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The Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the 1954 Geneva Conference: A revisionist critique

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Drawing upon documentary and other evidence from Vietnam this paper argues that in 1954 the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) accepted negotiations and a diplomatic solution to its war against France because it served some of its most vital interests and satisfied its sense of the possibilities of the moment. To be sure, the DRVN leadership responded positively to concerns and pressures from its socialist allies, the Soviet Union and China, on some issues in Geneva. But it was not, as western scholars have maintained, acting against its own better judgement or strategic imperatives.

Introduction

The 1954 Geneva Conference on Indochina produced one of the consequential diplomatic settlements of the Cold War. Portending the end of the First Indochina War and of French colonial rule in Southeast Asia, the 'Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam' authorised a temporary partition of Vietnam into two regroupment zones divided at the seventeenth parallel, while a related document, the 'Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference', called for national elections to create a single government for a sovereign, unified Vietnam. The two documents presaged American military intervention in the country and legitimated the effort of the government of the northern zone, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN), to 'liberate' the southern half of the country after the failure to hold national elections. The documents also served as a backdrop for all subsequent negotiations between Washington and Hanoi. In a meaningful sense, Hanoi's war against the United States

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aimed to force Saigon and Washington to honour the spirit and the letter of the Geneva accords.

Several studies have addressed the Geneva Conference and the accords it generated.[1] A recurrent theme in those studies is that China and the Soviet Union played controlling roles in shaping the accords to satisfy their own national interests and in doing so pressured the DRVN to accept terms that undercut its interests and those of the Vietnamese revolution. Though Beijing and Moscow directed no specific threats at Hanoi that those studies can substantiate, and despite the inability of their authors to read, or their reluctance to use, Vietnamese sources, they infer from the tone of the discussions in Geneva, the contents of the accords, and the contentions of one another that Hanoi could not have been satisfied by the result of the proceedings. The behaviour thus attributed to Moscow and Beijing amounted to a betrayal of the Vietnamese revolution, a 'fact' the DRVN leadership would surely have recognised and regretted.

François Joyaux's *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine – Genève 1954* introduced those themes at the end of the 1970s. Relying on French archives, Joyaux concluded that at Geneva the People's Republic of China (PRC) sacrificed the interests of its Vietnamese allies by pressuring them to accept terms that were detrimental to their interests, and did so because the PRC was determined to preclude American military intervention in Indochina and to enhance its own international prestige. Interestingly, Joyaux only inferred that it was Beijing, with Moscow's support, that coerced the DRVN into agreeing to partitioning Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel. 'It is symbolic [*significatif*]', he wrote, that the DRVN's concession 'took place shortly after the return to Geneva of [Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav] Molotov and [Premier and head of the PRC mission in Geneva] Chou En-lai and even, more precisely, following a meeting between the latter and [French Prime Minister] Mendès-France. *How, therefore, [can one] not see therein, at least partially, the consequence of a Sino-Soviet pressure*'?[2]

Using Chinese sources, Qiang Zhai has more recently repeated that interpretation. 'The Geneva Accords of 1954 reflected the moderating influence of the Chinese and Soviet delegations', Qiang argues. To achieve the 'primary objective' of containing the US in Indochina, China consented to 'bargain away' DRVN interests. 'Under the pressure of Beijing and Moscow', he continues, the DRVN 'had to abandon its effort to unify the whole of Vietnam' and liberate all of Indochina. Thus, at Geneva, 'Chinese and Soviet national self-interests overweighed any ideological obligations to assist the struggle of a fellow Communist Party'.[3] On the basis of similar evidence Chen Jian has surmised that 'the [Geneva] conference's settlement of the Indochina issue should be attributed to the cooperation between Zhou Enlai and Vyacheslav Molotov'.[4] In a study focused on the strategic partnership between the DRVN, the PRC, and the Soviet Union, Mari Olsen posits that at Geneva Moscow and Beijing 'both sacrificed a swift Vietnamese reunification in order to safeguard their own priorities'. Using language similar to that of Qiang, Olsen contends that 'the two powers exerted a restraining influence' on the DRVN, 'thereby illustrating how international strategic

considerations took precedence over the ideological obligations to support the struggle of a fellow Communist party'.[5]

Elaborating still further on the argument made originally by Joyaux, Christopher Goscha suggests that China used the Geneva negotiations to forestall Vietnamese domination of the Indochinese peninsula.[6] In a parallel study of Soviet policy, Ilya Gaiduk contends that as part of its endeavour to encourage French rejection of the European Defence Community (EDC), which presaged the militarisation of West Germany, Moscow cajoled the Vietnamese at Geneva to make substantive concessions to secure a peace settlement. 'We do not know Ho Chi Minh's attitude toward' such concessions as partition, Gaiduk confesses, 'although it can be assumed that such a solution would be unsatisfactory to the Vietnamese leader whose armies were winning on the battlefield'.[7] As William Turley has summarised this consensus of views from Joyaux to Gaiduk, whatever the circumstances surrounding their completion, the Geneva accords 'deprived the [Vietnamese] Communists of an imminent victory'.[8]

So widespread is this consensus that it amounts to what Michael Vickery has called a 'standard total view', an understanding of a subject so commonly accepted that it constitutes a 'conventional wisdom' that no one challenges or looks further into.[9] It has thus become a truism that the Vietnamese were relatively passive participants in a set of negotiations that compromised their own interests, helpless to resist the machinations of overbearing 'allies'. Vietnamese leaders 'had no other choice but to follow Beijing's and Moscow's advice', a recent study bluntly noted.[10]

This consensus exists – and persists – largely because few western scholars have studied the DRVN's role in the Geneva negotiations or probed into its influence in melding the resulting accords.[11] Astonishingly, important questions have never been addressed adequately. Why, in the aftermath of the evidently spectacular victory at Dien Bien Phu, did DRVN leaders not continue the fight to crush French forces in Indochina and opt instead to end hostilities diplomatically? Did pressures from its socialist allies drag a reluctant DRVN into negotiations and then coerce it to accept an agreement not of its own choosing and not in its own revolutionary interests? What were the circumstances constraining or encouraging the DRVN and otherwise conditioning its behaviour immediately before and during the Geneva Conference? Did DRVN diplomats squander at the negotiating table what their military had won on the battlefield?

While western historians have offered mostly speculative answers to such questions, Vietnamese scholars have recently overcome an earlier reluctance to address and answer them. According to an article in the journal *Nghien cuu Lich su* (Historical Research), the latter change began in 1986 when the leadership in Hanoi promulgated the policy of *doi moi*, or 'renovation', eventuating in a new freedom of inquiry for Vietnamese historians.[12] That freedom facilitated access to historical archives and resulted in the publication of many important and heretofore classified Party documents. Today, historical enquiry in Vietnam is significantly less subservient to dictates of the Party and the State than before 1986, and may be conducted independently, albeit circumspectly. In the years around the fiftieth anniversary of the

Geneva Conference, historians and others in Vietnam produced a number of impressive works on the conference, including works that systematically consider the role of DRVN negotiators and the issues raised in the preceding paragraph.[13] Foremost among these are works by Professor Vu Duong Ninh of Vietnam National University and by a number of former and current officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Bo Ngoai giao*; MOFA). These works probe into the factors that prompted the DRVN to agree to peace talks, to negotiate as it did, and to accept the terms of the Geneva accords. The results include fascinating new insights and understandings that convincingly challenge and sometimes demolish the interpretations of the historians whose views were summarised above.

