

Hanoi and Americanization of the War in Vietnam: New Evidence from Vietnam

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The spring 1965 deployment of U.S. ground forces to South Vietnam and initiation of sustained aerial and naval bombardments of the North by the U.S. military marked a turning point in the history of the Vietnamese Revolution. Until recently, Western scholars only vaguely understood Hanoi's attitude toward those developments and what they meant for the revolution it spearheaded. Newly available materials from Vietnam provide a clearer picture of the concerns of North Vietnamese policymakers in the period immediately before and after the American intervention. Based on such materials, this article demonstrates that, when it committed the North to a wider war with the United States, Hanoi did so reluctantly. Having made the commitment, however, it stopped at nothing to guarantee the ultimate success of its efforts.

Americanization of the conflict in Vietnam, which began in the spring of 1965, marked a turning point in the Vietnamese Revolution. Until recently, a paucity of documentation made it difficult for scholars to understand and assess Hanoi's response to the American intervention. The availability of a variety of new sources over the last few years has overcome this problem to a substantial degree. Among these new sources are archives of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam government, which are now open to foreign researchers, as well as official and other histories that draw on the archives of the Party and the Foreign and Defense ministries, which are still closed to foreign researchers.

Perhaps the most useful of the new sources is a series of volumes, the publication of which began in 1998, under the title *Van kien Dang—Toan tap* (Party Documents—Complete Works). Released through the *Nha xuat ban Chinh tri quoc gia* (National Political Publisher), the series consists mostly of previously confidential and

secret documents relating the history of Party policymaking.¹ Beginning with the period leading to 1930, the year of the founding of the Indochinese Communist Party, which was the forerunner of the wartime Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP, 1951–1976) and of the present Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP), each volume typically encompasses one year. Certain volumes for the period before 1948 cover multiple years, including volume 1 (1924–1930), volume 6 (1936–1939), and volume 7 (1940–1945).

The documents featured in the series were generated by such authorities as the first/general secretary of the Party, the Politburo, and the Central Committee. They pertain to domestic as well as foreign policymaking and reveal a number of internal debates and disagreements, in addition to concerns and purposes that inspired the adoption and implementation of specific policies. A committee of three to five editors (*nhom xay dung ban thao*) was responsible for the selection of documents for each volume, and an advisory committee (*ban chi dao xay dung ban thao*) reviewed all selections and edited them for content before a thirteen-member “publishing council” (*hoi dong xuat ban*) provided final approval for publication. On account of the extensive review and editing process, and the VCP's tradition of non-transparency, the resulting record is only partial, and the number and quality of documents in each volume vary. One of the most comprehensive tomes is volume 20 (1959), which includes 124 documents, several of which offer important new insights into such issues as land reform and collectivization in the North, Party organization, the situation in the South and adoption of Resolution 15, and foreign relations.² Volume 27 (1966) is the shortest thus far with only fifty-seven documents; this is unfortunate, since it covers one of the most critical years of the “American War.” Thus, the overall quality of individual volumes is also inconsistent.

The volume for the year 1965 is excellent, however, as it offers fascinating insights into the policymaking process in Hanoi immediately before and after the U.S. intervention and covers a wide range of issues. More significantly, it provides answers to a multitude

1. The few public documents reproduced in the series generally consist of addresses to the Party Central Committee by North Vietnamese President Ho Chi Minh.

2. Resolution 15 was a policy statement formulated by the VWP Central Committee and ratified by the Politburo in May 1959, mandating intensification of the insurgency below the seventeenth parallel and deployment of North Vietnamese forces via the so-called “Ho Chi Minh Trail.”

of questions that have long perplexed students of the conflict, including: How did Hanoi feel about the prospects of war with the United States? Did Hanoi precipitate the war's outbreak or attempt to delay it? How prepared was North Vietnam to face the American military in 1965? Were Hanoi's efforts following the U.S. intervention geared exclusively to defeating the Americans militarily, or did other considerations also condition its decision making? Using policy statements and directives issued by VWP authorities in Hanoi that are reproduced in the 1965 volume, as well as other untapped sources from Vietnam, this paper elucidates the answers to these questions and seeks thereby to show the usefulness of the series to which the volume belongs to historians of the Vietnamese crisis.³

