

**A CHRONICLE OF  
PRINCIPAL EVENTS  
RELATING TO THE  
INDO-CHINA  
QUESTION  
1940-1954**

**PEKING 1954**

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## *Preface*

In 1858, a combined French and Spanish Force occupied Tourane, a port in central Viet-Nam.

In 1859, French troops occupied Saigon.

In 1862, France coerced the Nguyen Dynasty of Viet-Nam to sign the Saigon Treaty by which France, besides securing many privileges, seized control of the three provinces in the southern part of Viet-Nam as well as Poulo Condor.

In 1863, France forced the king of Cambodia (Khmer) to agree to a French protectorate over Khmer.

In 1867, France annexed the whole of South Viet-Nam (Cochin-China).

In 1884, France forced Viet-Nam and Khmer to sign treaties by which Viet-Nam and Khmer became French protectorates.

In 1885, France concluded the Tientsin Treaty with the Manchu Government of China by which the Manchu Government was forced to recognize Viet-Nam as a French protectorate.

In 1887, France amalgamated Annam, Tonkin, Cochin-China and Khmer to form French Indo-China and placed it under the rule of a French governor-general.

In 1893, France established its protectorate over Laos (Pathet Lao) and in 1899 incorporated it into French Indo-China. This brought the whole Indo-China peninsula under the French colonial rule. The territory of Viet-Nam was divided into three parts: the southern part became a French colony; the central part became a kingdom under French protectorate; and the northern part was "placed under" French administration.

Under French colonial rule, the Indo-Chinese people were deprived of their most elementary human rights and lived in the most deplorable conditions. Franklin D. Roosevelt, the late President of the United States, once remarked: "The native-Indo-Chinese have been so flagrantly downtrodden that they thought to themselves: Anything must be better than to live under French colonial rule!"

During the last eighty years and more, patriots of Viet-Nam, Pathet Lao and Khmer have carried on a resolute and undaunted struggle for freedom. They have held high the banner of national liberation. Many revolts have been organized, one following close upon another. These include the Truong Quyen Revolt in South Viet-Nam and the Po Kum Bo Revolt in Khmer in 1863, the Hue Revolt in 1884, the Khmer people's revolts in the provinces of Kompong-Cham and Kompong-Thom in 1885 and 1886, the Saigon Revolt in 1886, the Phan Dinh Phung Revolt of Viet-Nam in 1893, the long drawn out guerilla war led by Hoang Hoa Tham which started in 1903, the Phu Mi Bum patriotic movement led by Phok Ba Duct in Pathet Lao in 1901, the Aung Keo and Aung Kumadan Revolt of Pathet Lao in 1910 and the guerilla war which followed and lasted 25 years, the Thai-Nguyen Revolt in 1917, and the Yen-Bai Revolt in 1930.

Although all these revolts were brutally suppressed by the French colonialists, they served as an eloquent declaration to the whole world that the Indo-Chinese people will never tamely submit to enslavement and that they would ultimately win freedom and independence.

In 1940, the Japanese imperialists, who had launched a war of aggression against China, demanded of the French Government that Japanese troops be admitted into Indo-China, for the purpose of preparing for their war in the Pacific. The French colonial authorities, which had been notorious for their ferocity and brutality towards the Indo-Chinese people, were completely servile to Japanese fascists.

Thus, a new colonial master—Japanese fascism—was imposed upon Indo-China.

The occupation of Indo-China by Japanese fascism brought to the Indo-Chinese people a deeper and graver national crisis. In face of this crisis, the Indo-Chinese people rallied together in a still broader unity than ever before and waged a struggle for national independence on an unprecedented scale. With the defeat of Japanese imperialism in World War II, the Indo-Chinese people at last won their independence.

However, the French colonialists, who had surrendered to the Japanese fascists, now sought to recover their former positions in Indo-China. They attempted with armed force and U.S. assistance to subjugate the Indo-Chinese people. As a result, shortly after World War II ended, a new war broke out in Indo-China.

The war in Indo-China has now become one of the centres of world tension, one of the points on which all eyes are focussed. All those who are concerned with the Indo-Chinese question will be greatly assisted in getting a true understanding of it by the following sketch of historical developments since 1940.