More valuable than these secondary accounts for scholars seeking to comprehend Vietnamese motivations and decision-making going into and during the Geneva Conference is the growing documentary record available in Vietnam. That record includes dossiers (*ho so*) of documents generated by or submitted to the National Assembly (*Quoc hoi*) and the Prime Minister's Office (*Phu Thu Tuong*) at the National Archives Centre 3 (*Trung tam Luu tru Quoc gia III*) in Hanoi, as well as growing compilations of published documents, most notably Party documents reproduced in the series *Van kien Dang: Toan tap*.[14] That series includes a lengthy review of issues and strategies prepared for the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Workers' Party (VWP) by First Secretary Truong Chinh in mid-July 1954, as the Geneva talks entered their crucial phase. Particularly revealing is Chinh's trenchant overview of the Party leadership's understanding of the domestic and international situation at the time. This and many other documents in the series reveal the concerns of Party leaders as they negotiated the end of the war with France. Less accessible but equally illuminating is a retrospective history of Vietnamese diplomacy during the war against France compiled by the MOFA for internal use in 1976 and reprinted with some revisions by the Institute of International Relations in Hanoi in 2002.[15]

These and other sources afford a much clearer and more complete understanding than was previously possible of the DRVN leadership's positions on war and negotiations from late 1953 through the middle of 1954. They elucidate the bases, purposes, and understandings that prompted the leadership to agree to negotiate and then to accept the terms of the various accords negotiated in Geneva. (Those accords included, besides the agreement on Vietnam and the Final Declaration, separate bilateral agreements on Laos and Cambodia.) These sources indicate that the DRVN accepted a diplomatic solution to the war in the summer of 1954 because doing so satisfied its relevant vital interests within its sense of the possibilities of the moment. In conceding on certain issues during the talks, Vietnamese communist leaders were in part responding positively to concerns of their socialist allies. Because of the sizeable, indeed essential contributions of those allies to its war effort, the DRVN had to acknowledge these concerns. But it was not acting against its better judgement solely or even largely as a result of those concerns. On the one hand, there was a remarkable degree of congruence between Vietnamese and Chinese and Soviet interests in Geneva concerning the cessation of hostilities. On the other hand, the importuning of allies,

while tangible and consequential, was only one of several factors informing DRVN decision-making during the Geneva negotiations. Although it is impossible to state with certainty which of several sometimes competing considerations weighed definitively in so complex a calculus, the evidence from Vietnam suggests that concerns about the balance of forces in Indochina after some eight years of war and the looming possibility of American military intervention weighed more heavily on the minds of Vietnamese policymakers than the dispositions of Beijing and Moscow toward an immediate ceasefire. This paper has no pretension of solving the quandary involving motivations, intentions, and influences at the Geneva Conference. Its purpose is the more modest one of introducing some of the evidence that offers an alternative to the 'standard total view' of the role of the DRVN in the Geneva negotiations.

To understand DRVN decision-making at Geneva it is essential to recognise that the way historical actors interpret a situation is often more important than the historian's hindsight or ostensibly 'objective' knowledge of the situation. In this case, perceived rather than 'objective' realities were paramount in forming the judgements of Vietnamese leaders and their decision to accept the Geneva accords. Scholarly postulates and evidence that Chinese and/or Soviet pressures conditioned the DRVN's course of action mean little unless it can be demonstrated that Vietnamese policymakers felt the weight of those pressures in their strategic calculations and adjusted those calculations to accommodate those pressures. Similarly, contentions that DRVN leaders at the time considered the Geneva accords detrimental to the Vietnamese revolution are valid only if substantiated by evidence documenting the consideration and the detriment.

Historical overview

In the immediate aftermath of Japan's surrender in World War II, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the establishment of the DRVN. The proclamation culminated the relatively peaceful process known to Vietnamese as the 'August Revolution'. In that 'revolution', communist and nationalist forces amalgamated into the Viet Minh, a united front led by Ho, wrested the reins of government from the defeated Japanese and forced the abdication of the last Nguyen emperor, Bao Dai.[16] Thus ended ten centuries of dynastic rule in Vietnam. The Japanese had effectively ended French colonial control over Vietnam and the rest of Indochina in March 1945, but France never forswore its *mission civilizatrice* in the peninsula and was in fact working to reassert it even as Ho made his proclamation. Unwilling to accept the reimposition of French authority, Ho remobilized the Viet Minh to resist it.[17]

Following the gradual re-occupation of Indochina by French forces, hostilities broke out in December 1946, and the newly-formed DRVN government retreated from Hanoi to Pac Bo in the mountains of northern Vietnam along the Chinese border. From there it launched a three-pronged 'Resistance against French Colonial Aggression' (*cuoc khang chien chong thuc dan Phap xam luoc*). The first prong, 'military

struggle', aimed at wearing down French forces through strategies of attrition and demoralization. A parallel 'political struggle' entailed propaganda activity among the Vietnamese masses to recruit and retain fighters as well as civilian partisans, and thereby 'isolate' (*co lap*) the enemy. A third prong, 'diplomatic struggle', sought international support for Vietnamese independence through diplomacy and propaganda.[18] The communist victory in China in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War a year later prompted Beijing and Moscow to provide military and other assistance to the Viet Minh. Cold War considerations caused Washington to respond in kind, and provide increasing amounts of aid to the French. The resulting internationalization intensified the hostilities in Indochina, but failed to tip the scales in favour of either side. But the longer the war continued, the more it became linked to Cold War interests of the great powers. France became increasingly dependent on the US, and the Viet Minh on the Soviets and the Chinese. Although the DRVN leadership remained largely impervious to the political influence of its allies despite the support they rendered to the Vietnamese revolution, that situation was subject to change if dependence on that support became too pronounced, or prolonged.

After almost seven years of fighting, Prime Minister Joseph Laniel's conservative government in France announced in October 1953 a willingness to accept a negotiated settlement of the war. Shortly thereafter, Ho Chi Minh told a Swedish newspaper that if Paris wanted 'to negotiate an armistice in Vietnam' and 'solve the Vietnam problem by peaceful means', the DRVN was 'ready to meet this desire'.[19] In February 1954, the great powers responded to these initiatives by agreeing to participate in talks in Geneva to resolve the Indochinese crisis. On 7 May 1954, the day before the talks commenced, Viet Minh forces overwhelmed a sizeable French garrison at Dien Bien Phu in a remote valley of north-western Vietnam. The fallout from that event hovered over the deliberations at Geneva, which involved representatives from the governments of Britain and the Soviet Union, who jointly chaired the conference, as well as the US and China, plus the parties immediately involved, France, the pro-French State of Vietnam (SOVN), the pro-French, royal governments of Laos and Cambodia, and the DRVN.[20] By 21 July 1954, the parties had reached three separate agreements, one for each of the Indochinese states, ostensibly ending the Indochina war. In the agreement on Vietnam, France and the DRVN agreed to an immediate ceasefire, the independence of all of Vietnam, the temporary division of the nation into two regroupment zones separated by a demilitarised zone at the seventeenth parallel, a mandatory regroupment of all military forces loyal to France south of that line and to the DRVN north of it, and a voluntary regroupment of individual Vietnamese along the same lines.[21] The two parties also agreed to prohibit the introduction of new military forces into Vietnam and to refrain from retaliating against former enemy combatants. To supervise the implementation of these provisions and monitor violations of them, the settlement created a joint French–DRVN task force and an international control commission of representatives from India, Poland, and Canada. In line with the military situation in the summer of 1954, the DRVN inherited jurisdiction over the northern regroupment zone and France (and by extension its surrogates in the SOVN)

over the southern zone. As the partition of the nation was to be temporary, a fourth document, the 'Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference', called for consultations between 'the competent representative authorities of the two zones' to set the terms for nationwide elections leading to reunification under a single government. The consultations were to begin in April 1955 and the elections to be held by July 1956, at which point all remaining French forces would withdraw from Vietnam. The Final Declaration listed all the participants in the conference, but remained unsigned. Unilaterally, the Americans announced that their government was 'not prepared to join in a declaration by the Conference such as is submitted'.[22]

The road to Geneva

By late 1953, Viet Minh forces had been fighting France in Vietnam and other parts of Indochina for nearly seven years. Though committed to 'complete victory' (*toan thang*) over the French in all of Indochina, DRVN leaders by this time had come to recognise that for the foreseeable future such an outcome was problematical at best.[23] Despite all of their sacrifices and hardships, Viet Minh forces were still unable to challenge French control in key parts of the country, including most cities, and almost all of Cambodia and Laos.[24] According to a recent Vietnamese study, the military campaigns in Viet Bac (1947), the border regions (1950), Hoa Binh (1951–52), and Tay Bac/Laos (1952–53) had begun to have 'substantive significance' (*bat dau co y nghia ve chat*) but not yet 'truly transformative substantive significance' (*y nghia thuc su chuyen bien ve chat*).[25] Viet Minh forces had scored several tactical victories over the years, but there was no indication Paris was about to capitulate. Of greatest concern to DRVN leaders was the fact that the 'balance of forces' (*luc luong so sanh*) – the number and condition of military effectives under their command relative to those of the French and their Indochinese allies – remained in favour of the French. As that constituted the barometer by which the leaders measured progress, they concluded that the war was at an impasse. As they acknowledged later, the VWP at this point faced two 'possible developments' (*khan nang phat trien*), continuing hostilities on current terms or ending the impasse through new approaches.[26] The first option risked provoking American intervention as French forces faltered, a prospect the Party thought more than likely but sought to avoid. It thus turned to the second option, deciding to make constructive use of diplomatic struggle by engaging in negotiations with France, even suspending for a time the military struggle if that became possible or necessary.