The referendum on the national reunification of Vietnam mandated by the 1954 Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference failed to take place because of the intransigence of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime in South Vietnam. Communists and other opponents of that regime thereupon instigated a campaign of guerrilla warfare aimed at bringing about the collapse of the Diem regime and the reunification of Vietnam under the auspices of the government headquartered in Hanoi. The campaign was surprisingly effective. By 1960 the survival of Diem's regime was problematic. Soon thereafter, Cold War concerns prompted the John F. Kennedy administration to dispatch American military advisers to train South Vietnamese armed forces to defeat the insurgency, to little avail. In August 1964, one confirmed and another alleged attack on two American destroyers by North Vietnamese patrol boats in the Gulf of Tonkin prompted the Lyndon B. Johnson administration to order reprisal air strikes against the North. Believing the Soviet Union and China to be ultimately responsible for the "communist aggression" against South Vietnam, the U.S. Congress passed the so-called Tonkin Gulf Resolution, giving President Johnson authority to do whatever he thought necessary to counter the communist threat to the government and the people of South Vietnam.⁴

3. Recently, a handful of North American scholars has been making extensive use of newly available Vietnamese sources to assess more accurately certain of the myriad dimensions of the "Vietnam War." Foremost among such scholars is Robert Brigham. Brigham's work, however, has focused primarily on the communist/revolutionary movement in the South and only indirectly considered North Vietnamese policymaking.

4. Lloyd C. Gardner, *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (Chicago, 1995), 134.

As Washington and Saigon braced for a wider war, North Vietnamese leaders did all they could to delay it. On January 2, 1965, the VWP Politburo reiterated the mandate of the Third National Congress of 1960 that the people of the North and of the South make “big efforts” (*co gan rat lon*) to prevent a resumption of war and strive to “peacefully achieve the reunification of our country.”⁵ At the 1960 congress, the Party leadership had decided that the building of socialism in the Democratic Republic of [North] Vietnam (DRVN) was at that juncture the most pressing and essential objective of the Vietnamese Revolution. Fundamental as they were, the “liberation” of the South and the reunification of the nation could take place only after the consolidation of a socialist “rear base” (*hau phuong*) in the North.⁶ At its fifth plenum in July 1961, the Central Committee of the VWP restated this commitment to a “North First” policy, asserting that industrialized socialism (*cong nghiep hoa xa hoi chu nghia*) was necessary to increase standards of living in the North, facilitate the liberation of the South, and pave the way for national reunification.⁷

Hoping to give the economy time to develop, North Vietnamese leaders also wanted to avoid or at least delay a military confrontation with the United States because the VWP by itself lacked the resources to win such a confrontation. By the leadership’s own reckoning, revisionist thoughts and tendencies were prevalent at all levels of the Party. “Among cadres [and] party members, including middle- and high-ranking cadres and members,” the Party reported in 1965, “thoughts of leftist deviationism and the influences of revisionism have not yet been successfully overcome, and there are still

5. “Chi thi cua Bo chinh tri, So 88-CT/TW, ngay 2 thang 1 nam 1965: Ve cuoc van dong chinh huan mua xuan nam 1965,” in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dang—Toan tap*, Tap 26: 1965 (Hanoi, 2003) [hereafter referred to as VKD, 1965], 1.

6. See the documents in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dang—Toan tap*, Tap 21: 1960 (Hanoi, 2002), specifically “Bao cao chinh tri cua Ban Chap hanh Trung uong Dang tai Dai hoi dai bieu toan quoc lan thu III do dong chi Le Duan trinh bay, ngay 5 thang 9 nam 1960,” in *ibid.*, 495–656, and “Nghì quyết của Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ III của Đảng Lao động Việt Nam về nhiệm vụ và đường lối của Đảng trong giai đoạn mới, ngày 10 tháng 9 năm 1960,” in *ibid.*, 913–945.

