
DOI: 10.31696/2618-7302-2022-4-030-041

DECOLONIZATION IN ASIA DURING THE EARLY COLD WAR ERA: THE CASE OF VIETNAM, 1945–1954

Luong Thi Hong¹

After the Second World War, two confrontation systems led by the United States and the Soviet Union were established. The two superpowers played decisive roles that affected all international relations, involving many regions and nations in a new form of war — the Cold War. Although it was called the ‘Cold War’, the atmosphere of the world was not ‘cold’ at all. The local conflicts between the U.S. forces and the Soviet Union’s allies happened in many regions. With the formation and competition between communism and capitalism, Vietnam’s decolonization struggle was put into a spiral and affected by the profound influence of this context. This article draws on Vietnamese official documents and materials to show that the process of decolonization in Vietnam lasted longer and fiercer because of not only the French government’s determination to reestablish its old colonial rule but also the Cold War. The fear of communism coverage throughout Asia and the world led to the ballooned aid from Washington to the French army in Indochina during the 1950s. Meanwhile, China and the Soviet Union provided military and economic assistance to Vietnam. The Vietnamese struggle for independence became not only a centre of the Cold War in Asia but also the critical front worldwide and «hot» competition to determine the result of the two rival ideological systems. The Cold War impacted the Anti-French resistance in Vietnam, and by contrast, the Vietnamese struggle had a profound impact on France. During the war in Indochina, the international image of France was damaged and the political situation was unstable. The decolonization process, therefore, forced the Paris government into seeking solutions to stabilize the political and economic situation as well as enhance its prestigious position and integrate into Europe.

Keywords: Decolonization, Cold War, the First Indochina War, Vietnam, Asia

For citation: Luong Thi Hong. Decolonization in Asia During the Early Cold War Era: the Case of Vietnam, 1945–1954. Vestnik Instituta vostokovedeniia RAN. 2022. 4. Pp. 30–41. DOI: 10.31696/2618-7302-2022-4-030-041

ДЕКОЛОНИЗАЦИЯ АЗИИ В РАННИЙ ПЕРИОД ХОЛОДНОЙ ВОЙНЫ НА ПРИМЕРЕ ВЬЕТНАМА, 1945–1954

Луонг Тхи Хонг

После Второй мировой войны сложились две системы противостояния во главе с США и Советским Союзом. Две сверхдержавы сыграли решающую роль, которая повлияла на все международные

¹ Luong Thi Hong, Researcher, Deputy Head of Department, Institute of History, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences; hongflower@gmail.com.

Луонг Тхи Хонг, научный сотрудник, заместитель заведующего кафедрой, Институт истории, Академия общественных наук Вьетнама; hongflower@gmail.com.
ORCID: 0000-0001-8806-6191

отношения, вовлекая многие регионы и страны в новую форму войны — холодную войну. Хотя это и называлось «холодной войной», атмосфера мира вовсе не была «холодной». Локальные конфликты между войсками США и союзниками Советского Союза происходили во многих регионах. С формированием и конкуренцией между коммунизмом и капитализмом борьба за деколонизацию Вьетнама закрутилась по спирали и подверглась глубокому влиянию этого контекста. В данной статье на основе вьетнамских официальных документов и материалов показано, что процесс деколонизации во Вьетнаме длился дольше и жестче не только из-за решимости французского правительства восстановить свое старое колониальное правление, но и из-за холодной войны. Страх перед освящением коммунизма в Азии и мире привел к резкому увеличению помощи из Вашингтона французской армии в Индокитае в 1950-х годах. Тем временем Китай и Советский Союз оказывали военную и экономическую помощь Вьетнаму. Борьба вьетнамцев за независимость стала не только центром холодной войны в Азии, но и решающим фронтом во всем мире и «горячей» конкуренцией, чтобы определить результат двух соперничающих идеологических систем. Холодная война повлияла на антифранцузское сопротивление во Вьетнаме, и, напротив, вьетнамская борьба оказала глубокое влияние на Францию. Во время войны в Индокитае международный имидж Франции был подорван, политическая ситуация была нестабильной. Таким образом, процесс деколонизации вынудил парижское правительство искать решения для стабилизации политической и экономической ситуации, а также для укрепления своего престижного положения и интеграции в Европу.

Ключевые слова: деколонизация, холодная война, Первая Индокитайская война, Вьетнам, Азия

Для цитирования: Луонг Тхи Хонг. Деколонизация Азии в ранний период холодной войны на примере Вьетнама, 1945–1954. Вестник Института востоковедения РАН. 2022. № 4. С. 30–41. DOI: 10.31696/2618-7302-2022-4-030-041