In the aftermath of the offer from the Laniel government, the DRVN thus signalled its willingness to negotiate. In November 1953, one of its representatives told a meeting of the World Peace Council in Vienna that ending the war with France was 'an effort that was important and which the DRVN could fulfil'.[27] 'To stop the war in Vietnam through peaceful negotiations', he specified, 'is completely necessary and also possible'.[28] The VWP followed this general statement with a more explicit signal six days later, on 29 November, when a Swedish newspaper, Stockholm's *Expressen*,

published Ho Chi Minh's answers to questions it had previously submitted to the DRVN mission in Beijing. Ho affirmed that his government was prepared to engage in serious negotiations to resolve its differences with the French through peaceful means. But he added an important caveat: the negotiations must be 'an affair between the government of the DRVN and the government of France'.[29] Shortly thereafter, on 19 December, the seventh anniversary of the beginning of the war, Ho reiterated the VWP's commitment to negotiations. Though 'the French colonialists continue their war of aggression' and 'our people remain determined to fight until final victory', Ho told the Party membership, 'if the French government wants to arrive at a ceasefire in Vietnam by means of negotiations and wants to resolve the Vietnam problem following a peaceful way then the people and government of the [DRVN] are also prepared to talk'.[30]

One of the interesting revelations of declassified Vietnamese documents is that leaders of the regular armed forces, the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), were reluctant to support negotiations. Emboldened by the Dien Bien Phu victory, they wanted to continue fighting. In a report, also in December 1953, to the National Assembly, which was still convening despite trying circumstances, the Defence Ministry alerted the government to the army's concerns about negotiations and possible suspension of hostilities. 'An extremely central and formal lesson of the revolution is that arms secure political power', the Ministry told the Assembly of the army's concerns, and 'the use of violence destroys the enemy and protects the revolutionary homeland'. In colonies and 'semi-colonies', the Ministry report continued, 'armed struggle is an essential form of struggle'. Given the conditions that now exist in Vietnam and the rest of Indochina, the Defence Ministry added, 'only violent struggle can solve revolutionary problems, liberate the people, protect democracy, [and] guarantee the progress of socialism'. Privileging diplomacy over military struggle could thus only be detrimental to the resistance effort and, by extension, to the long-term interests of the revolution.[31] With a clear focus on the tactical dimensions of the war with France, military leaders paid no heed to the larger strategic situation.

Several factors explain the decision to reject these views of the DRVN military, which a number of Party and government officials shared. To 'struggle to restore peace in Vietnam' was 'the wish of our people', a Party report noted in early 1954; but there were other important realities to consider in honouring that wish.[32] In addition to the pressing need for a respite from the demands of war, there was a need to placate French and now American 'warmongers', whom DRVN leaders thought were anxious to widen the war.[33] According to a recent article in the Vietnamese journal *Nghien cuu Quoc te* (International Studies), the DRVN 'raised the peace flag' in late 1953 to 'isolate' those warmongers by precluding any excuse Washington might invent for military intervention in Indochina.[34] The Eisenhower administration, it now appeared to DRVN leaders, was more concerned about defeating the resistance than were the French themselves, and more determined than ever to use its own forces to achieve that goal. 'As the [threat of] American intervention in the war of aggression in

Indochina deepened by the day', a Vietnamese historian wrote recently of this line of reasoning, the situation in Indochina became 'more tense and decisive by the day'.[35] 'War-weariness, coupled with the possibility of American military intervention, persuaded DRVN and VWP officials that the negotiating table would be a more profitable arena at that point than continued military struggle', Carl Thayer has noted, summarising this set of circumstances.[36] Moreover, direct negotiations with France would enhance the legitimacy of the DRVN government domestically as well as its status internationally. The mobilisation of world opinion which this recognition of the DRVN promised to encourage, the Party acknowledged in February 1954, constituted 'a winning opportunity' to pressure Paris and Washington to end their 'war of aggression' in Indochina.[37]

Another important factor influencing the turn to negotiations, which historian Vu Duong Ninh has stressed, was the DRVN's recognition in mid-1953 and thereafter that its allies in the Soviet Union and the PRC favoured a negotiated conclusion to the war for reasons of their own.[38] The death of Stalin, whom VWP leaders considered a staunch supporter of the Vietnamese revolution, precipitated a succession crisis in the Soviet Union which, they feared, threatened Moscow's commitment to their cause. Moreover, the end of the Korean War, a major catalyst for Soviet and Chinese aid to the Viet Minh, appeared to have dampened enthusiasm for continuing the Indochina war in both Moscow and Beijing. For Beijing, the Korean armistice presented an opportunity to concentrate on the still nascent socialist transformation of the Chinese state. The PRC had been at war incessantly since long before its inception, and had had little opportunity to implement such vital objectives as land reform and economic autarky.[39] In respecting the wishes of these allies, the VWP would not only retain their political and material support for its ongoing revolution; it would also contribute its dues to international socialist solidarity and to the furtherance of world revolution.

Predictably, Beijing and Moscow welcomed news of the DRVN's seemingly sudden willingness to negotiate an end to the war. Eager to seize the opportunity this presented them, they at once petitioned the governments of France, Britain, and the US to join multilateral negotiations with the concerned Indochinese parties.[40] Almost immediately, in February 1954, these governments agreed to an international conference on the future of Indochina to be held in Geneva at the conclusion of similar talks on the future of Korea scheduled to begin shortly. Pleased as it was by these rapid developments, the DRVN leadership had reservations about the format of the proposed talks. It preferred, as Ho Chi Minh earlier indicated, bilateral talks with France, but accepted the fact that internationalisation of the peace process was sensible since the war itself had become internationalised. But more parties meant more interests to accommodate and, under the proposed format, the DRVN saw at once that its interests might be subsumed under those of larger powers. Moscow and Beijing had been loyal supporters of the Vietnamese resistance, but under the altered circumstances of early 1954 both might be tempted to use the conference to further their desire for new, less antagonistic relations with the West at the expense of the ongoing

Vietnamese revolution. At the same time, Washington, with imperatives of its own, could be expected to attempt to undermine the Geneva negotiations in order to preclude a peace settlement and use the resulting failure as a pretext for intervening in the war.

With these conflicting considerations in mind, the DRVN leadership assumed that any agreement produced within the Geneva framework would at some level have to accommodate the interests not just of the belligerents but of other parties as well. 'With the element of internationalization like that', a Vietnamese scholar commented recently, 'the stamp of the great powers on the process and the results of the conference were things that could not be avoided'.[41] 'Our biggest problem in Geneva', another Vietnamese scholar wrote later, was 'the framework of the talks and the procedure to execute negotiations'.[42] Thus, the Geneva Conference 'did not convene in accordance with a coming to terms between us and our enemy', another Vietnamese historian has concluded, but 'in accordance with the coming to terms between the big countries, mainly the Soviet Union, France, England, the US, and China'.[43]

In December 1953, VWP leaders had concluded on the basis of 'the correlation of forces between us and the enemy at that juncture' that 'conditions for peace negotiations were not yet ripe'.[44] To facilitate the 'ripening' that that statement implied, the Party leadership decided on 17 December 1953 to use military force to enhance its advantage in the upcoming bargaining. Specifically, it planned to escalate hostilities in a way that, if successful, would compromise the overall French strategy as laid out in the Navarre Plan, and in so doing convince the enemy that 'he will lose everything' if he continued fighting.[45] 'At that point, he will want to talk peace' and will negotiate earnestly.[46] The decision by French military commanders to establish a 12,000-man garrison at Dien Bien Phu presented the VWP a golden opportunity to fulfil this plan. Though its leaders had given up hope of overall military victory for the time being, they understood that any success in the military struggle would serve their larger diplomatic purposes. Dien Bien Phu thus unexpectedly became the fulcrum on which the DRVN's prospects for success in Geneva rested. Interestingly, available VWP documents from that period did not really address the possibility or implications of failure at Dien Bien Phu.