7. “Bai noi cua Chu tich Ho Chi Minh tai Hoi nghi lan thu nam Ban Chap hanh Trung uong Dang (khoa III)” and “Nghì quyết của Hội nghị Trung ương lần thứ năm, So 26 NQ/TW, tháng 7 năm 1961: về vấn đề phát triển nông nghiệp trong kế hoạch 5 năm lần thứ nhất (1961–1965),” both in Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dang—Toan tap*, Tap 22: 1961 (Hanoi, 2002), 410–412, 413–458.

manifestations of individualism.”⁸ Some cadres and members still failed to grasp the importance of the relationship between “production and the people’s livelihood,” nor did everyone understand the “problems of socialist allocation.”⁹ Moreover, numerous elements in the VWP did not “yet pay enough attention to the task of understanding [the importance of] the political front.”¹⁰ The leadership suspected that this situation was due to the infiltration into Party ranks of enemies who sought to “destroy” the Party from within.¹¹ Assuming that leaders at all levels would heed their directives, First Secretary Le Duan, the Politburo, and the Central Committee undertook to bolster morale and purge the ranks of subversive thoughts and individuals. They estimated that it would take most of 1965 and perhaps part of 1966 to overhaul the Party and assure that cadres and members thought and acted fittingly.¹² Newly released documents convey the urgency of the situation, revealing that in early 1965 the Party actively recruited new cadres and members to improve its ranks and overall performance.¹³ In essence, the VWP leadership believed that, before the Vietnamese Revolution could proceed militarily, the spirit of the Party and of the masses had to be elevated.

That stance was not popular among southern supporters of the Revolution. For them, the liberation of the South was the most urgent task facing the Vietnamese nation. In 1959 the Diem regime redoubled its efforts to eliminate opponents in the South, with devas-

8. “Chi thi của Bộ chính trị, So 88-CT/TW, ngày 2 tháng 1 năm 1965: Về cuộc vận động chỉnh huan mua xuan nam 1965,” in *VKD*, 1965, p. 3. At the time, the Hanoi leadership used the term “leftist deviation” in reference to the aspirations of Party members who opposed all forms of armed struggle and remained committed to deposed Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev’s 1956 policy of peaceful coexistence (“revisionism”) and accommodation, with the West generally and with South Vietnam specifically.

9. “Chi thi của Ban Bí thư, So 92-CT/TW, ngày 27 tháng 2 năm 1965: Về việc thi hành Nghị quyết Hội nghị lần thứ 10 của Trung ương về thương nghiệp và gia ca,” in *VKD*, 1965, p. 29.

10. “Chi thi của Ban Bí thư, So 90-CT/TW, ngày 1 tháng 3 năm 1965: Về việc mở cuộc vận động nâng cao tinh thần cảnh giác cách mạng, ý thức tổ chức kỷ luật, làm tốt công tác tham tra chính trị và cải tiến công tác quản lý đối ngũ cán bộ, đảng viên để bảo vệ đảng (gọi tắt là cuộc vận động bảo vệ đảng),” in *ibid.*, 42.

11. *Ibid.*, 44.

12. *Ibid.*, 47.

13. See, for example, “Chi thi của Ban Bí thư, So 95-CT/TW, ngày 8 tháng 4 năm 1965: Về việc điều động cán bộ phục vụ cho yêu cầu xây dựng quan đội trong tình hình va nhien vu moi,” in *VKD*, 1965, pp. 137–139.

tating consequences for the revolutionary movement there. Within months, the number of VWP members in South Vietnam fell by 70 percent, from 50,000 to 15,000, due to death and capture.¹⁴ One district located outside Saigon lost 994 of its 1,000 members.¹⁵ Although Diem was deposed and murdered during a 1963 coup, the situation for southern revolutionaries remained precarious. For them, nothing justified deferring the fight to liberate the South. In 1964 southern revolutionary forces had intensified their guerrilla campaign.¹⁶ Efforts by Hanoi to rein in southern guerrillas were futile. Then, on February 7, 1965, southern insurgents attacked an American special forces camp at Pleiku, killing eight Americans and injuring more than 100 others.¹⁷ In the aftermath of the attack, the Johnson administration gave the go-ahead for a campaign of sustained bombings of North Vietnam and, shortly thereafter, deployed combat troops to South Vietnam.¹⁸