THE VIETNAMESE STRUGGLE FOR DECOLONIZATION

Over thousands of years of history, the Vietnamese people defeated countless foreign invaders to protect their independence and sovereignty. French colonialists began to conquer Vietnam in 1858, and with the treaty of 1884 signed by the Nguyễn dynasty, France established a colonial rule throughout the whole territory of Vietnam. From the beginning days, the anti-French movements took place continuously and vigorously in various ways with different trends: from national struggles led by patriotic Confucian intellectuals to the Vietnamese who were educated in the Western countries. All of these efforts were defeated by the French, but the desire for an independent country was continuous. After approaching Marxism-Leninism, Nguyễn Ái Quốc (later to be known as Hồ Chí Minh) had the determination to liberate his country by this ideology. He established the Communist Party of Vietnam in February 1930 (then it was renamed Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in October 1930), leading to numerous anti-colonial movements in Vietnam. Following the political strategies, the ICP immediately set goals of the Vietnamese revolution as national independence and land for the tillers [Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam, 1998, p. 2–3]. Because of the Second World War (1939–45), the destiny of Vietnam was radically changed along with the world situation. In May 1941, Hồ Chí Minh founded the Việt Nam Độc lập Đồng Minh (the League for Independence of Vietnam, commonly known as Việt Minh) to unify all the Vietnamese to fight together for national independence [Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam, 2000(1), p. 461].

At the end of the Second World War (1945), a series of international conferences were organized to resolve the distribution of interests and establish a new global order. Two such conferences were of importance: Yalta conference (February 1945) and Potsdam conference (July 1945), in which

the great powers decided to split up the Indochina peninsula into two occupied zones, taking the sixteenth parallel as a boundary. The North was assigned to the Chinese Kuomintang army, the South would be administered by British troops.

In mid-August 1945, as soon as the Japanese emperor surrendered, the Vietnamese national uprising led by the Việt Minh took place quickly and successfully throughout the country. The revolutionary government was established, headed by the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) with 15 members headed by Hồ Chí Minh. The DRV was proclaimed on September 2, 1945 [Chính phủ Việt Nam, 2008, p. 42]. The Declaration of Independence of DRV stated that:

(Vietnam) break off all relations of a colonial character with France; we repeal all the international obligation that France has so far subscribed to on behalf of Vietnam, and we abolish all the special rights the French have unlawfully acquired in our Fatherland. The whole Vietnamese people, animated by a common purpose, are determined to fight to the bitter end against any attempt by the French colonialists to reconquer the country... Vietnam has the right to be a free and independent country — and in fact, it is so already. And, thus the entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property to safeguard their independence and liberty [Việt Minh, 1945].

In Vietnam, the situation was quite complicated because DRV declared its independence before the Allies' entering, therefore, the powers were not able to set up indigenous governments and had to compromise with other forces to overthrow the DRV government. At that time, the newly DRV had to face a number of challenges. The country was devastated after the war and the Great Famine of 1945 afflicting the northern region left between one and two million victims (Văn Tạo and Furuta Motoo, 2005; Gunn, 2014). The flood in August 1945 broke dikes in nine northern provinces, causing a third of the cultivated area severely damaged. The damage triggered by this flood was estimated to cost 13 million VND. The three provinces of north-central Vietnam also lost their crops in about half of the area. After the flood, the prolonged drought left 50% of the land area in North Vietnam uncultivated [Chính phủ Việt Nam, 2008, p. 48–49]. A new famine threatened the new government. Moreover, the treasury of the revolutionary State was nearly empty because the national budget at that time was only 1,230,000 VND of which more than half was ruined [Ngân hàng Nhà nước Việt Nam, 2016, p. 15]. Meanwhile, the new revolutionary government was born, without any management experience. In some places, the government was not in the hands of revolutionaries. The standing army was in the process of construction, not receiving much training. Most commanders lacked military knowledge, combat experience as well as weapons.

The greatest threat to the DRV government at that time was the determination of the French in re-occupying their old colonies. In the North, Kuomintang forces were amassed to make the Japanese surrender in Hanoi and most cities and towns from the Vietnam — China border to the sixteenth parallel. The political situation in Southern Vietnam was more serious. On September 13, 1945, following the Potsdam agreement, British-Indian soldiers arrived in Saigon to disarm Japanese troops. With the backing of the British command, nearly 2,000 French troops were released [Bộ Ngoại giao, 2005, p. 45]. In addition to the forces of Kuomintang, British and French forces, there were still about 5,000 disarmed Japanese troops in Vietnam at this time [Bộ Quốc phòng, 1994, p. 45]. On September 23, 1945, a clash broke out in Saigon, marking the return of French colonial rule in Vietnam.

With the establishment of the DRV, the Vietnamese continuously struggled for their independence and sovereignty [Văn phòng Quốc hội, 2016, p. 72]. Hồ Chí Minh sent an appeal to the United Nations to call for a solution for the Indochina issue and accused the French government of ignoring any Vietnamese offer for peace in Indochina. The president of DRV confirmed that during the Second World War, when the French government surrendered and gave the control of Indochina to

Japan, colluding with the Japanese troops against the Allies, the Vietnamese people went along with the Ally. When the Japanese were forced to surrender, the Vietnamese took power from the Japanese army and proclaimed the establishment of DRV. However, since September 23, 1945, the French troops under the shadow of the Allies to disarm the Japanese soldiers, entered South Vietnam with a desire to reconquer its old colony. With goodwill, the DRV government agreed to sign a preliminary agreement with the French government on March 6, 1946. According to the agreement, DRV accepted to be a member of an Indochinese Federation but the French government had to recognize DRV as an independent nation. Vietnamese people sincerely wish for peace but also determined to fight to protect the most sacred rights: territorial integrity for homeland and independence for the nation [Hồ Chí Minh, 2011(1), p. 520].