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# 1940

**September 23** Japanese troops marched into Indo-China, the domain of the French colonialists.

Earlier, in June, Japan made a series of demands on the French authorities in Indo-China which included: permission for Japanese troops to pass through Indo-China for an attack on China; closing the border between China and Viet-Nam, and occupying military bases in Tonkin. The French authorities assented to all these Japanese demands and repeatedly notified the Japanese Government that they recognized Japan's "dominant political and economic interests in the Far East" and gave assurance of allowing Japan to acquire "a most favourable position" in Indo-China.

On September 4, France and Japan signed a military agreement which permitted Japanese troops to penetrate the areas north of the Red River. On September 15, France was asked to cede Hanoi, Haiphong and her naval bases in Camranh Bay and Kwangchowwan. France agreed. On September 22, another military agreement was signed between France and Japan which permitted Japan to station troops in Indo-China. All these arrangements opened the way for the subsequent occupation of Indo-China by Japanese troops.

On the same day, the Vichy Government issued a communiqué stating that the Franco-Japanese agreement on the stationing of Japanese troops in Indo-China was aimed at "facilitating the establishment of a new order in East Asia and settlement of the Sino-Japanese Incident." The communiqué also stated that the French authorities in Indo-China were to provide the Japanese Army with facilities to continue its drive against China. In turn, Japan recognized France's "sovereignty and territorial integrity" in Indo-China.

Also on September 23, the people in Bac-Son, Lang-Son Province, Viet-Nam, rose against the French colonialists for their sell-out of Indo-China to the Japanese imperialists. In October, the people liberated Bac-Son and established a people's regime. A guerilla detachment, organized by the insurrectionists, launched an attack against Japanese-occupied Lang-Son. The Japanese accepted the French offer of four French battalions to help suppress the Viet-Nameese people's guerillas. Although this people's insurrection was finally quelled after two months by joint French and Japanese

1940 forces, the armed insurrectionists continued their resistance against the Japanese and French imperialists and gradually grew into the Viet-Nam People's Army.

**November 23** People's insurrections broke out in many provinces of South Viet-Nam. Many places were liberated in My-Tho, Bac-Lieu and Soc-Trang Provinces and people's committees set up in them. During the insurrection in Cao-Lanh, the red flag with a gold star was hoisted for the first time. This flag was later adopted as the national flag of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam. The Cao-Lanh insurrection ended in failure as a result of joint suppression by French and Japanese troops. More than 7,000 patriots were arrested and confined in Poulo Condor. Large numbers of people were put to death.

## 1941

**January 13** Uprising of Viet-Nameese soldiers stationed in the area of Do-Luong, Vinh Province.

**May 6** The Vichy Government signed an economic agreement with Japan, granting Japan "most-favoured nation treatment" for her industrial and commercial enterprises and in other economic activities in Indo-China. Japanese goods were to be taxed at the lowest rates and many items exempted from customs duty. The agreement also stipulated that the French authorities in Indo-China export various strategic materials and commodities to Japan.

**May 9** France and Japan concluded the "Protocol on Mutual Guarantee and Political Understanding Between Japan and France." In this Protocol, France agreed not to sign with any third power an agreement on political, economic or military co-operation with regard to Indo-China that might, directly or indirectly, interfere with Japan's interests there.

**May 19** The Viet-Nam Independence League (Viet-Minh) was organized at a joint conference of political parties and groups and social organizations including the Communist Party of Indo-China (predecessor of the Viet-Nam Lao Dong Party), the Socialist Party, the Nationalist Party, the Viet-Nam Workers' National Salvation Association, the Peasants' National Salvation Association, the Na-



tional Salvation Association of Culture, the Women's National Salvation Association, the Young Men's National Salvation Association, the Buddhists' National Salvation Association, the Catholics' National Salvation Association and the Businessmen's National Salvation Association. Ho Chi Minh, leader of the Viet-Nameese people, was elected President of the Viet-Nam Independence League (Viet-Minh). From its inauguration, the Viet-Minh organized guerilla forces in order to develop armed struggle against the Japanese occupation. The Viet-Nameese people's resistance was thus placed under unified leadership. The Viet-Minh was commonly acknowledged as the sole anti-Japanese force in Viet-Nam. The French paper *La Marseillaise* stated on May 15, 1946, "While French high officials were being good little Pétainists, the Viet-Nameese fought with rare courage under the leadership of President Ho against Japanese fascism." *La Rue* said on August 9, 1946, "The Viet-Minh comprised all democratic forces of the country." *France Nouvelle* said on June 8, 1946, "The whole of this resistance is the work of the Viet-Minh."