The resulting Americanization of the war distressed Hanoi, but it did not balk, having had some time to brace for that eventuality. Within days, the VWP announced that the struggle for reunification had entered a new phase and committed substantial additional resources to the liberation of the South. Specifically, it organized and implemented what it called the “Anti-American Resistance for National Salvation” (*cuoc khang chien chong My, cuu nuoc*) consisting of three separate struggles (*dau tranh*). The military struggle aimed at the demoralization and attrition of U.S. and South Vietnamese forces and at the occupation of southern territory.¹⁹ The political struggle entailed propaganda and other activity aimed at recruiting and retaining fighters and other supporters among the South Vietnamese population. The diplomatic struggle involved enlisting international support for the Vietnamese Revolution through diplo-

14. Military Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975* (Lawrence, Kans., 2002), 44.

15. Philippe Franchini, *Les guerres d'Indochine*, volume 2: *De la bataille de Dien Bien Phu à la chute de Saigon* (Paris, 1988), 191.

16. Philip B. Davidson, *Vietnam at War—The History: 1946–1975* (New York, 1988), 313–316.

17. Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945–1990* (New York, 1991), 135.

18. Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, 1999), 344, 363; Arthur J. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam* (Bloomington, Ind., 2001), 636.

19. *Tiep tuc nghien cuu xay dung ly luan quan su Viet Nam* (Hanoi, 1974), 4.

macy, propaganda, and, perhaps, when the time was right, negotiations with the Americans to convince Washington that the future of Vietnam should be determined by the Vietnamese themselves.²⁰

Although the VWP did not want war with the United States, it refused to negotiate with Washington once war began, relying instead on the military and political modes of struggle.²¹ The prospect of another negotiated agreement was inconceivable to Hanoi after the debacle caused by the settlement signed in Geneva in 1954. Negotiations would also alienate southerners, many of whom assumed, because of that debacle and the VWP's "North First" policy, that Hanoi "put the long-term interests of the North before southern liberation."²² Accordingly, VWP leaders "made the unity of the country one of their reasons for fighting and living, one of the fundamental elements of a revolution with a strong national component," and thus a commitment about which there was nothing to negotiate.²³ The VWP also rejected negotiations following the outbreak of hostilities because its leaders, who claimed to be internationalists, came to see the Vietnamese Revolution as a vanguard movement with the potential to inspire oppressed peoples around the world. The leadership thus accepted the possibility of an "enormous bloodletting" because it eventually viewed its struggle in a context that "served the cause of revolutionary forces worldwide."²⁴ "We have to establish a world front that will be built first by some core

20. Nguyen Thanh Le, *Cuoc dam phan Pari ve Viet Nam* (Hanoi, 1998), 21.

21. However, the VWP recognized the merits of an "apparent" readiness to negotiate. Accordingly, on April 8, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong presented to the DRVN National Assembly a four-point plan to serve as a foundation for a diplomatic settlement with the United States. The four points were: recognition of the fundamental rights of the Vietnamese people to peace, independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity, accompanied by unilateral American withdrawal and the unconditional cessation of military operations in South and North Vietnam; American respect for the Geneva Agreement of 1954; settlement of South Vietnamese problems by the South Vietnamese people in accordance with the program of southern revolutionaries without outside interference; and no foreign interference in the peace process leading to the reunification of Vietnam (see Franchini, *Les guerres d'Indochine*, 298).

22. Robert Brigham has claimed that the Geneva Agreement created "much ill" against the VWP leadership in the South as revolutionaries and other nationalists there concluded after its signing that they would "always" be treated as "a sacrificial animal." See Robert K. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF's Foreign Relations and the Viet Nam War* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1999), 41, 48.