Meanwhile, the French colonialists continued their military activities, causing clashes with Vietnamese soldiers in South and Central Vietnam. Both the Preliminary Agreement on March 6, 1946, and the Provisional Agreement on September 14, 1946, could not be a bridge for peace and national self-determination or for the process of decolonization in Vietnam at this time. In October 1946, the French bombarded Haiphong, aggressively preparing to carry out 'a coup script'. The fire of war throughout the country was inevitable because France has decided to fan it any time. It means that France determined to re-occupy its former colonies in Indochina while Vietnam proclaimed its independence.

Continue to hand over or fight? Independence, freedom or slavery? The emergency required Hồ Chí Minh's government to make a historical choice and a timely strategic decision to protect national independence and freedom. A series of negotiation meetings between Vietnam and France failed, and as a result, the first Indochina war was finally broken out on December 19, 1946. Hồ Chí Minh on behalf of the government issued an appeal urging all Vietnamese people to fight for national salvation on December 19, 1946. Vietnamese people believed that they 'died for the Fatherland and not to be a slave again'. In the appeal for Vietnamese resistance, Hồ Chí Minh firmly stated that:

We want peace so that we have to make concessions to French colonialists. But the more we make concessions the more French colonialists encroach upon our freedom because they want to reconquer our country. No! We are better off sacrificing everything than losing our country and becoming slaves [Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam, 2000(2), p. 160].

It is quite clear that this war, for the Vietnamese, was an armed conflict against the French colonial invaders with the purpose of safeguard the national unity and independence that they had to pay nearly one hundred years to regain and newly establish [Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam, 2000(3), p. 150].

The decolonization in Vietnam, therefore, was through a brutal process. The war took place when there was a disparity between the forces of the French and the Việt Minh, but Vietnam actively and resolutely attacked with determination to follow President Hồ Chí Minh's appeal for resistance.

On the way to destroy the rule of colonialists, Hồ Chí Minh and his colleagues had to find out solutions to achieve national independence. At first, they saw no contradiction between their Communism and their fervent desire to restore Vietnam to the Vietnamese again [Logevall, 2012]. Besides seeking sympathy from the socialist bloc, Hồ Chí Minh also found out another way for his government to be recognized by capitalist powers. He sent eight telegrams and letters to the United States President Harry Truman, just in two years, asking for the recognition from Washington for the national independence of Vietnam and DRV².

² List of eight letters written by Hồ Chí Minh to President Truman: (1): Letter to President Truman, dated September 24, 1945. (2): Message sent to President H. Truman dated October 17, 1945. (3): Letter to the President of the United States dated October 20, 1945. (4): Letter to the President of the United States dated November 2, 1945. (5): Letter to President Truman dated November 8, 1945. (6): Letter to President Truman dated November 22, 1945. (7): Letter to the U. S. President Harry Truman dated January 18, 1946, about the request of the United States and the United Nations to intervene and to have a solution before the war of invasion of the French colonialists in Vietnam. (8): The telegram to President Harry

Besides those eight letters, Hồ Chí Minh also sent notes to the Governments of the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom asking for urgent intervention to stop the bloodshed in South Vietnam and an urgent solution to the Indochina issue. Ho Chi Minh also sent a letter to the U. S. Secretary of State in November 1945 proposing to recognize the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and put an end to the bloody conflict in South Vietnam). Before 1950, Hồ Chí Minh and his government searched various ways to gain support from both communist and capitalist blocs for their desire for independence from colonial rule, but this call fell on deaf ears.

With the U.S. involvement in Indochina to support French troops, the Communist Party vigorously opposed this action [Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam, 2001(4), p. 254]. At the Second Congress of the Indochinese Communist Party (February 1951), in the Political Report, Hồ Chí Minh stated the main tasks of Vietnamese national resistance war were to ‘destroy the French colonial rule and defeat the American intervention, gain unity, complete independence, and protect world peace’ [Hồ Chí Minh, 2011(2), p. 37]. The official statements strongly confirmed the determination of the Vietnamese in the struggle to decolonization and attain full independence even though the presence of the U.S. in Indochina support the French. Therefore, the first Indochina war was the first and foremost Vietnamese struggle for decolonization.

THE COLD WAR AND ITS IMPACT ON THE VIETNAMESE STRUGGLE

Depending on the interests of great powers with two confrontation systems led by the United States and the Soviet Union, the capitalist and socialist systems were established after the Second World War. The United States and the Soviet Union played decisive roles that affected international relations, involving many regions and nations in a new form of war — the Cold War. Although it was called the ‘Cold War’, the atmosphere of the world was not ‘cold’ at all. The local conflicts between the U.S. forces and the Soviet’s allies happened in many regions. With the formation and competition between communism and capitalism, Vietnam’s decolonization struggle was spiralled and affected by the profound influence of this context.

For Asia, the concept of the ‘Cold War’ is more complicated. Its origins in Vietnam involved the aspirations of the colonial authorities to return their former colonies happening at the same time the wish of the local nationalist forces and communist parties for national independence [Hack and Wade, 2009, p. 441–448]. The Cold War in Asia reflected the conflicts and diplomatic rivalries between the two blocs. This confrontation had a significant influence on decolonization and nation-building in Asia. For long years, many Asian countries experienced the Cold War. Tensions and conflicts marked the relationships between many Asian countries and the United States and the Soviet Union in some cases [Vu and Wongsurawat, 2009, p. 7].