**July 29** France and Japan signed an agreement on the "joint defence of French Indo-China," by which both countries pledged themselves to military "co-operation" in the "common defence" of Indo-China.

On the same day, the Vichy Government, in a note to the Japanese Government, accorded the latter the right to send land, naval and air forces to southern Indo-China; to make use of eight cities, including Siem-Reap and Phnom-Penh as Japanese air bases, and Saigon and Camranh Bay as naval bases. The French note also granted Japan the right to station troops in Indo-China and their freedom of movement. France agreed to bear the expenses of the Japanese occupation.

**December 7** Japan unleashed war in the Pacific.

**December 9** A local military agreement concerning the "joint defence of French Indo-China" was signed between Decoux, the Vichy Government's Governor-General of Indo-China, and Major General Tyo (Yoshizawa), representing the Japanese Army, by which the French authorities agreed to co-operate, "with all means at their disposal," with the Japanese Army "in the defence of French Indo-China"; to "guarantee public order throughout Indo-China during the Japanese Army's military operations so as to safeguard the rear of the Japanese Army"; and to provide the Japanese Army with all facilities for troop movements, food supplies, etc.

## 1942

**October 10** The Viet-Minh issued a statement, calling on French soldiers and French nationals for unity with the Viet-Nameese people to fight against the Japanese invaders. The appeal stated: "We are ready to co-operate with all French people in Indo-China, both civilian and military, who are sincere in their desire to fight with us against the fascist Franco-Japanese military. . . . Let us form an anti-fascist, anti-Japanese Viet-Nam-French front on Indo-Chinese territory!"

From 1941 to 1945, the Viet-Minh advocated on many occasions co-operation with the French authorities in a joint fight against the Japanese aggressors. But the French authorities in Indo-China remained all along on the side of the Japanese Army and perpetrated brutalities against the Viet-Nameese people who resolutely fought the Japanese invaders. The French paper *La Défense* stated on May 10, 1946, "It was the Viet-Nameese who raised the standard in the anti-fascist struggle, calling upon the Free French people to fight for the common cause with them. Decoux and his agents replied with terrible reprisals."

## 1943

**March 4** French Governor-General Decoux signed an agreement with the Japanese authorities, modifying the economic agreement of May 6, 1941, to give even more far-reaching economic concessions to Japan. The new economic agreement stipulated: 1. Free participation by Japanese nationals in all enterprises on the same footing as French citizens, and the guarantee of all agricultural, mining and other concessions that Japan might need "for military reasons"; and 2. The French authorities must facilitate the production, distribution and export of all products required by Japan "for military reasons."

**December 8** A declaration on the post-war status of Indo-China was issued by the French Committee of National Liberation in North Africa (predecessor of the post-war French Government). The Declaration characterized the surrender and betrayal by the French

authorities in Indo-China as being “imposed” by the Japanese and hinted at continued French control over Indo-China after the war. At the same time, the Declaration promised to give “a new political status” to “those who have affirmed their national sentiments and political responsibilities.”

## 1944

**September 5** The Viet-Minh issued a proclamation warning the French of Japan’s scheme of openly occupying Indo-China. The proclamation saw Indo-China “on the eve of a decisive event” and called on the free and progressive forces in Indo-China to launch a struggle to “prevent the imminent political crisis before it is too late.”

The Viet-Minh’s warning was ignored by the French authorities in Indo-China.

**December 22** The Viet-Nam Liberation Army was formed. To celebrate the birth of the Liberation Army, meetings were held in Hoang Hoa Tham and Tran Hung Dao. Representatives of the Liberation Army stated at these meetings that the Army’s aim was to awaken the people to armed resistance and to lay the political and military foundations for future uprisings.