23. Franchini, *Les guerres d'Indochine*, 189–190.

24. See Stein Tønnesson, "Tracking Multi-Directional Dominoes," in Odd Arne Westad, et al., eds., *77 Conversations Between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in In-*

countries and later enlarged to include African and Latin American countries,” Le Duan told Chinese premier Zhou Enlai.²⁵ On another occasion, he stated that fighting the Americans until final victory had become the “moral obligation” of the people of Vietnam to “the international Communist movement.” For the sake of “the spirit of proletarian internationalism” and “the international Communist movement,” he added, the Vietnamese had to be willing to suffer and shed their blood. “It doesn’t matter if the process of socialist development in the south of Vietnam is delayed for 30 or 40 years.”²⁶ A Central Committee document from the same period argued along the same line, insisting that “the nationalist struggle of the Vietnamese people was a big contribution [*mot dong gop to lon*] to the cause of the struggle of the world’s peoples against American-style imperialism.”²⁷ The struggle against the United States and its “lackeys” was thus motivated by “nationalism and proletarian internationalism” [*chu nghia yeu nuoc va chu nghia quoc te vo san*]; compromise would let down the people of Vietnam as well as the cause of world revolution.²⁸

Finally, Hanoi rejected diplomacy because it did not believe the Americans would negotiate seriously and equitably. According to the VWP Central Committee, the Americans would negotiate only to advance their position on the battlefield, set the stage for widening the war, or “halt the nationalist revolutionary struggle in the South.”²⁹ Only defeat on the field of battle would disabuse Washington of the idea that it could control the course of events on the Indochinese peninsula. In a speech before the National Assembly in April 1965, DRVN prime minister Pham Van Dong explained that, in the aftermath of the Geneva Agreement, “the U.S. imperialists gradually [sought] to replace the French colonialists in South Vietnam, set up the Ngo Dinh Diem puppet administration, wiped out

dochina, 1964–1977 (Washington, D.C. [Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 22], 1998), 33–34.

25. Quoted in *ibid.*, 35.

26. From the transcript of a conversation dated April 13, 1966, between Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, Kang Sheng, Le Duan, and Nguyen Duy Trinh, reproduced in *ibid.*, 95.

27. “Nghị quyết Hội nghị trung ương lần thứ 11 (đặc biệt), ngày 25, 26, 27 tháng 3 năm 1965: Về tình hình và nhiệm vụ cấp bách trước mắt,” in *VKD*, 1965, p. 116.

28. “Chỉ thị của Ban Bí thư, Số 94-CT/TW, ngày 2 tháng 4 năm 1965: Về công tác tu tuong trong tình hình trước mắt,” in *ibid.*, 129.

29. “Nghị quyết Hội nghị trung ương lần thứ 11 (đặc biệt),” 104.

one by one opposition groups, and carried out ruthless and wicked repressions against the people.” The Americans had thus shown no respect for the rights of the Indochinese peoples as they “drowned in blood all patriotic forces aspiring to independence, democracy, and peaceful national reunification.”³⁰ Negotiations with such a foe were therefore futile. “Popular violence is the only way to oppose the violence of the imperialist aggressor,” Pham Van Dong added.³¹

Few in the VWP thought the struggle would be easy. Newly available evidence suggests that ruling circles in Hanoi were apprehensive, especially about the near future, believing that the Americans would fight savagely and resolutely, in the process subjecting people in both halves of Vietnam to immeasurable suffering. In a document dated March 1965, reference to a prospective American invasion of the North reflected these concerns. Discussing the nature of American ambitions and strategies in Indochina, the VWP Central Committee expressed concern that the Americans may “extend their war of aggression” from the South “into the North of our country.”³² Despite this possibility, as well as the intensification of the war in the South and the air war against the North, Hanoi remained committed to the pursuit of socialism above the seventeenth parallel. “Great attention must be paid to securing the advance of the socialist revolution,” another document emphasized, “adequately pursuing the construction of the material and technical bases for socialism, and firmly consolidating the socialist relations of production.”³³ Following an emergency session convened in response to the initial deployment of U.S. ground forces in the South, the VWP Central Committee declared that the North “is still the great rear base, but it now must provide assistance to the front line in the South while strengthening the defensive capabilities [of the North] on all fronts.” The main tasks of the VWP in the new context included “building and developing the economy, consolidating national defense, assisting the southern revolution, and helping the Laotian revolution.” While those tasks were “closely related,”

30. “Government Report Submitted by Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, April 1965,” reproduced in *Against U.S. Aggression: Main Documents of the National Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, 3rd Legislature—2nd Session, April 1965* (Hanoi, 1966), 15.

31. *Ibid.*, 54.

32. “Nghị quyết Hội nghị trung ương lần thứ 11 (đặc biệt),” 105.