Most Vietnamese historians of the war against France are members of the PAVN and/or veterans of the campaigns they write about, and they tend to reject the claim that the military struggle was ever secondary to the diplomatic one.[47] Their counterparts among diplomatic historians, on the other hand, agree with that claim. Vu Duong Ninh, the most distinguished of the latter, suggests that Party leaders agreed to the assault on Dien Bien Phu because they believed victory there would assure that DRVN envoys in Geneva negotiated from a position of strength.[48] The commander of the assault, General Vo Nguyen Giap, hinted at that interpretation in January 1954. 'Our victory', Giap told his field commanders, 'will make it possible for our forces to intensify their actions on various fronts'.[49] The French garrison at Dien Bien Phu had to be destroyed, a member of the PAVN General Staff observed later, 'to co-ordinate with the diplomatic activities then about to start in Geneva'.[50] Ho Chi Minh himself

wrote to Giap in early 1954 that Dien Bien Phu 'is a very important battle not only militarily, but also politically, not only domestically, but also internationally'.[51] On the basis of such evidence historian William Duiker has concluded that DRVN leaders 'decided to attack the new French base [at Dien Bien Phu] in a bid to bring about a dramatic shift of the military balance of power on the eve of the peace conference'.[52] In support of that decision, Beijing 'accelerated considerably' its aid deliveries.[53] During the attack itself, which began on 13 March and lasted 55 days, the DRVN received from China approximately 200 trucks, 10,000 barrels of oil, 100 cannons, 3000 guns of various kinds, 2,400,000 rounds of small arms ammunition, 60,000 artillery shells, and 1700 tons of grain.[54]

Although the victory at Dien Bien Phu was complete, in its aftermath public praise of its 'momentous' nature were echoed by private cautions against hubris or complacency.[55] The victory marked 'only the beginning', Ho Chi Minh told those who participated in it. 'We must not be self-complacent'; the revolutionary struggle 'may be long and hard' before 'complete victory can be achieved'.[56] VWP First Secretary Truong Chinh noted later that while the victory was important, 'it had not basically changed' the balance of forces 'between [the enemy] and us'. 'On every battlefield', he added, 'our strength was greater than the enemy's; but in the whole nation, our strength was [still] only equal to the enemy's strength'.[57] The balance remained unchanged in part because Paris, undeterred by the setback at Dien Bien Phu, immediately deployed additional troops to Indochina.[58] The Party leadership cabled Foreign Minister Pham Van Dong, who headed the DRVN delegation in Geneva, that 'we won big' and 'the enemy suffered heavily and was humbled [at Dien Bien Phu and] on many [other] battlefields' in early 1954. Shortly after Dien Bien Phu, however, the enemy rebounded in certain areas and his 'sphere of occupation' (*pham vi chiem dong*) became 'larger than before'.[59] Left to run its course the war could thus take a turn for the worse, the delegation understood, particularly if Washington acted to 'carry out its plan for extending and expanding the hostilities'.[60]

Some pundits have argued that the DRVN leadership made a mistake by negotiating after Dien Bien Phu, insisting that its own interests dictated that it ride the *élan* of triumph to complete victory.[61] A Vietnamese historian has described such views as 'legitimate' but 'subjective', for they fail to recognise the 'objective situation, of our side and the enemy's'.[62] Besides the VWP's concerns about the balance of forces, Beijing and Moscow remained committed to a prompt end to the war even as they increased their aid to the DRVN. In fact, Vu Duong Ninh has suggested that China and the Soviet Union conditioned their increased aid during the Dien Bien Phu campaign on pledges that the DRVN would use the victory to negotiate constructively at Geneva. 'Despite their zealous aid to the Vietnamese resistance, especially during the battle of Dien Bien Phu', Ninh has written, 'the big socialist countries also wanted to seek a way of reconciliation [*bien phap hoa giai*]'. Thus, 'it goes without saying' that the Party and government had to 'find a suitable response' (*doi sach thich hop*) to the concerns of their allies.[63] More importantly, the armed forces were 'weary' from the strenuous effort at Dien Bien Phu as well as the cumulative effects of more than seven years of

war against a better-supplied and technologically superior enemy.[64] 'PAVN forces were exhausted from what turned out to be a pyrrhic victory at Dien Bien Phu', Carl Thayer has remarked.[65] Viet Minh casualties in the battle exceeded 25,000, including 10,000 killed, and material losses were equally staggering.[66] 'Because of the protracted nature of the war, our people must contribute manpower, and contribute heavily', VWP leaders cabled Pham Van Dong. 'If the war expands then our circumstances will become even more tiring and difficult'. Resistance forces had 'made progress on several fronts, but went through a half year of continuous and difficult fighting' and 'suffered exhaustion'. Moreover, unfavourable 'battlefield, weather, and material conditions' were likely to 'limit our activities during the [coming] rainy season'. Thus, the cable concluded, 'generally speaking, our capacity to carry out major military operations is limited'.[67] Behind such language lay a clear but unacknowledged fact: resistance forces would have been hard pressed to continue fighting, particularly with increased American assistance to the French.

Finally, the DRVN leadership proceeded with negotiations after Dien Bien Phu because failing to do so would undercut the political and diplomatic modes of struggle. The internal MOFA history of Vietnamese diplomacy states that after Dien Bien Phu 'our compatriots' in areas under enemy control were 'begging for the return of peace in Indochina'. The 'central slogan of their struggle at the time' was 'negotiations [by France] with the Ho Chi Minh Government to end the war in Indochina'. In Hanoi, Haiphong, Saigon, and elsewhere 'thousands of compatriots from all social classes were signing petitions requesting the French to negotiate seriously with our representatives in Geneva'.[68] Given the pervasiveness of antiwar sentiment throughout Indochina after more than seven years of conflict, refusing to negotiate would have been imprudent. It would have alienated intellectuals and Vietnamese moderates of all stripes, tarnished the DRVN's image domestically and internationally, validated French claims that Paris was more committed to peace than its enemies were, and, quite possibly, have served as pretext for American military intervention. With much to gain and little to lose politically, diplomatically, or militarily, the DRVN was ready to negotiate.

The DRVN and the Geneva negotiations

DRVN leaders expected the Geneva talks to be difficult. In the words of one Vietnamese scholar, the victory at Dien Bien Phu 'did not mean that the diplomatic struggle would not meet difficulties, complexities' in Geneva.[69] The leadership acknowledged the widespread desire that the fighting cease, but believed that 'only victory over the enemy can bring about a true peace'. It would therefore negotiate, but 'we should not harbour illusions that peace will come easily'.[70] 'We have no high expectation about the Geneva Conference', the VWP Secretariat remarked as late as 1 May 1954; at best it promised an opportunity to 'win over public opinion'.[71]

At Geneva, the strategy of DRVN negotiators revolved around several basic propositions. They wanted above all a final settlement that would not preclude further

progress in the revolution. Negotiations continued the revolution by foregrounding the political and diplomatic struggles. They were a way of sustaining the revolution. The negotiators also wanted a settlement that covered all of Indochina, not just Vietnam. The aim in this was to 'help the friendly countries' of Laos and Cambodia 'help themselves' in the spirit of socialist solidarity. This would be accomplished through securing recognition of the Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak revolutionary fronts as legal political entities, and in so doing help safeguard the independence and territorial integrity of Vietnam against the presence of unfriendly foreign forces elsewhere in Indochina.[72] Indochina was 'one battlefield' (*chien truong*), 'one united bloc' (*khoi thong nhat*), Ton Duc Thang, the acting chairman of the DRVN National Assembly's Standing Committee, observed.[73] Having suffered equally under the French, as the Foreign Ministry had put it in 1945, 'the three [Indochinese] peoples must struggle together to get rid of them, help one another to recover and keep their independence'.[74] The 'cunning designs' of the Americans and their allies at Geneva, VWP leaders believed, 'are to separate the issue of Cambodia and Laos from the issue of Vietnam'. However, 'if peace has been restored in one country of the Indochinese peninsula but not restored in the other two countries', then 'that country's peace is not guaranteed'. Should the DRVN sign a ceasefire agreement with France while war continued in Laos and Cambodia, Washington would 'have a chance' to turn those two countries into 'strategic bases' to use 'as a springboard for occupying Vietnam'.[75] Accordingly, only the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Indochina and the prospect for neutral or, ideally, allied governments in Laos and Cambodia could be satisfactory.[76] Finally, the DRVN negotiators wanted to settle political matters before taking up military issues.[77] The reason for this set of priorities was the fear that immediate suspension of military struggle would diminish their leverage at the bargaining table. They thought that Paris, more precisely, 'one faction in the French government', would 'take advantage' of a ceasefire to 'stabilize the military and political situation' in Indochina by 'zealously increasing reinforcements from France, zealously expanding the puppet army, [and] zealously requesting American material assistance'.[78]