This armed force gradually expanded till it became the Viet-Nam People’s Army. December 22 is thus marked as the founding day of the Viet-Nam People’s Army.

By the end of 1944, the Viet-Nam people’s anti-Japanese armed forces had liberated six provinces in North Viet-Nam, namely: Cao-Bang, Bac-Kan, Tuyen-Quang, Thai-Nguyen, Lang-Son and Ha-Giang. People’s committees were established in all these provinces to organize the people’s armed resistance against the Japanese and, at the same time, to carry out extensive economic, social and cultural reforms.

**March 9** The Viet-Minh's warning proved correct—the Japanese Army formally occupied the whole of Indo-China. A communiqué issued by the Japanese Army Headquarters stated: "In view of the lack of sincerity demonstrated by the French authorities in Indo-China . . . our forces stationed there have decided to assume the defence of that country and are taking the necessary measures." The Japanese troops disarmed all French forces, except those stationed at certain points in the border area of North Viet-Nam, and liquidated the French organs of control without meeting any French resistance.

**March 11** Propped up by Japan, Emperor Bao Dai of Annam formed a puppet government. In a statement, Bao Dai proclaimed the "immediate abolition of the treaty of protectorate signed with France" and said he was going to follow the "directives of the Joint Manifesto of Greater East Asia." He also expressed his "confidence in Japan's sincerity and his determination to co-operate with Japan towards the stated goal."

**March 24** The Provisional Government of the Republic of France issued the declaration that Indo-China would again come under French control after the war. The declaration recognized that the Viet-Nameese people "have acquired a new qualification for their rightful place" through their heroic struggles against Japanese aggression. The declaration stated that France intended to make Indo-China a "Federation" of "five states." But Indo-China was only to "enjoy its proper freedom within the French Union" and the "external interests" of this Union must be represented by France. The French declaration permitted Indo-China to have its own government, on condition that it be headed by the French Governor-General and "composed of the ministers responsible to him." The declaration called for an assembly to be elected "according to the pattern of elections most appropriate to each state within the Federation of Indo-China" and stated that "French interests must be represented in the assembly."

On March 25, Minister for Overseas France Paul Giacobbi in a broadcast speech expressed "fullest respect for the cultural characteristics of every constituent member of the Federation," but they must all be "closely associated with French culture." He also stated that Indo-China "would have her own land, sea and air forces" which, however, would form "part of the general defence system of the French Union."

**June 4** The liberated areas of Viet-Nam merged formally into one unified whole. A provisional committee was set up in this unified liberated area to guide the people in their struggle for national liberation.

**August 8** The Soviet Union declared war on Japan. On the 9th, the Red Army of the Soviet Union attacked the Japanese army. On the 10th, Japan informed the Allies it was ready to surrender and on the 15th it surrendered unconditionally.

**August 13** The Viet-Nam Independence League formed an Insurrection Committee which ordered the Viet-Nam People's Army into action throughout the country and called on the people to join in this general uprising. At the same time, the General Headquarters of the Viet-Minh told the Japanese Army to lay down arms and hand over the state power to the Viet-Nameese people.

**August 16-17** More than 60 people's representatives of all sections and of the various nationalities of Viet-Nam met in a national people's congress at Tan-Trien Village, on the border of Tuyen-Quang and Thai-Nguyen Provinces. The congress resolved unanimously to mobilize the people throughout the country to seize power and to establish the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam on the basis of complete independence. The congress also decided to carry out the 10-point Viet-Minh programme for national independence and democratic reforms. The congress elected the National Liberation Committee of Viet-Nam which was to exercise the functions of a provisional government, pending the establishment of a formal government.

**August 17** Demonstrations were held by the Viet-Nameese people in Hanoi and many other places. Representatives of the Viet-Minh everywhere called on the people to rise up and seize power.

On August 17, the French Government appointed Vice-Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu French High Commissioner in Indo-China.

**August 19** The people rose up in Hanoi and established a provisional revolutionary order. August 19 was adopted as the Day of Victory in the August Revolution.