A series of continuous events happening in Asia from late 1949 and 1950 had a profound impact on the U.S. and Indochina policy. The politicians in Washington saw that the conflict in Indochina as a sign of the ideological confrontation between capitalism and communism. If Southeast Asia was controlled by communism, its impact would be felt throughout Asia and the world [Fifield, 1973, p. 71].

Nationalism, communism, decolonization and the Cold War were all parts of the First Indochina War. In the early 1950s, the international context changed dramatically. The two sides of the Cold War manifested firm determination. In Europe, the division of Eastern European socialism and Western European capitalism added an important ‘highlight’ to the establishment of the two states

Truman dated February 16, 1946, for the help to defend Vietnam’s independence from the French invasion suggested that Vietnam should be granted independence as the Philippines and fully cooperating with the United States.

(the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic). In Asia, the presence of two states on the Korean Peninsula (Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Republic of Korea) deepened the trace of a confrontational world. In particular, the declaration of the People's Republic of China (1949) led by China's Communist Party changed the world context, established a dominant position of socialism and created a new order in Asia [Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam, 2001(3), p. 223].

The climax of the tense situation in Asia was revealed when the Korean War was 'internationalized'. The United States and Chinese troops directly engaged in the Korean War. Thus, the war which broke out within boundaries of the two regions to unify a country turned the peninsula into a 'direct battlefield' between Chinese and American forces. It became a hot spot of the Cold War and reflected the confrontation between two halves of the Yalta order.

In the world divided into two hostile blocs, as any expansion for the communism camp was considered a loss for the 'free world', previously unimportant regions such as Indochina suddenly acquired a considerable meaning. The North Korean troops entering South Korea in June 1950 raised the American fears of communist expansion and heighten the importance of Vietnam [Herring, 2004, p. 18–21]. The battle on the Korean peninsula certainly deepened and intensified the United States' determination to prevent the spreading of communism in Indochina [Nojeim, 2006, p. 122–146].

The Korean War and the international situation relevant to this war were also essential factors in changing the United States' policy on Asia in general and Vietnam in particular. It is assumed that the Korean War affected the United States' policy towards Indochina in an indirect way but in an important form. The Korean War influenced the United States' strategy and facilitated its priority order in Asia. Indochina was a key for the United States to protect Southeast Asia. After the communist success in China (1949) and the outbreak of the Korean War (1950), the Truman administration made the first step towards directing the United States' involvement in Indochina. It is clear that the Korean War, together with anxieties about the intentions of the establishment of communist's government in China, reinforced Washington's commitment [Logevall, 2013, p. 9].

Truman revealed the domino theory that 'If we let South Korea down, the Soviets will keep right on going and swallow up one piece of Asia after another', which would eventually trigger a collapse in Japan and Europe [Offner, 1999, p. 148].

Under those subjective and objective factors, since 1950, Indochina increasingly occupied a critical position in the strategy of the United States, China and the Soviet Union, although, before 1950, Indochina was still not considered a central area but just a 'peripheral' area of the Cold War.

By these considerations, since 1950, the United States started to intervene in Vietnam to contain communism and prevent it from spreading throughout Asia. The Cold War was likely the main motivation urging the United States, China and the Soviet Union to intervene in such a local struggle for decolonization in French Indochina. Therefore, the Cold War formed the way the Indochina War erupted and significantly affected its outcome.

'The Cold War was an early and constant preoccupation, presenting a range of problems, challenges, and opportunities... To a degree not fully evident at the time, the superpower's actions in Indochina in 1950 had the effect of intensifying the struggle and prolonging it, and of reducing (but not eliminating) the freedom of action of both France and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam' [Leffler and Westad, 2010, p. 281–304].

Because of the importance of Indochina, it was clear that the U.S. could not ignore the Indochina war of France. The U. S. had two options: if it had helped France, it would contain communism, but it would also certainly create an anti-American mentality in Southeast Asia and at the same time, create opportunities for China and the Soviet Union in this area. If America did not help France,

communism would certainly prevail in Asia, then it might adversely affect the stability in Europe, even destroying the U.S. global strategy. Ultimately, the Americans on the pretext of ‘undertaking the mission to protect the free world, against the threat of communism’ chose the first option: supporting the French. In February 1950, the Truman government approved the aid program and since May 1950, the U.S. began sending direct military equipment to the associated countries in Indochina and France. The Military Assistance Advisory Group was established on August 2, 1950, marking the growing U.S. connection to the French war in Vietnam [Duiker, 1994, p. 90–95].

It is obvious that because of the Cold War, the superpowers were forced to intervene into a local conflict. Therefore, from a ‘top-down’ perspective, the Cold War impacted the Vietnamese decolonization profoundly. On the other hand, the Vietnamese forces and French power also took the Cold War as a chance to gain more U.S. or Soviet aid for their determination [Boden, 2008, p. 110–128].