Within the parameters of these concerns, DRVN negotiators hoped to secure the best terms possible. Understanding that he would likely have to settle for less than he wanted, Pham Van Dong advanced maximalist positions at the outset of the conference. Specifically, he presented an eight-point plan that called for (1) recognition of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian independence and sovereignty; (2) withdrawal of foreign forces from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos within a specified time; (3) free general elections in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos to form a single government in each country; (4) freedom for the people of each of the three nations to determine their future relationship with the French Union; (5) acknowledgement by the DRVN, Khmer Issarak, and Pathet Lao of the economic and cultural interests of France in their respective countries; (6) commitment by all concerned parties not to prosecute anyone who collaborated with the enemy during the war; (7) exchange of all prisoners of war; and (8) a complete and simultaneous ceasefire throughout Indochina

by all armed forces and demarcation of areas occupied by the armed forces of each side to strengthen the armistice.[79]

An official American assessment concluded that the DRVN's eight-point plan 'amounted to a request that the French abandon Vietnam' and the rest of Indochina at once. Dong's purpose in advancing such an unreasonable package of proposals, the assessment added, was to 'delay a settlement' until the DRVN government and its armed forces could enhance their battlefield position further without provoking American intervention.[80] That was also the understanding of US President Dwight Eisenhower.[81] A US Defense Department study, part of the so-called *Pentagon Papers*, observed that at the outset of the negotiations 'the Viet Minh were not only interested in gaining rights to the three-quarters of Vietnam they claimed to have controlled, but in extending their authority throughout Indochina into Laos and Cambodia'. Although its allies in those countries 'controlled little territory', the DRVN, the Pentagon noted, 'pressed for their full representation in these countries'. In that sense, Washington believed 'Viet Minh ambitions were broad'.[82]

Unsurprisingly, Paris rejected Dong's proposals, and the talks stalled. This lack of progress reflected the fact that neither France nor the DRVN yet felt any urgency to reach an agreement. That situation changed suddenly for the DRVN on 19 June when, by imperial decree, Ngo Dinh Diem became prime minister of the SOVN government in Saigon, replacing Prince Buu Loc who had been 'compromised' by his association with the French.[83] A Catholic from central Vietnam, Diem had served as minister of the interior under the French colonial regime, and had a reputation as a capable administrator as well as a hard-line anti-communist. DRVN leaders received news of his accession to power with trepidation. It confirmed their worst fears about American designs, for Diem in their reckoning was also a 'lackey' of the US whose appointment had been arranged by Washington. This was thus the first concrete step toward direct American intervention in Vietnam, clearly signalling a US intention to replace the French in Vietnam and later, by inference, in the rest of Indochina. Presently, this puppet would invite American military intervention in his war against his Vietnamese adversaries. The appointment of Diem thus convinced the DRVN leadership that the longer it took to 'solve the Indochina problem', the more damage the Americans would do to the long-term prospects of the revolution and national unity in Vietnam. Those prospects were further threatened by the generally positive response of non-communist Vietnamese nationalists to Diem's appointment. According to the British consulate in Hanoi, the appointment 'caused favourable comments in most Vietnamese nationalist circles' and created 'a welcome uplift of Nationalist spirit among most sections of the politically conscious', even in northern Vietnam. 'Apart from the Catholics who largely supported the new Prime Minister', the appointment 'was also welcome by those who had refrained from backing previous governments either because they did not wish to compromise themselves vis-à-vis the French' or 'considered the governments concerned too corrupt or too closely welded to the old and discredited mandarin classes'. Diem thus 'might yet succeed in pulling some chestnuts out of the fire', the consulate concluded.[84] Reaching a diplomatic settlement

at Geneva had heretofore been a possibly favourable result of the negotiations for the DRVN; now it was a pressing necessity. Until an agreement was reached, the Americans would have free rein to do as they wished in large parts of Vietnam and by extension in all of Laos and Cambodia.

The DRVN at once shifted its negotiating posture. The next day, a new phase in the conference began. DRVN negotiators were now eager to reach agreement with France on substantive issues. Soon, the two sides agreed to a framework for peace that called for temporary partition of Vietnam into regroupment zones and general elections at an undetermined time for a national government that would oversee national unification. That framework was generally consistent with DRVN aspirations, though its lack of specificity left important matters unresolved. Regroupment zones and partition of the country meant no in-place ceasefire. That arrangement would probably compel the Viet Minh to relinquish control of parts of the country it had 'liberated', but would also probably extend DRVN jurisdiction to some cities, where the presence of the revolutionary movement was virtually nil. To settle these points, the DRVN tacitly withdrew its insistence on settling political matters concerning Laos and Cambodia. This was a monumental concession.[85] At the time, VWP leaders estimated that 'the achievements of the Laotian revolution were great, but the actual strength of the Lao resistance was weak'. In Cambodia, similarly, 'the military forces of the [Khmer Issarak] were still small' and the 'strength of Vietnamese volunteers ... was limited'. There were many liberated areas in the latter country, but 'the majority was in highland regions' that were sparsely populated and had little arable land.[86] Those considerations no doubt made it easier for the DRVN to make concessions on Laos and Cambodia. Nonetheless, the MOFA later conceded that its negotiators had been too lax on matters concerning Laos and Cambodia.[87]

Before the talks entered their final phase Zhou Enlai returned to China for talks with Ho Chi Minh and other VWP leaders at Liuzhou, on the Sino-Vietnamese border. On 3, 4, and 5 July, the two men and their aides 'exchanged opinions' on the 'development of the situation' in Geneva.[88] According to the internal MOFA history, the matter of regroupment zones dominated the talks. At issue was whether to press for two, or more, regroupment zones, and whether to allow the French to retain control of large cities such as Hanoi and Haiphong in regions likely to fall under DRVN jurisdiction as a result of the zoning. On the first issue, the Vietnamese concluded that two regroupment zones was 'more advantageous to us' than any of the proposed alternatives because it would give the DRVN 'one full-fledged area' and might 'force the enemy to abandon many important military, political, and economic positions which until now they controlled and/or threatened'.[89] In Ho Chi Minh's assessment, this arrangement would also facilitate 'building, consolidating, and developing our forces', and make it easier to 'influence the other zone' and 'bring about reunification'.[90] Zhou acquiesced in this reasoning.

Deliberations on locating the demarcation between the two zones and on control of cities were contentious. According to both Vietnamese and Chinese sources, Ho wanted the line at the sixteenth rather than the seventeenth parallel, as suggested by

China. Zhou answered, 'We will endeavour to execute the will of President Ho but implore President Ho for permission to demonstrate flexibility on the diplomatic front'.[91] The two men also failed to agree on the fate of the French-controlled cities, specifically Hanoi and Haiphong, in the northern zone likely to be designated for communist regroupment. Zhou, it appears, was willing to let the French retain at least partial control of those cities, while Ho insisted on full jurisdiction over Hanoi and Haiphong, as well as Route 5 connecting them. Otherwise, as the VWP Politburo had earlier explained to Zhou, 'we will not have a political centre'.[92] Besides, as the VWP warned on 3 July, 'the enemy' might use 'strategically important areas', including 'Hanoi, Haiphong, and Route 5 in particular' to 'introduce military reinforcements' and 'launch attacks to recapture areas it had lost'.[93] Unable to agree on these points, Ho and Zhou turned to other questions, including the deferral of political matters related to Laos and Cambodia, and composition of the proposed international commission to supervise implementation of the Geneva accords.