33. “Government Report Submitted by Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, April 1965,” 44.

the most “central” of them was “to build and develop the economy.”³⁴ The South was “a big front,” the North “the big rear base,” whose primary responsibility was to “build while sustaining the war, while assisting the front line in the South.”³⁵ The economy would be transformed from “an agricultural economy, with small production” and high levels of dependence on foreign aid to one “that was independent, self-sustaining, and which had reached a strong socialist stage.”³⁶ In addition to strengthening the industrial, “modern,” urban sector of the economy, the allocation of resources between lowland and highland areas would be improved, as “they do not yet meet the requirements of war.”³⁷ The DRVN would, in short, “reorient” its economy while “concentrating [its] strength to meet urgent requirements [and] prepare for war.” It would also “take initiative and cope with the plan and activities of the American imperialists and their puppets” while striving “to liberate the South, protect the North, and guide forward the revolution in the entire country.”³⁸ The future of the Vietnamese Revolution thus depended on the principle of “producing while fighting” [*vua san xuat, vua chien dau*].³⁹

As the war raged, the VWP would also promote localized over centralized production.⁴⁰ Regional self-sufficiency would best support the nation at war against an enemy that could attack urban areas, seaports, roads, and rail lines almost at will.⁴¹ Gradually, dispersed “ateliers,” or workshops, replaced large factories, and the

34. “De cuong bao cao tai Hoi nghi Ban chap hanh Trung uong lan thu 11 (dac biet), hop tu ngay 25 den ngay 27 thang 3 nam 1965: Kip thoi chuyen huong viec xay dung va phat trien kinh te quoc dan phuc vu dac luc nhiem vu cach mang ca nuoc trong tinh hinh moi,” in *VKD*, 1965, pp. 56, 57.

35. “Nghị quyết Hội nghị trung ương lần thứ 11 (đặc biệt),” 108.

36. “De cuong bao cao tai Hoi nghi Ban chap hanh Trung uong lan thu 11 (dac biet),” 58.

37. *Ibid.*, 59.

38. *Ibid.*, 65. See also “Thong bao cua Ban Bi thu, So 56-TB/TW, ngay 1 thang 4 nam 1965: Nhung quy dinh cua Bo chinh tri ve viec to chuc lanh dai cong tac tiep tuc cai tao xa hoi chu nghia doi voi cong thuong nghiep tu ban tu doanh, thu cong nghiep va thuong nghiep nho,” in *VKD*, 1965, pp. 119–125.

39. “Chi thi cua Ban Bi thu, So 94-CT/TW, ngay 2 thang 4 nam 1965: Ve cong tac tu tuong trong tinh hinh truoc mat,” in *ibid.*, 127.

40. Wilfred G. Burchett, *Vietnam North* (New York, 1966), 66.

41. Doan Trong Truyen and Pham Thanh Vinh, *Building an Independent National Economy in Vietnam* (Hanoi, 1964), 24–25, and Vo Nhan Tri, *Croissance économique au Viêt-nam, 1945–1965* (Hanoi, 1967), 116.

share of handicraft production in industrial and handicraft output value rose significantly.⁴² Provinces became autarkic units “able to provide ‘on-the-spot supply,’ meet [their] own needs in combat and production,” and satisfy the people’s basic needs.⁴³ Because rural residents, especially in the Red River delta, traditionally lived and worked autonomously under the jurisdiction of village communes and councils of elders, the VWP’s wartime measures required no major adjustment on the part of most people.⁴⁴ Hanoi promoted a variety of new patriotic slogans designed to inspire the masses, encouraging them variously to “carry out production work as vigorously as fighting,” “hold firm both your hammer and your rifle,” and, if they lost time as a result of alerts, “work twice as hard to make up for the lost time.” Peasants, for their part, were to “hold both our plough and our rifle” and “fight the enemy wherever he comes and resume production after the fight.”⁴⁵

As soon as Americanization of the fighting began, the VWP sanctioned a mass mobilization effort in April 1965. The “Three Readinesses” campaign urged men in the North to be ready to fight, ready to join the armed forces, and ready to perform any other task as necessary.⁴⁶ As part of the campaign, the DRVN government promulgated a decree extending indefinitely the period of service of soldiers and authorizing the recall of all discharged officers and enlisted men.⁴⁷ It also implemented similar orders to increase the

42. Jon Van Dyke, *North Vietnam's Strategy for Survival* (Palo Alto, Calif., 1972), 193; G. Nguyen Tien Hung, *Economic Development of Socialist Vietnam, 1955–80* (New York, 1977), 140–141.

