

## Background Briefing Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Vietminh)

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The day of liberation for the Vietnamese people is finally here! After a century-long struggle, the Vietnamese people, led by the Vietminh, have defeated decisively the forces of colonialism and imperialism. Total military victory and national independence are within our reach.

For the past eight years, the Vietnamese people have been fighting single-handedly the French imperialists and their lackeys in Vietnam. Shortly after our leader, Ho Chi Minh, raised the banner of independence in September 1945, we requested that the United States and Britain support the idea of Vietnamese independence and “take steps necessary for the maintenance of world peace which is being endangered by French efforts to reconquer Indochina.” Our pleas for Western and United Nations’ assistance went unheeded. We were forced to fight on our own against an enemy with superior forces and superior weaponry. The courage of our men and women and the superior tactics of our leaders have turned the tide of battle and brought about the historically inevitable triumph of the people and the humiliation of the imperialists. Despite the huge amounts of money and war materials that the United States has sent the French and that were used to kill and maim the Vietnamese people and keep them in bondage, the imperialists are now on the run and know that their days are numbered.

Our objective is the total expulsion of the colonial forces and the establishment of communist governments in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In addition, steps must be taken to prevent the warmongering Americans from establishing counter-revolutionary bases in the area. Such provocative actions by the chief imperialist power would threaten the safety of the people’s governments and endanger world peace. While the French and British colonial

powers have reluctantly recognized the triumph of the people’s movements in Southeast Asia, the United States insists upon denying the justness and reality of the people’s victory. American obstructionism in Asia has prevented the Chinese People’s Republic from taking its rightful place among the sovereign nations of the world, and American threats have prevented Western nations from recognizing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam since it was proclaimed in 1950.

France must immediately recognize the full sovereignty and independence of Vietnam and the full sovereignty and independence of Pathet Lao [communist forces in Laos] and Khmer [communist forces in Cambodia]. All foreign troops must withdraw from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos immediately and free elections must be organized to form a democratic government in each country. Vietnam must not be divided. The Vietnamese people are one. Our Chinese brothers have been encouraging us to accept a temporary military settlement that would leave southern Vietnam still under the control of the imperialist lackeys. We object to such a resolution, but if necessary to bring about an end to the French presence in Indochina, we would reluctantly accept it. The Chinese People’s Republic has been our faithful ally throughout this long struggle and we must respect the opinions of its leaders. However, assurances must be given that elections will be held soon to provide for the unification of the Vietnamese people under a truly representative people’s government. While a military solution may precede a political settlement, the latter must not be put off indefinitely. The goal of a free, unified Vietnam that we are about to achieve on the battlefield must not be lost at the conference table in Geneva.

## From the Historical Record

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*Speech by Ho Chi Minh declaring Vietnamese independence from the French, September 2, 1945*

“We hold the truth that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’ This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America.... The Declaration of the French Revolution made in 1791 on the Rights of Man and the Citizen also states ‘All men are born free and with equal rights, and must always remain free and have equal rights...’ Nevertheless, for more than eight years, the French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, have violated our Fatherland and oppressed our fellow-citizens. They have acted contrary to the ideals of humanity and justice. In the field of politics, they have deprived our people of every democratic liberty.... For these reasons, we, members of the Provisional Government, representing the whole Vietnamese people, declare that from now on we break off all relations of a colonial character with France.... 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 their country. We are convinced that the Allied nations, which at Tehran and San Francisco have acknowledged the principles of self-determination and equality of nations, will not refuse to acknowledge the independence of Vietnam.”

*Comments by Ho Chi Minh, fall of 1945*

“[The Americans] are only interested in replacing the French.... They want to reorganize our economy in order to control it. They are capitalists to the core. All that counts for them is business.”

*Press release by representatives of Vietminh, January 6, 1947*

“THE VIETNAM STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE. At a time when the democratic powers have just emerged from a long war

against Fascism, Vietnam, victim of French colonial aggression, must still defend itself with arms. It is no longer necessary to emphasize the misdeeds and crimes of that particular form of colonialism, its constant and deliberate attempt to poison an entire people with alcohol and opium, its policy of exploitation, pressure, and obscurantism imposed upon Vietnam by a handful of colonialists and from which the French people themselves have derived no real benefit. Suffice it to recall that since the French conquest more than three-quarters of a century ago, the people of Vietnam have never ceased striving to regain their independence. The long list of uprisings and revolts, although harshly quelled, have marked this painful period with interruption and have demonstrated the invincible strength of our national spirit.... VIETNAM APPEALS TO THE WORLD. The era of colonial conquest and domination is over. Vietnam is firmly resolved to the very end in her struggle for her most sacred rights, viz., the territorial integrity of her country and her political independence.”

*Statement of Vietminh strategy, issued during the early years of the war*

“The general strategic line to be followed by our resistance is protracted warfare. An agricultural country, we are brought into conflict with an industrial country. With rudimentary weapons we are fighting an enemy equipped with aircraft, armour, warships.... We know how to preserve and increase our strength, season our army and give military training to our people, if we learn to wage war while carrying our combat operations, we shall obtain what we lacked at the beginning, and though weak at first, we shall become strong. By decimating, harassing, demoralizing the enemy, we shall turn the tide. Losing his initial superiority, the enemy, a victor at the start, will be vanquished in the end. If we prolong the war, our strength will increase; that of the enemy will dwindle, the poor morale of his troops will sink ever deeper, the serious financial problems saddled on him will be ever more aggravated. The

more we fight on, the closer national unity will grow and the stronger the support of the world democratic forces. On the other hand, in France itself, the enemy will be ever more hampered by the popular movement against war and for democracy; the revolutionary upsurge in his colonies will force him to scatter his forces; his isolation in the international arena will worsen. To get at this result, we need time. Time is for us.”

*Statements by Pham Van Dong, head of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) delegation, May 1954*

“[The DRVN proposes] recognition by France of the sovereignty and independence of Viet-Nam over the whole territory of Viet-Nam.... Conclusion of an agreement on the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the territories of Viet-Nam, Khmer [Cambodia] and Pathet Lao [Laos].... Organization of free, general elections in Viet-Nam, in Khmer and Pathet Lao in order to form a single govern-

ment in each country.... Conferences will take all measures to guarantee the free activity of patriotic parties, groups, and social organizations. No foreign intervention will be allowed.... A complete and simultaneous cease-fire over all the territory of Indochina by all the armed forces—land, sea, and air—of the belligerent parties.... Complete cessation of all introduction into Indochina of new military units...of all kinds of arms and munitions... establishment of a control [commission] to assure the execution of the provisions of the agreement on the cessation of hostilities.... It is common knowledge that in order to reestablish peace in Indochina, it is necessary to put an end to the provision by the United States of arms and munitions to Indochina, to recall the American missions, advisers, and military instructors, and to cease all intervention by the United States, in whatever form, in the affairs of Indochina.”