After the meeting, Ho instructed Pham Van Dong to insist on simultaneous ceasefires in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia; the creation of two regroupment zones; exclusive jurisdiction over all territory, including cities, in each zone by the respective authorities; and demarcation at the sixteenth parallel. Ho also asked for bans on the introduction of foreign forces and construction of new military bases in Indochina after the ceasefires, and a prohibition against military alliances between Indochinese and foreign governments. These new demands were aimed largely at containing the US, and highlighted the acuteness of the VWP's concerns about Washington's intentions. Ho also directed Dong to exact agreement from France on a specific deadline for the elections leading to Vietnamese reunification, something Paris was still resisting.[94]

Scholars have inferred from the Liuzhou talks that Zhou 'left a deep impression upon the Vietnamese leaders' and prevailed upon them to be more conciliatory in the Geneva negotiations.[95] To be sure, DRVN negotiators demonstrated increased flexibility after the Liuzhou meeting, but only on certain issues. On others, their position was unchanged, or even hardened. Alarmed by the prospect of American intervention since Diem's investiture in Saigon, the DRVN leadership needed no coaxing by China to realize the importance of concluding the negotiations promptly and successfully. In fact, VWP leaders made that clear in a cable to southern revolutionary cadres on 3 July, the day the Liuzhou meeting opened. The Party must 'take advantage of a ceasefire and peace' to 'defeat the plan to extend and expand the war of the American interventionists and French warmongers', the cable read, as well as to 'consolidate existing gains, continue to increase our forces, and continue the struggle' to achieve national liberation and unity. That represented 'the only correct and advantageous road'.[96]

The final phase of the talks in Geneva began on 10 July. At the outset, Pham Van Dong again presented maximalist positions, demanding that the regroupment zones be separated at the thirteenth parallel, that general elections take place within 6–12 months after a ceasefire, and that all foreign forces leave Vietnam before the

elections.[97] According to one Vietnamese source, Paris then demanded and Beijing endorsed partition at the sixteenth parallel as well as retention by the French of Hanoi and Haiphong.[98] Pham Van Dong rejected the latter, insisting that France relinquish control of all territory in the northern zone, including its two largest cities. To induce the French to give up Hanoi and Haiphong, Dong accepted partition at the sixteenth parallel on 13 July, a position already agreed to by Ho Chi Minh and other VWP leaders.[99] The appearance of US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles at the talks on that day rekindled Vietnamese suspicions that Washington intended to sabotage the negotiations to have an excuse for military intervention. French Prime Minister Pierre Mendès-France, who had succeeded Laniel on 18 June and personally attended the conference, in fact believed that 'it was the fear of seeing Mr. Dulles arrive in Geneva that prompted Mr. Dong to make that concession' on the sixteenth parallel.[100]

As these developments transpired the VWP Central Committee held an emergency meeting, its Sixth Plenum, on 15, 16, and 17 July to discuss the Geneva negotiations. Ho Chi Minh told the delegates that under existing circumstances it was in the best interest of Vietnam to embrace peace as the surest route to independence, reunification, and revolutionary success. Peace would enable the PAVN to rest and reorganise itself, and the DRVN to address land reform and other pressing problems. He also warned against 'deviationist thinking' concerning the necessity of peace in Indochina and unity under Party leadership.[101]

In a revealing report to the plenum, First Secretary Truong Chinh assessed the current situation.[102] 'The more we fight, the stronger we become, and the more the enemy fights, the weaker he becomes', Chinh remarked. But the possibility of American intervention was now greater than ever. Since the armistice in Korea 'the American empire [had] increased its intervention in the Indochinese war', he stated. 'In the past Winter–Spring campaign, particularly the Dien Bien Phu campaign, the US saw France's failure, so it intervened forcefully in the Indochinese war by directing a part of its air force to participate in the shooting and killing of Indochinese people'. Though there is no evidence that American air combat units participated in the defence of Dien Bien Phu, DRVN leaders believed otherwise, which only heightened their concerns about the likelihood of American intervention. American 'imperialists', Chinh continued, have 'made every effort to carry out the plan for extending and expanding the Indochinese war, expecting to change Indochina into a colony and a strategic base of the American empire, causing difficulties for the Indochinese people and increasing tensions in South East Asia and the world'. To those ends Washington had installed the Diem regime, the 'henchman of the US Empire and warlike France', to front for it in Saigon.

Under these threatening circumstances achieving a negotiated settlement on reasonable but imperfect terms would constitute a 'good opportunity' to foil American ambitions in Indochina, Chinh continued. That would make it far more difficult for Washington and Paris to continue to 'exploit the tensions in the Geneva Conference' and in Indochina as well. Equally important, peace on the basis of the framework currently under review in Geneva would give the Party jurisdiction over

strategic locations in the North. 'Hanoi, Haiphong, and other cities, together with the rest of the northern delta, will belong to us once the Ceasefire Convention is concluded', he confidently insisted. That would give the revolution direct access to 'abundant resources', human and material.

> Receiving these areas is very meaningful; it is not only related to the consolidation of the whole liberated area but also serves as a foundation for achieving complete unification and independence for the nation. Also, it is related to not only the execution of all immediate tasks but also the economic restoration and long-term construction of the nation.

Ever since the war of resistance commenced, 'our core efforts have been in the countryside, concentrating our forces in the countryside, taking the countryside to surround cities' with the ultimate purpose of 'taking back the cities'. 'Upon liberation of the northern delta', including Hanoi and Haiphong, 'the core efforts of our Party will move gradually from the countryside to the cities'. That would represent 'a transition of historical significance'. The Party and the people 'have to prepare for that transition', to 'make the taking of the cities a capital point while paying attention to both cities and the countryside so that urban tasks and rural tasks, workers and peasants, industry and agriculture are closely united'.

'There remain many difficulties', Chinh concluded, 'but peace shall bring about many favorable conditions for us' to 'complete unfinished tasks' and 'gain new victories'. In the meantime, the Party must 'strive' to 'restore peace in Indochina' with a view to 'strengthening our forces, consolidating the national defence, and preventing the US interventionists and warlike France to use their puppets and henchmen to sabotage the ceasefire or directly provoke war and invade' Vietnam. 'The main issue is that we will hold a nationwide free general election to unify the country, the French army will have to withdraw its troops after a given period', and the war will end. Together, these results 'shall encourage the world's peace loving people', help 'establish the [global] Front for fighting against the US Empire', and 'unite' the peoples of Indochina to 'resist the US Empire' and 'warlike France'.

Not everyone in Chinh's audience agreed with these assessments, and the First Secretary warned of the pitfalls of disagreement. 'Many comrades appreciate too highly our own force and disregard plots of the American imperialists and warmongering France', he noted. These 'leftist-deviationists' believed that resistance forces 'can clean [the enemy] out after only a short period of struggle' and that the DRVN should therefore 'continue fighting to the end'. Such thoughts, Chinh insisted, underestimated the capacity and willingness of the Americans and their allies to do harm. Conversely, 'rightist-deviationists' were so fearful of the US and its allies that they favoured 'making too many concessions'.[103] Like Ho, Chinh urged Party members to be more discerning. 'The ideological leadership must be aimed at resisting rightist deviationism and preventing leftist deviationism', he insisted. Unless the DRVN and France conclude an agreement soon, such thinking would compromise Party unity.

'At present, on the basis of the changed situation, we lay down as a policy making use of peace while preparing to continue the war if needed'.[104]

The resolution adopted at the conclusion of the plenum was consistent with the First Secretary's analysis and prescriptions. It reiterated that Dien Bien Phu and other victories had 'changed the balance of forces between ourselves and the enemy in our favour, but basically have not yet changed the strategic character' of the war. It warned that unless a negotiated settlement was achieved expeditiously the Americans would soon expand their involvement in Indochina and 'the balance of forces between us and the enemy might change to our disadvantage'.[105] It was on the basis of these considerations, and not just pressure from its socialist allies, that the VWP decided that the DRVN should end the war diplomatically and as soon as possible.