43. Vo Quoc Tuan and Nguyen Xuan Lai, “The Second Resistance (1965–72),” in *Vietnamese Studies*, no. 44 (1976), 222.

44. “The Traditional Village (1),” in *Vietnamese Studies*, no. 61 (1980), 33–56; Pierre Gourou, *Les paysans du delta Tonkinois* (Paris, 1936), 32, 71. The traditional village and communal systems in Vietnam were modified after the French introduced an exploitative capitalist economy and, more recently, by the VWP’s land reform and collectivization campaigns.

45. “Government Report Submitted by Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, April 1965,” 40.

46. Hy Van Luong, *Revolution in the Village: Tradition and Transformation in North Vietnam, 1925–1988* (Honolulu, 1992), 202.

47. By the end of 1965 approximately 290,000 more troops had been mobilized, bringing the total number of servicemen to 400,000. Those forces joined indigenous southern forces, including, as of 1965, 68,000 regulars (*bo doi dia phuong*) and 137,000 irregulars (*dan quan du khich*), up from 12,000 and 10,000, respectively, in 1960. See William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh* (New York, 2000), 548, and Bo Quoc phong—Vien

ranks of militia forces, which rose from 1.4 million in 1964 to 2 million in mid-1965.⁴⁸ The guiding principle behind these measures was “Let the entire people fight the enemy and take part in the national defense.”⁴⁹ Because the war required the involvement of everyone, the VWP also launched the “Three Responsibilities” campaign, directing women to produce, work, and substitute for male combatants; urge men not in the military to join women in supporting the war effort; and participate in active resistance to the American aggressors.⁵⁰

Within the DRVN, resourceful leaders and valiant people undermined the effectiveness of the American bombing. In South Vietnam, however, the American war posed more difficult challenges. There, the firepower of the Americans and their South Vietnamese allies took a heavy toll on revolutionary forces. On the political front, cadres secured a number of “friendly” bases in rural areas, but not in cities, which remained under tight control of the enemy. For years, the effort in the South failed to achieve the strategic success the VWP hoped for.

It was in the face of these realities that the VWP deliberated on the predicament facing the Revolution below the seventeenth parallel. Ultimately, Hanoi approved a major offensive on urban centers in the South, culminating in the so-called Tet Offensive of 1968 that dealt the Americans and their South Vietnamese allies a blow that eventuated in “Vietnamization”—really, de-Americanization—of the war in Vietnam. It thereby set the stage for the withdrawal of American forces, the collapse of the Saigon regime, and the reunification of the nation under communist governance.

While it may be appropriate to rationalize the outcome of America’s military intervention in Vietnam in terms of the indomitable fighting spirit of indigenous revolutionaries and their leaders, new evidence from Vietnam demonstrates that that spirit cannot account for the origins of the conflict. On the eve of Amer-

lich su quan su Viet Nam, *Hau phuong chien tranh nhan dan Viet Nam, 1945–1975* (Hanoi, 1997), 203.

48. Military Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam*, 164.

49. Quoted in *History of the Communist Party of Vietnam* (Hanoi, 1986), 195.

50. Nguyen Thi Thap, *Lich su phong trao phu nu Viet Nam* (Hanoi, 1981), 109; “Chi thi cua Ban Bi thu, So 99-CT/TW, ngay 8 thang 6 nam 1965: Ve phuong huong, nhiem vu cua cong tac van dong phu nu truoc tinh hình moi,” in *VKD*, 1965, pp. 198–203.

icanization of the war, the VWP remained more concerned about developing the northern economy and enhancing Party cohesion than about liberating the South, to the consternation of southern supporters of the Revolution. In the spring of 1965, it was only reluctantly that the VWP committed the DRVN to a wider war with the United States. Once it made that commitment, however, it would leave no stone unturned to ensure the triumph of its cause.