During the 1950s, the aid from Washington to the French army in Indochina ballooned to 150 million dollars. By early 1951, they were receiving more than 7,200 tons of military equipment a month [Hastings, 2018]. In fact, by the end of 1953, the United States provided about 80% of the war cost in Indochina [Kaufman, 1986, p. 349] a billion dollars a year.

As the growing intensity of the war in Indochina, the number of directly involved soldiers reached its peak. By 31 December 1953, there were 160,000 soldiers in the Vietnamese armed forces, including 112,000 regular troops and 47,00 auxiliary forces. There were also 70,000 Vietnamese directly serving in the CEFEO and another 20,000 guerrilla troops employed by French intelligence [Lawrence and Logevall, 2007, p. 217].

The decolonization process in Indochina accelerated and prolonged the Cold War, transforming this local conflict into a ‘hot’ war. Only on the battle of Điện Biên Phủ, the French lost 1,500 men, 4,000 wounded and 10,000 taken prisoner, while Việt Minh casualties amounted to some 8,000 dead and 15,000 wounded [Ruane, 1998, p. 32]. When the war came to an end, the French forces lost over 92,000 soldiers and 170,000 wounded [Wong, 2006, p. 221]. It means that the Vietnamese decolonization intensified the Cold War and that was only in Vietnam, that decolonization was ended by a military struggle.

In terms of Vietnam, the national decolonization struggle gradually went with the wind of the Cold War. Hồ Chí Minh made his first official visit, in early 1950, as the DRV President to China and had meetings with Chinese leaders. Ultimately, two weeks later, the People Republic of China recognized the DRV government. By that time, the Soviet Union and other socialist states established official diplomatic relations with the DRV.

Vietnam’s breakthrough success in diplomacy in the first two months of 1950 had a profound effect on the U.S. and Indochina policy. On January 14, 1950, the Government of DRV issued a diplomatic statement addressed that ‘DRV is ready to establish diplomatic relations with the governments that respect the equality, territorial and national sovereignty of Vietnam, jointly protect peace and build democracy world’ [Việt Nam Dân quốc Công báo, 1950]. From that point, the Central Committee of Vietnam Communist Party decided that their government had to show a clear attitude leaning the democratic world. They frankly joined in the democratic world led by the Soviet Union, against the imperialist bloc leading by the United States [Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam, 2001(1), p. 14]. China and the Soviet Union, the two largest socialist countries in the world, agreed to establish diplomatic relations with Vietnam in January 1950. Following that, a series of democratic countries recognized and established diplomatic relations with DRV.

Thus, after nearly five years since the DRV was established in 1945, the ‘isolation’ situation of the Vietnamese revolution has completely ended. With this diplomatic victory, Vietnam ‘not only had

a rear extending from China to the Baltic Sea but also gained international recognition for the national independence' [Luu, 2004, p. 136]. The immediate 'diplomatic siege' paved the way for the military victory that the 1950 Autumn-Winter Frontier Campaign connected Vietnam to the international rear as socialist countries. The decolonization struggle in Vietnam stepped into a new phase because of international support, creating both difficulties and challenges. In this sense, the Indochina war became an important link to the Cold War in Southeast Asia and Asia [Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam, 2001(2), p. 225].

Mao Zedong, as well as Stalin, agreed to provide political and military assistance to Vietnam. China and the Soviet Union provided both military and economic aid to Vietnam in 1950 and the amount increased gradually until 1954. From 1950 to 1954, DRV received 136 million yuan (approximately 34 million rubles) [Ủy ban tổng kết chiến tranh trực thuộc Bộ Chính trị, 2015, p. 600]. By the 1950s, Vietnam had become not only a centre of the Cold War in Asia but also the critical front worldwide and a 'hotter' competition to determine the result of the two rival ideological systems [Lau, 2012, p. 4].

The First Indochina ended by Điện Biên Phủ battle leading to the signing of Geneva Accords on July 21, 1954. The Vietnamese people achieved a triumph as the French government had to recognize their national independence and unification, ending their colonial empire in Indochina. The Vietnamese confidently state that the Điện Biên Phủ victory was also the failure of aggressive French colonialists determinating to reconquer Indochina as well as the U.S. imperialist dreaming of turning Indochina into its strategic base [Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam, 2001(5), p. 234].

However, the Cold War was continued to surge by the splitting of Vietnam into two rival parts: The North of the seventeenth parallel was supported by the socialist bloc, and the South was backed by the capitalist bloc. Vietnam, therefore, became a focal point of the ideological competition between two blocs during the Cold War, resulting in a more brutal conflict lasting over 20 years later. According to incomplete statistics of Vietnam, during 30 years (1945–1975) 1,1 million soldiers died; 600,000 soldiers were wounded; 300,000 soldiers went missing and two million civilians were killed. There were also about two million people who suffered from disabilities, two million who contacted toxic chemicals, and nearly 500,000 children with deformities due to chemical warfare [Ủy ban tổng kết chiến tranh trực thuộc Bộ Chính trị, 2015, p. 576–580]. Millions of Vietnamese from both sides died because of the internationalization of this colonial war.

THE TURNING POINTS FOR FRANCE

The Cold War had impacts on the Anti-French resistance in Vietnam, and by contrast, the Vietnamese struggle influenced the Cold War at some points. The Vietnamese struggle step by step promoted national liberation movements in many Asian and African countries and the decolonization in Vietnam also had a profound impact on France.