**August 22** The representative of French High Commissioner d'Argenlieu in North Viet-Nam, Sainteny, arrived in Hanoi aboard a U.S. plane.

On the same day, d'Argenlieu's representative in South Viet-Nam, Cedille, was airdropped and taken to Saigon by the Japanese Army.

**August 24** Japanese-supported Emperor Bao Dai of Annam declared he was "determined" to abdicate and to "transfer his powers

**1945** to the Democratic Republican Government." In his Act of Abdication, Bao Dai called on the people to "unite as one man and wholeheartedly stand by the Democratic Government." He also stated: "We are happy to be the free citizens of an independent country. We will not allow anyone to abuse our name or the name of the royal family for sowing dissension among our compatriots."

On September 10, Bao Dai was invited to act as adviser to the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam. But he left Hanoi for Chungking and then sneaked into Hongkong in 1946.

**August 25** Big demonstrations were held by the people in Saigon and the cities and provinces of South Viet-Nam, in response to the Viet-Minh's call. People's Committees were set up for South Viet-Nam and for the various provinces and state power was taken over by the people.

**August 27** Cedille, French representative in South Viet-Nam, met with a representative of Viet-Nam and handed him the French Government's declaration of March 24 on French intentions for renewed control over Indo-China. The representative of Viet-Nam expressed the friendly feelings the Viet-Nameese people have for the new France and pointed out that this declaration cannot serve as the basis for discussions on the relations between France and Viet-Nam.

The Viet-Nameese representative made it clear that recognition by France of Viet-Nam's independence was the prerequisite to any agreement that might be reached, and that Viet-Nam was prepared to negotiate with France only on this basis.

**August 28** The Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam (i.e. the National Liberation Committee of Viet-Nam) issued a proclamation to the people, announcing that state power was in the hands of the National Liberation Committee; that, for the broadest representation of the national united front, the National Liberation Committee was to be reorganized, with all patriots participating, to shoulder the tasks entrusted to the Committee by the people before the inauguration of a permanent government. By the end of August, the patriots of Pathet Lao had formed the National Liberation Committee of Pathet Lao, under the leadership of Prince Souphanouvong, to strive for national independence, unity and democracy, and to seize political power.

**September 2** At a mass meeting in Hanoi, attended by 500,000 people, Ho Chi Minh, as President of the Viet-Nam Provisional Government, proclaimed his country's independence and issued the Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam. The Declaration quoted from the Declaration of Independence

of the United States of America and from the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens that all men are created equal and endowed with the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But France was acting contrary to humanity and justice in its colonial rule in Indo-China. After a recital of the brutalities perpetrated by the French rulers in a period of eighty years and the submissive attitude towards Japan in the latter's five-year occupation of Indo-China, the Declaration pointed out: "The truth is that our people have wrested and regained state power from the Japanese and not from the French. . . . Our people have broken the chains of slavery that bound us for nearly 100 years and have won the independence of Viet-Nam. Our people have also overthrown the monarchical regime of the past several thousand years and have established a democratic republic in its stead. Hence, we declare, as the Provisional Government of the new Viet-Nam, on behalf of all the people, that the colonial relationship with France is at an end, that all the old treaties signed between Viet-Nam and France are null and void, and that all special privileges of France in Viet-Nam are hereby abrogated. The people of Viet-Nam stand firmly against all French imperialist intrigues. We are confident that the Allied Powers who recognized the principle of equality among nations at the Teheran conference and at the San Francisco conference cannot fail to recognize the right of Viet-Nam to fight for its liberty and independence." The Declaration concluded solemnly: "A people that has courageously opposed French colonial rule for more than 80 years, a people that has courageously fought fascism by the side of the Allied Powers during the past years, this people will win its freedom and independence. We solemnly declare to the world: Viet-Nam has the right to freedom and independence and has, in fact, become a free and independent country. . . ."

**September 21** The first contingent of French troops, brought by British warships, landed in Saigon. According to an agreement reached between the Allied Powers, Japanese troops in Indo-China north of the 16th parallel were to surrender to Kuomintang troops, while those south of the 16th parallel were to surrender to British troops. The Kuomintang and British forces whose task was to disarm the Japanese forces and send them home, had already entered North and South Viet-Nam.