The Sixth Plenum had a decisive influence on the outcome of the Geneva Conference. Within hours of its conclusion the DRVN delegation accepted the seventeenth parallel as the partition line between the two regroupment zones, and also accepted ceasefire agreements for Laos and Cambodia that omitted all political matters, including the hoped-for recognition of the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Issarak as legal political organisations.[106] VWP leaders considered the latter omission a particularly bitter pill to swallow, but concluded that they had to accept it to reach an agreement promptly. They did, however, convince France to agree to a two-year deadline for national elections, and were therefore confident they could 'look forward to a possible legal victory at the ballot boxes' by the summer of 1956.[107] They also secured guarantees safeguarding the whole of Indochina against the introduction of new foreign forces, the construction of new military bases, and the formation of new military alliances between Indochinese political entities and foreign governments, as well as the right to 'receive replacements for worn-out arms and equipment' of their own forces, which western experts thought 'offers evident opportunities for exploitation by the Communists'.[108] These rights and guarantees, especially the election deadline, represented essential gains for the VWP, whose 'policy' (*chu truong*) after the signing of the agreement would be to 'use the regroupment zones to bring about peace, and use national elections to achieve reunification'.[109] Together, these and the other gains they achieved in Geneva demonstrate that DRVN leaders and negotiators were far more assertive in the negotiations and with their socialist allies than western scholars have acknowledged. No one else in Geneva insisted on an election deadline for Vietnam or worried much about the rest of Indochina. In fact, until 16 July Beijing and Moscow had 'said nothing' (*khong noi gi*) about an election deadline, as the internal MOFA history points out.[110]

The DRVN had made important sacrifices to get a settlement it could live with and its adversaries would endorse. But so did Paris. 'We and France both compromised', the internal MOFA history concludes.[111] Ultimately, both the terms of the Geneva accords and the impetus for accepting them owed at least as much, if not a good deal more, to VWP initiatives as to the Cold War strategies and concerns of Moscow and Beijing.[112]

That Moscow and Beijing would naturally subsume the interests of the DRVN into interests of their own is a given of realist interpretations of the Cold War espoused by western and especially American historians. According to these interpretations, considerations of *realpolitik* informed the strategic thinking of policymakers during the Cold War. States were interested largely or exclusively in maximising their power and interests, construing those things relative to those of other actors in the international system. Thus, in Geneva, the two communist colossi would have behaved in accordance with realist expectations, that is, in pursuit of their national interests.[113] International relations thus being a zero-sum game, the gains Beijing and Moscow made at the conference in defusing the military situation in Vietnam came at the expense of someone else, in this case the DRVN. This interpretation – that Moscow and Beijing in effect dictated the behaviour of DRVN negotiators at Geneva – is also consistent with the superpower-centred nature of western scholarship on the Cold War. Because that scholarship revolves primarily around the US, the Soviet Union, and the PRC, understandings of Cold War events, including the Geneva Conference, often exaggerate the roles of those powers and rarely acknowledge the agency of lesser actors.[114] Presumably, this rests on an assumption that the interests of the latter were invariably subordinate, and subordinated, to the interests of their allies in the former.

To be sure, 'the interests of the Soviet Union and especially those of China did not completely correspond to the interests of Vietnam', as one Vietnamese scholar has put it.[115] Yet there was a degree of convergence between Vietnamese and Chinese aspirations at Geneva that was in fact far greater than western scholars have acknowledged. 'The entire attitude of the Chinese delegation', François Joyaux has written of the Geneva Conference, 'demonstrated that its priority objective [*objectif prioritaire*], from the start to the end of the crisis, was to avoid an internationalization of the Indochina war as had happened in Korea four years earlier'. Presumably, the looming internationalisation was due to the obstinacy of Vietnamese ideologues. At Geneva, the Chinese delegation, in Joyaux's reckoning, thus sought to 'arrive as quickly as possible at a negotiated settlement that would remove for Washington all reason or pretext for intervention in the peninsula'.[116] 'China's basic objective' at Geneva, Qiang Zhai has written echoing Joyaux's judgement, 'was to prevent the internationalization of the Indochina conflict, as had happened in Korea'.[117] Precluding *further* internationalisation of hostilities in Indochina, that is American intervention, may not have been the primordial objective of the DRVN at the onset of the Geneva negotiations, though it certainly figured prominently in its calculations. But changing circumstances in the South during the conference quickly led to a revision of the DRVN's priorities that propelled them toward those of the Chinese. By late June Vietnamese and Chinese strategic and tactical priorities concerning the future of the war in Indochina had become essentially the same. Close collaboration thus became a hallmark of the relationship between the DRVN and the

Chinese delegations, as the one-time DRVN ambassador to the PRC Hoang Van Hoan has noted.[118]

Moscow and Beijing did affect the comportment of the DRVN during the negotiations, variously lobbying and pressuring its envoys, mollifying or rejecting its positions. These efforts are elaborated and critiqued in a number of Vietnamese studies.[119] According to two of the recent studies, DRVN negotiators worked to fashion a settlement at Geneva that was suitable to the interests of Moscow as it pursued détente with the West and to those of Beijing, which wanted to concentrate on its national economy now that the Korean War was over rather than on an expanding war in Vietnam.[120] The resulting settlement, Vu Duong Ninh has noted, was 'essentially an international compromise [*thoa hiep quoc te*] organized by the big countries [*cac nuoc lon*], in which each participating side got a piece of the cake'.[121] One outcome in particular, partitioning the country at the seventeenth parallel, was the result of an 'agreement of the big countries allied with us'.[122] According to Nguyen Hong Thach of the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry, Pham Van Dong himself once stated that the Chinese had been responsible for his acceptance, on behalf of the DRVN, of the seventeenth parallel.[123] Chinese pressures, these studies claim, were also primary reasons for acquiescence in excluding from the conference representatives of the revolutionary movements in Laos and Cambodia. This was of course a factor in the failure of the conference to address political matters relating to those countries. Early on in the proceedings in Geneva, on 17 May, Zhou Enlai stated that 'all barriers [to a negotiated settlement], no matter where they are from, should be denounced'. Thach interprets this statement as proof of Beijing's commitment to a negotiated settlement even at the expense of the DRVN.[124] The Chinese delegation in effect reiterated this commitment at an informal meeting with its French counterpart on 18 May, when its general secretary, Wang Bingnan, said that the Chinese had come to Geneva 'not to support the [DRVN's] position' but to end the war in Indochina.[125] According to Thach, the Chinese consented to the exclusion of the Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak as a quid pro quo for promises of French help in securing guarantees that the Americans would not intervene in Indochina after a settlement had been reached in Geneva. Only later did the DRVN come to see that this trade-off was 'very fundamental and disadvantageous to the Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian peoples', Thach concludes.[126]

According to another Vietnamese source, it was India rather than the PRC or the Soviet Union that persuaded the DRVN to agree to the demarcation line at the seventeenth parallel. This source, the authors of which are current or retired members of the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry or the Institute of International Relations in Hanoi, posits that it was Krishna Menon, the head of the Indian delegation to the United Nations, who was then in Geneva, who persuaded the DRVN delegation on 19 July to accept the demarcation at the seventeenth parallel because of the urgency of completing a settlement.[127] This account is unconfirmed by other sources, but the DRVN negotiators would have been disinclined to ignore importunings from India. DRVN leaders respected the Soviet Union and PRC as socialist brothers and

supporters of their revolution, but many of them had particular affinities for India because of the advocacy of its prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, on behalf of the Third World and decolonising nations. Furthermore, the DRVN had agreed only the day before to accept India as the neutral third party to sit on the international commission that was to monitor the ceasefire.[128]

Despite this kaleidoscope of interpretations, the weight of the evidence in Vietnamese sources suggests that the meddling of foreign powers had only limited effects on the conduct and decisions of DRVN negotiators at Geneva, shaping some of the specifics, but not the contours, of the final settlement. Chinese and, to a lesser degree, Soviet pressures made DRVN decision-makers aware of the intense concerns of Beijing and Moscow to end the hostilities in order to preclude American intervention in Indochina. But those concerns only validated the even stronger concerns of Vietnamese leaders on the same issues. On 10 July Zhou Enlai told the DRVN that unless the Geneva Conference concluded successfully and promptly 'the Mendès-France Government might collapse', an event sure to prove 'disadvantageous for resolution of the Indochinese problem, and disadvantageous for the [DRVN]'.[129] VWP leaders 'completely agreed [*hoan toan tan thanh*] with that position of our friends'.[130] 'We cannot let the American imperialists and the French warmongers take advantage of the prolongation of the Geneva Conference to induce pessimism [and] despondency, and sabotage the negotiations', Truong Chinh had noted in his address to the Sixth Plenum.[131] The internal MOFA history suggests that if the DRVN's socialist allies blundered at Geneva, it was not in acting against Vietnamese interests in order to serve their own, but in 'underestimat[ing] the strength of the Vietnamese revolution' and overstating the threat from Washington and bellicose elements in the French government.[132]

The DRVN was never a passive participant in the Geneva negotiations and in shaping the final settlement. The terms of the accords were not inconsistent with VWP assessments of its interests or of what it could live with under circumstances then current in and outside of Indochina. Although it may have appeared that they were satisfying the interests of their allies at their own expense by accepting the Geneva accords, DRVN leaders were actually getting much of what they expected to get. To be sure, the terms of the accords could have been more favourable to their domestic and especially their regional ambitions. Similarly, those terms could have created better safeguards against future American interference in Indochinese affairs. In accounting for those shortcomings, Vietnamese scholars point to the craftiness of American negotiators and decision-makers, to the lack of experience of Vietnamese diplomats in multilateral, international negotiations, to their leaders' misguided faith in the revolutionary commitment of their allies, and to the limitations of internationalism as a means of addressing the concerns of small nations subject to the vicissitudes of imperialism and of Cold War power politics.[133] Nonetheless, partition at the seventeenth rather than the sixteenth parallel and elections in two years rather than one did not change the fact that irrespective of the concerns of Beijing and Moscow DRVN leaders knew from the outset they would have to accept one or more

enemy-controlled zones, perhaps even a *de facto* partition of the country, and deferred national reunification.[134] What really mattered was pre-empting immediate expansion of the war, securing international recognition of Vietnam's sovereignty, and laying out a path to national reunification under VWP governance. All else was detail.