Indochina colonies had played an important role in supplying raw materials for the French industry. Therefore, decolonization harmed French economics due to their dependence on those providers. As the Second World War ended, the French government had to choose whether to preserve their interests in the newly established nation in Vietnam or keep rights for the old colonial management. At that time, almost all French politicians had the same thought that the preservation of their nation's grandeur had the link to their old colonies [Ruane, 199, p. 15]. Being out of the calculation, the more escalation of the Indochina war happened, the more the national French budget had to spend on. For nine years, the brutal war in Indochina had been a burden for French manpower and financial resources.

After four years of pursuing the war, France failed to change the situation in Indochina, even suffered from consecutive failures from the Fall-Winter Border campaign in 1950. Although the aid from the United States increased, the French-controlled area in Indochina was narrowing, and the French army could not respond actively to the attacks of the Vietnamese army. The long brutal war in Indochina made the French people, even more, feel miserable because they had to suffer from high taxes and military service. Since then, the anti-war movement had been widespread. The conflict within the French administrators was fierce. As a result, the French government had been continuously replaced and despatched several high commissioners to Indochina.

In the French National Assembly, the appeal for solving the problem of Vietnam peacefully still gained more and more votes. Some party leaders in the French establishment also realized the fact that the war could not continue forever. They wanted as a strategy to get out of it. France's exhausted conditions no longer allowed the French government to hesitate and they continued to ask for American aid. The turmoil in the colonies, as well as the divided political situation, led to the fact that France went unstable by this war. Finally, the Điện Biên Phủ epic marked the turning point for the collapse of decolonization of the French empire in Indochina and worldwide as well. The first Indochina war was also believed to cause many of France's crises in the following years. 'The interminable wars in Indochina and Algeria cost not only the lives of hundreds of thousands of Asians and Africans but eventually brought the collapse of the Fourth Republic as well' [Smith, 1978, p. 71].

It was only by the decolonization process in Vietnam that the French would recognize the importance of integrating the country into Western Europe. The exploitation of old colonies was no longer an opportunity for the French capitalists, in fact, it was a great burden for France because of the war cost. It might be seen as one of the most significant motivations for France to take part in the Western integration process with hopes to regain its reputation in Europe. This integration became 'the instinctive French response to her need to regain her seriously reduced influence' [Frank, 1992, p. 161]. Therefore, decolonization coincided with the process of French integration into Europe.

The decolonization in Indochina was an opportunity for France to reassess and adjust its strategies in term of economics, military, and politics to enhance its position in Europe. As a result, the process of decolonization created a positive outcome for the French regarding integration into Europe.

CONCLUSION

(1). The situation after the Second World War changed dramatically and the colonialists could not rule their old colonies in the same way as they did before. By a reassessment of the situation of the colonies and their capacities, the colonial empires eliminated the ex-forms of political domination to pave the way for the maintenance of their colonial strategic benefits with the new policies to seize the colonies by 'giving the independence to the colonies'. Accordingly, the United States, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, in turn, granted independence to the Philippines, Myanmar and Indonesia. Although Malaya continued to be a British colony due to its special importance to the post-war British economy, the British government had to constantly adjust its policies in a more positive way to respond to the increasing Malay political demands. It was only France that refused to abandon its colonies. France continued to seek to rehabilitate its colonial reputation in Indochina. In the meantime, Vietnam took the opportunity to carry out the historic August revolution. The DRV proclaimed freedom and independence on September 2, 1945. For the Vietnamese, after nearly one hundred years under colonial rule, the thirst for independence reached the highest level. They believed that they gained national freedom from Japanese fascists, and the French colonialists too no longer

had any special rights in the Vietnamese fatherland. The Vietnamese determined to sacrifice everything than losing their country and becoming slaves again. The Vietnamese desire for an independent nation clashed with the French determination of re-occupation. Therefore, at the beginning, it can be said that the Indochina war was first and foremost a struggle for decolonization to gain independence.

(2). However, after returning to re-occupy Indochina, with a determination to rule the colonies at any cost, the French government used violence to put the power back in Indochina, turning the Indochinese countries into a fierce battlefield. Because of the drastic challenges that DRV had to face due to the post-war situation, Hồ Chí Minh and his government tried to avoid the direct war with France and get international recognition for newly DRV. On the way to looking for supporters and colleagues, the conflict was gone gradually with the breeze of the Cold War, resulting in struggling for national independence turned into a brutal and complicated ideological clash. From the Vietnamese perspective, both Paris and Washington forced Vietnamese nationalists to make such a historic choice. ‘The Cold War and decolonization collided most intensely at first in Asia. These dual political forces make the Indochina War an excellent case study for historical remembrance: it provides the opportunity to engage with and provide new perspectives on the politics of remembrance of both French decolonization and the Cold War, and more importantly of the overlap between these contexts’ [Edwards, 2016, p. 2]. The war was motivated by a desire to reconquer the colony and to thwart legitimate national independence movements and then with the breeze of the Cold War, it turned into a struggle against communism. Consequently, the Cold War made the Vietnamese decolonization intensive and last longer, but in other sense, the Cold War also had more hostilities because of this local conflict. That is only in Vietnam, the decolonization was ended by a military struggle. Indochina gradually became a ‘hot spot’ of the Cold War involving a series of superpowers such as France, the U.S., the Soviet Union, and China. The war ended in 1954 with the stunning defeat of French Union forces at Điện Biên Phủ. The Geneva Accords confirmed the independence of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam marking the end of French colonialists in Indochina.