**September 23** Saigon was occupied by a French landing party assisted by the French troops who had been disarmed by the Japanese and who had been assembled by Cedille, the French High Commissioner's representative in South Viet-Nam. The government offices of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam in Saigon were forcibly occupied. War broke out in South Viet-Nam between France, which

**1945** was attempting to reconquer Viet-Nam, and the Viet-Nameese people, who opposed the French colonialists.

At the same time, French troops renewed their attacks on Khmer. After the surrender of Japan, Khmer proclaimed its independence and established a people's regime throughout the country. One week after their invasion of South Viet-Nam, the French forces occupied Phnom Penh, capital of Khmer. After occupying Khmer, the French ordered the Japanese-supported King of Cambodia, Norodom Sihanouk, to form a puppet government in October. Khmer patriots organized the Khmer Independence Committee to resist the French forces.

**October 5** The main force of the French troops, led by Leclerc, French Commander-in-Chief in the Far East, arrived in Indo-China, together with British troops. An Anglo-French agreement was concluded, illegally stipulating that only French administrative organs were to have civil administrative power over the British-occupied area. After the evacuation of the British forces, the French immediately started military operations in an effort to occupy Indo-China using Saigon as their jumping board. Leclerc boasted that the French could reconquer the whole of Indo-China within three months.

**October 12** The Lao People's Committee was set up in Vientiane and organized the Provisional Resistance Government of Pathet Lao. Pathet Lao proclaimed its independence.

**November 10** King Sisavang Vong of Pathet Lao abdicated and issued a statement saying: "I place myself under the authority of the new government of Pathet Lao, which has been constituted and is the real and legitimate government of Pathet Lao."

## 1946

**January 6** The Viet-Nam Democratic Republic held National Assembly elections on a nation-wide scale. The suffrage was on a universal, direct and equal basis, irrespective of nationality, belief, condition of property or sex. Over 90 per cent of the qualified voters in the great majority of the cities and provinces in the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam took part in the elections. In most



provinces in French-occupied South Viet-Nam, over 90 per cent of the voters also took part in the elections. **1946**

The Viet-Minh scored victory in the elections by winning 230 of the 300 seats in the National Assembly.

**February 4** Thierry d'Argenlieu set up a South Viet-Nam Advisory Committee in the French-occupied area, composed of French colonialists and Viet-Nameese puppets.

**February 25** A meeting was held between President Ho Chi Minh and the French negotiator Sainteny on the possibility of holding Viet-Nam-France talks. President Ho Chi Minh reiterated Viet-Nam's policy of independence and co-operation. Sainteny voiced France's willingness to recognize Viet-Nam's right to have its own government, parliament, army and independent finance "within the French Union." Both sides shared the opinion that preliminary conditions for the success of negotiations must assume, firstly, an atmosphere of relaxation and harmony and, secondly, immediate ceasefire on all fronts.

On March 18, 1947, Marius Moutet, Minister for Overseas France, revealed in a speech to the French National Assembly that the aim of the French Government at that time was to facilitate the occupation of North Viet-Nam by French troops through negotiation. Moutet said: "Our troops were not numerous—15,000 men — . . . How heavy were the losses to be sustained, if we were to proceed from Haiphong to Hanoi by force of arms under such conditions? I believe that for the combatants as well as non-combatants, the number of casualties would have been several hundred times higher than those of December 19 (the date Hanoi was re-occupied by French troops—Ed.).

**February 28** The Kuomintang government reached an agreement with the French Government: The areas of Viet-Nam north of the 16th parallel occupied by the Kuomintang troops were to be taken over by the French troops not later than March 31.

**March 2** The first plenary session of the National Assembly of the Viet-Nam Democratic Republic was held in Hanoi.

**March 3** The National Assembly elected the Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam with Ho Chi Minh as President of the Republic.

**March 6** After several months of negotiations, the governments of Viet-Nam and France signed a preliminary agreement in Hanoi. The Agreement stipulated that the French Government should recognize the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam as "a free state having