendant la seconde guerre mondiale", in Isoart (ed.), p. 111.
55. AN, SOM Indochine NF C. 121 O. 1102.

56. **L'Armée française au combat** (Paris), issues No 2 (April 1945), No 3 (August 1945); the cover of a special issue on "Indochine: Terre Française" (late 1944?) has a painting of a Sherman tank with a cross of Lorraine crashing through bamboo shrub in front of Jayavarman VII's massive statue at Angkor.
57. Paul Isoart, "Aux origines d'une guerre: l'Indochine Française (1940-1945", in Isoart (ed.), pp. 54-5.
58. AN, SOM Indochine NF C. 122 D. 1106. DGER report 1 June 1946.
59. AN, SOM Indochine NF C. 184 D. 1219.
60. AN, SOM Indochine NF C. 123 D. 1108. Report of Royère, no date, but probably July 1945.
61. Institut Charles de Gaulle, **Le Général de Gaulle et l'Indochine, 1940-1946** (Paris, 1982), pp. 30-1, 35, 174-9, 199-200. Some French officials suspected British foul play in the crash.
62. AN, SOM Indochine NF C. 133 D. 1211. DGER report 3 September 1945.
63. **Le Général de Gaulle**, p. 68.
64. **Chặt Xiềng**, pp. 92-5. Of course he did not mention that Bao Dai had said most of this as well several weeks earlier.
65. Mordal, pp. 115-8. **Sơ Thảo Lịch Sử ... Quảng Ninh**, p. 45.
66. The estimate is from the French Navy. Paul Mus, **Témoignage Chrétien**, 12 August 1949.
67. **Le Général de Gaulle**, p. 256.
68. AN, SOM Indochine NF C. 123 D. 1108. 12 July 1945 telegram to Paris.
69. **Le Général de Gaulle**, p. 15.
70. AN, SOM Indochine NF C. 133 D. 1211.
71. Jean Julien Fonde, **Traitez à tout prix** (Paris, 1971), p. 62.
72. Devillers, pp. 164-5.
73. **Le Général de Gaulle**, p. 33.
74. Ban Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử Đảng Tỉnh Ủy Nghệ An, **Sơ Thảo Lịch Sử Tỉnh Đảng Bộ Nghệ An** (Nghệ An, 1967), pp. 90-101.
75. **L'Armée française au combat**, special issue, "France d'Asie", June 1946, p. 13.
76. AN, SOM Indochine NF C. 184 D. 1219.
77. Fonds Maréchal Leclerc, as quoted in Isoart (ed.), p. 68. 13 October 1945 memo from Col. Fay.
78. Nguyễn Quốc Hồng, p. 78.
79. Hồ Chí Minh, "Our Party has struggled...", in **A Heroic People** (Hanoi, 1965), p. 12.
80. **Cuộc Vận Động**, pp. 111, 151-2.
81. See, for example, Nguyễn Quốc Hồng, pp. 71-3, quoting the Sơn Tây Party Secretary, Lê Quảng Hoa, who returned from a training session carrying that basic message about 23 August.
82. Barbara S. Harvey, "Diplomacy and Armed Struggle: A Comparison of the Indonesian and Vietnamese Revolutions", paper presented at the Asian Studies of Australia Conference in Melbourne, May 1976.
83. An exception is Ralph Smith, "The Work of the Provisional Government of

Vietnam, August-December 1945", **Modern Asian Studies**, vol. 12, No 4 (1978), pp. 571-609. A compilation contained in AN, DOM (Aix) C.R. 141, GF 4, suggests that about 80 per cent of Tonkin administration employees were still working in early 1946.

84. The following remarks are based on a small sample viewing of AN, DOM, 'Archives du Gouvernement de Fait', C.R. 141 à C.R. 154 (uncatalogued), which appears to be mostly files kept by the Tonkin Viceroy's office before 19 August and the DRV's Northern Region Administrative Committee afterward. They are said to have been captured by French troops in late December 1946.
85. A July budget statement, contained in AN, DOM (Aix) C.R. 141, GF 5, reports 9,859,873 piastres in the Tonkin Khâm Sai account alone. By way of comparison, the French, before they were deposed in March, estimated 299.7 million piastres in expenditures for all Indochina in 1945. Võ Nhân Trí, **Croissance Economique de la République Démocratique du Viet Nam** (Hanoi, 1967), p. 110.
86. Patti, p. 287.
87. Ngô Huy Đồng, pp. 155-6.
88. Nguyễn Quốc Hồng, pp. 68-9.
89. Patti, pp. 337-9. At the time it was announced that 129 kg of gold and 1.5 million piastres had been donated. **Cuộc Vận Động**, p. 162, indicates the real figures were 2210 taels (83.54 kg) of gold, 2,551,000 piastres, and 920 tons of rice. Võ Nguyên Giáp, **Unforgettable Days** (Hanoi, 1975), p. 76, says that the 'Independence Fund' and 'Gold Week' together netted 370 kg of gold and 20 million piastres. It is widely believed that a portion of the gold was used to make an ornate opium pipe set to present as a gift to Gen. Lu Han.
90. AN, DOM (Aix) C.R. 141, GF 1, Nam Định dossier.
91. **Cuộc Vận Động**, pp. 154-5.
92. Some of this skill is captured in print in **Những Lời Kêu Gọi của Hồ Chủ Tịch**, vol. 1 (Hanoi, second printing, 1958), pp. 14-62.