(3). From the time of the return of French troops (1945) to the climactic battle of Điện Biên Phủ (1954), French governments were reshuffled constantly. At the end of the conflict, almost all war cost was covered by the United States. As a result, France profoundly relied on U.S. aid, leading to another long and brutal war after that. The process of decolonization in Indochina, however, also had affected French politics. It seemed that it was an opportunity for the Paris government to readjust their domestic policies as well as economic integration into Europe. During the Indochina war, the international image of France was damaged because of French attempts to reestablish their old colonial territories that being called a ‘dirty war in Indochina’. Therefore, the decolonization process with the loss of French colonies forced the Paris government into seeking solutions to stabilize the political and economic situation as well as enhance the French’s prestigious position in Europe.

References

- Bộ Ngoại giao [Ministry of Foreign Affairs]. 2005. *Ngoại giao Việt Nam 1945–2000* [Vietnamese Diplomacy, 1945–2000]. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.
- Bộ Quốc phòng, Viện Lịch sử quân sự [Ministry of Defence, Institute of military history]. 1994. *Lịch sử cuộc kháng chiến chống thực dân Pháp 1945–1954* [The History of Anti-French Resistance War, 1945–1954], Vol. 1. Hanoi: People’s Army Publishing House.
- Boden, Ragna. 2008. «Cold War Economics: Soviet Aid to Indonesia», *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10 (3): 110–128. DOI: 10.1162/jcws.2008.10.3.110

Chính phủ Việt Nam [The Government of Vietnam]. 2008. *Lịch sử Chính phủ Việt Nam, tập 1 (1945–1955)* [History of the Government of Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Vol. 1 (1945–1954)]. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.

Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam [Vietnamese Communist Party]. 1998. *Chánh cương văn tắt của Đảng* [Brief Political Platform]. *Văn kiện Đảng toàn tập* [Full Collection of Party's Documents], Vol. 2 (1930). Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.

Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam [Vietnamese Communist Party]. 2000 (1). *Tuyên ngôn của Việt Nam độc lập đồng minh* [Declaration of League for Independence of Vietnam]. *Văn kiện Đảng toàn tập* [Full Collection of Party's Documents], Vol. 7 (1940–1945). Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.

Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam [Vietnamese Communist Party]. 2000 (2). *Lời kêu gọi toàn quốc kháng chiến ngày 19–12–1946* [An appeal for national resistance, dated December 19, 1946]. *Văn kiện Đảng toàn tập* [Full Collection of Party's Documents], Vol. 8 (1945–1947). Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.

Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam [Vietnamese Communist Party]. 2000 (3). *Toàn dân kháng chiến ngày 12–12–1946* [An appeal urging all Vietnamese people to fight for national salvation, dated December 12, 1946]. *Văn kiện Đảng toàn tập* [Full Collection of Party's Documents], Vol. 8 (1945–1947). Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.

Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam [Vietnamese Communist Party]. 2001 (1). *Chỉ thị của Ban thường vụ Trung ương về việc tuyên truyền chính sách ngoại giao của Chính phủ ta ngày 18–1–1950* [Directive of the Standing Committee of the Central Committee about the propaganda on the government's foreign policy, dated January 18, 1950]. *Văn kiện Đảng toàn tập* [Full Collection of Party's Documents], Vol. 11 (1950). Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.

Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam [Vietnamese Communist Party]. 2001(2). *Chỉ thị của Ban thường vụ Trung ương về việc Liên Xô, Trung Hoa và các nước dân chủ nhân dân thừa nhận Chính phủ ta ngày 9–2–1950* [Directive of the Standing Committee of the Central Committee about the Soviet Union, China, and other People's Democratic countries recognized our government dated February 9, 1950]. *Văn kiện Đảng toàn tập* [Full Collection of Party's Documents], Vol. 11 (1950). Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.

Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam [Vietnamese Communist Party]. 2001(3). *Nghị quyết của Thường vụ Trung ương về nhận xét tình hình các việc phải làm do Liên Xô, Trung Quốc và các nước dân chủ nhân dân thừa nhận Việt Nam đề ra ngày 4–2–1950* [Resolution of the Standing Committee of the Central Committee about remarks on works to be done due to the Soviet Union, China, and other People's Democratic countries recognized our government dated February 4, 1950]. *Văn kiện Đảng toàn tập* [Full Collection of Party's Documents], Vol. 11 (1950). Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.

Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam [Vietnamese Communist Party]. 2001(4). *Điện của trung ương Chi đạo đấu tranh phản đối sự can thiệp của Mỹ vào Đông Dương tháng 3–1950* [Telegram of the Central Committee on directing the struggle to oppose the U.S. intervention in Indochina dated March 1950]. *Văn kiện Đảng toàn tập* [Full Collection of Party's Documents], Vol. 11 (1950). Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.

Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam [Vietnamese Communist Party]. 2001(5). *Lời kêu gọi của Ban chấp hành trung ương Đảng Lao động Việt Nam ngày 25 tháng 7 năm 1954* [An appeal of the Central Committee of Vietnamese Workers' Party, dated July 25, 1954]. *Văn kiện Đảng toàn tập* [Full Collection of Party's Documents], Vol. 15 (1954). Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.

Duiker, William J. 1994. *U. S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina*, Stanford: University of Stanford.

Edwards, M. Kathryn. 2016. *Contesting Indochina: French remembrance between decolonization and Cold War*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

Fifield, Russell H. 1973. *Americans in Southeast Asia: The Root of Commitment*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co.

Frank, Robert. 1992. The French Alternative: Economic Power through the Empire or through Europe? In *Power in Europe? II, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy and the Origins of the EEC 1952–1957*, edited by Ennio Nolfo. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Gunn, Geoffrey C. 2014. *Rice Wars in Colonial Vietnam: The Great Famine and the Viet Minh Road to Power*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

- Hack, Karl; Wade, Geoff. 2009. «The Origins of the Southeast Asian Cold War», *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40 (3): 441–448. DOI:10.1017/S0022463409990014
- Hastings, Max. 2018. *Vietnam: An Epic Tragedy 1945–75*. London: Harper Collins.
- Herring, George C. 2004. «The Cold War and Vietnam», *OAH Magazine of History* 18 (5): 18–21. DOI: 10.1093/maghis/18.5.18
- Hồ Chí Minh. 2011 (1). *Lời kêu gọi Liên Hợp Quốc* [An appeal on the United Nations]. *Hồ Chí Minh toàn tập*. [Complete works by Ho Chi Minh], Vol. 4 (1945–1946), 3rd ed. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.
- Hồ Chí Minh. 2011 (2). *Báo cáo chính trị tại Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ II của Đảng* [Political Report, speech at the Second Party Congress in 1951]. *Hồ Chí Minh toàn tập* [Complete works by Ho Chi Minh], Vol. 7 (1951–1952), 3rd ed. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.
- Kaufman, Burton I. 1986. *The Korean War: Challenges in Crisis, Credibility, and Command*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lau, Albert. 2012. *Southeast Asia and the Cold War*. New York: Routledge.
- Lawrence, Mark Atwood; Logevall, Fredrick. 2007. *The first Vietnam war: colonial conflict and cold war crisis*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- Leffler, Melvyn P.; Westad, Odd Arne. 2010. *History of the Cold War, Vol II: Crises and Détente*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Logevall, Fredrik. 2012. *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*. New York: Random House.
- Logevall, Fredrick. 2013. *The Origins of the Vietnam War*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Luu, Văn Lợi. 2004. *Ngoại giao Việt Nam, 1945–1995* [Vietnamese Diplomacy, 1945–1995]. Hanoi: People's Public Security Publishing House.
- Ngân hàng Nhà nước Việt Nam [The State Bank of Vietnam]. 2016. *Lịch sử ngân hàng Việt Nam, 1951–2016* [History of the State Bank of Vietnam 1951–2016]. Hanoi: Labour Publishing House.
- Nojeim, Michael J. 2006. «US Foreign Policy and the Korean War», *Asian Security* 2 (2): 122–146. DOI: 10.1080/14799850600767218
- Offner, Arnold A. 1999. «Another Such Victory: President Truman, American Foreign Policy and the Cold War», *Diplomatic History* 23 (2): 127–155. DOI: 10.1111/1467–7709.00159
- Ruane, Kevin. 1998. *War and revolution in Vietnam, 1930–75*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, Tony. 1978. A Comparative Study of French and British Decolonization, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20 (1). doi: 10.1017/S0010417500008835.
- Ủy ban tổng kết chiến tranh trực thuộc Bộ Chính trị [Vietnamese Committee of the Politburo for summarizing the national revolutionary War]. 2015. *Chiến tranh cách mạng Việt Nam 1945–1975: Thắng lợi và bài học* [Vietnam's Revolutionary War, 1945–1975: Victory and Lessons]. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.
- Văn phòng Quốc hội Việt Nam [Vietnam National Assembly]. 2016. *Lịch sử Quốc hội Việt Nam* [History of Vietnam National Assembly], Vol. 1 (1946–60). Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.
- Văn Tạo and Furuta Motoo (eds). 2005. *Nạn đói năm 1945 ở Việt Nam: những chứng cứ lịch sử* [The famine in 1945 in Vietnam: the historical evidences]. Social Sciences Publishing House. Hanoi.
- Việt Minh [The League for the Independence of Vietnam]. 1945. Tuyên ngôn độc lập của nước Việt Nam dân chủ cộng hoà [Declaration of Independence of Democratic Republic of Vietnam]. *Cửu quốc*, No. 36, September 5, 1945.
- Việt Nam Dân quốc Công báo [The official Gazette of Democratic Republic of Vietnam]. Issue on January 15, 1950.
- Vu, Tuong; Wongsurawat, Wasana (eds). 2009. *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia — Ideology, Identity, and Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wong, Reuben Y. 2006. *The Europeanization of French Foreign Policy: France and the EU in East Asia*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.