According to the internal MOFA history DRVN leaders suspected from the onset of the Geneva Conference that 'the plan of the enemy was indefinite partition of the country like in Korea'. They therefore 'resolved to prevent that plan' from being put in place. 'We sustained the struggle and the enemy had to accept a military demarcation that was only temporary', the history continued, and 'could not be considered a political and territorial boundary'. DRVN negotiators had 'linked the two matters of regroupment zones and deadline for general elections on reunification and the enemy had to agree' to that linkage. In the end, 'our position prevailed'.[135] To be sure, consenting to partition was a meaningful concession, but an acceptable one to forestall American intervention in 1954. Though accepting partition at the seventeenth parallel meant that the southern zone encompassed more area (by 12,000 square kilometres), the northern zone was more populous (by approximately 4 million people).[136] Given other terms of the accords, the latter advantage mattered more than the former. 'We believed that we could achieve reunification through elections', the internal history observed; therefore 'we made concessions on the issue of partition in exchange for [satisfaction on] the issue of a deadline for elections'.[137]

At the end of the conference, in Washington's estimate, 'the political situation in South Vietnam was precarious'. Below the seventeenth parallel, a Pentagon assessment noted, 'there was a multitude of armed sects and other groups hostile to' the SOVN government because it 'continually relied on the French'. Communist leaders thus 'certainly had good cause for considering that South Vietnam could not cohere sufficiently within the two-year period prior to national elections, stipulated by the Final Declaration, to pose a viable alternative to' the DRVN as a government for the whole of Vietnam. They also 'had good reason to believe that a stable regime in the southern zone would never be formed'. 'Hence', the Pentagon remarked, if the scheduled elections were held, the DRVN likely 'would assume control of the entire country almost by default'.[138]

For these and other reasons, the Pentagon concluded that DRVN leaders may well have been 'content with the results' of the conference. Their 'losses' at the bargaining table 'amounted merely to delays that would set back the time schedules in Indochina', a 'payment in time' that was 'well worth the territorial gains and the prevention of Western united action in Vietnam'. 'There is good reason to believe', therefore, that 'in reality, the Viet Minh were satisfied with the results attained at Geneva'. That satisfaction was, however, in Washington's view, misplaced for it was 'based in part on certain miscalculations'. Specifically, DRVN leaders 'underestimated [both] the future commitment of the U.S. to the South Vietnamese' and 'the survivability of Diem and his government'.[139] While that may have been true, DRVN leaders would have been hard-pressed to obtain better guarantees against future American involvement in

Indochina given their lack of leverage against Washington in Geneva and the fact that none of the Geneva agreements necessitated formal endorsement by the US.[140]

These two assessments of the substance of the Geneva accords, the one from Hanoi and the other from Washington, may serve as backdrop for a final review of the role of DRVN leaders and negotiators in producing the content of the final settlement. The elements for such a review are laid out above. But since in handling the negotiations the DRVN leadership was responding to both immediate circumstances and enduring revolutionary purposes, it seems proper and necessary to remark further upon them.

By mid-1954, multiple factors converged to encourage the DRVN to discontinue the war in Indochina, and those factors conditioned its conduct during the Geneva negotiations. The most consequential of these factors was the military and political situation in Indochina and the leadership's assessment of how things might evolve there and elsewhere. The balance of forces remained precarious. The British consulate in Hanoi reported in June that 'from a military point of view the situation was hardly any worse' for France and its indigenous allies 'than it had been at various other stages of the eight year old struggle'.[141] From the DRVN's perspective, the situation was especially bleak in the cities and in parts of southern Vietnam, including areas the Party considered strategically important and the 'first area where we must confront the enemy's plans'.[142] Conditions in central Vietnam were better but still 'difficult'.[143] And after nearly eight years of struggle and 'much help' from the DRVN, 'the war resistance forces of Laos and Cambodia are still weaker than the force of the enemy and its puppets'.[144] In July 1954 resistance forces numbered 310,000, while the French had 190,000 of their own troops in Indochina plus 280,000 Indochinese.[145] 'Although France had suffered a crushing psychological blow and military defeat at Dien Bien Phu', as Carl Thayer has stated, it 'still retained a powerful expeditionary corps, supplemented by a growing National Army of the State of Viet-Nam'.[146] Paris further increased the DRVN's anxieties about the continuation of the war on 7 July, when Mendès-France told the National Assembly of his decision to deploy additional reserve units to Indochina and take other measures necessary to continue the war should the Geneva negotiations fail to produce an agreement satisfactory to his government.[147] The 'peace faction' in France appeared to be ascendant at the time, the internal MOFA history observed, but the 'war faction' retained 'many influences on the ruling mechanisms'.[148]

But a greater threat in the thinking of DRVN leaders by that time was Washington. 'The Indochinese war has in fact become a war of the American imperialists', the VWP noted; 'the French expeditionary army is only a mercenary army of the Americans'.[149] 'Our main enemy', Truong Chinh now insisted, was not France, but 'the US empire'. As the French 'grew weaker by the day', the Americans 'intervened more actively in Indochina by the day'. The Eisenhower administration's ever increasing support for the French war in Indochina even before the end of the war in Korea had reinforced the conviction among DRVN leaders that the US would do whatever it thought necessary to thwart the Vietnamese revolution and advance its own interests in Southeast Asia. That Washington had failed to save the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu did not alter

that thinking. Rather, the VWP took that failure to mean that Washington now recognised that France was no longer able to do its bidding in the region and the US would itself have to 'execute the containment strategy in Southeast Asia'.[150] 'By their intervention in Indo-China', Pham Van Dong contended, 'the American imperialists pursued the aim to gradually oust the French from Indo-China and turn Indo-China into an American colony'.[151] As Ho Chi Minh had put it during the Central Committee's Sixth Plenum in the midst of the Geneva negotiations, 'the United States is not only the enemy of the people of the world, it is becoming the principal, direct enemy [*ke thu chin va truc tiep*] of the people of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia'. The Indochinese 'must' therefore 'concentrate our forces against the American imperialists'.[152] According to an official Vietnamese account, it was 'this statement' of Ho's rather than the Geneva accords that 'marked the dawn of a new era in the history of our nation, the era of opposing the Americans to save our nation'.[153]

While western scholars have tended to dismiss ideology as a minor component of the Vietnamese revolution, recent evidence indicates that although Party and DRVN leaders often sought to inspire the masses by appeals to nationalist sentiments they understood their own circumstances and purposes in Marxist-Leninist terms. To them the US was the world champion of reactionary capitalism and the most dangerous enemy of revolutionary socialism. Thus conditioned by ideology as well as circumstances and experience, the DRVN leadership assumed the worst about the Americans. 'If the Geneva Conference fails', a May 1954 Party assessment stated, the Americans will instinctively respond by 'intervening forcefully in the Indochina war'.[154] They might even sabotage the negotiations 'by whatever means' to create an excuse to 'continue the expansion of their war of aggression in Indochina'.[155] It was in the context generated by this line of reasoning that they understood and reacted to the selection of Diem as SOVN premier. 'The Americans', in the words of Ho Chi Minh himself, 'brought in the capable American lackey Ngo Dinh Diem to create a puppet government' in Saigon.[156] Once they had done that the DRVN leadership feared that US intervention might occur in no more than a few weeks. It was now evident to all, as one Vietnamese historian has put it, that Washington had 'replaced its plan to send troops into Indochina to save French colonialism from peril with a determination to push aside the French, and continue to leap in Indochina in place of the French'.[157] A ceasefire was thus 'indispensable'.[158]

In the account of these reactions in its internal history, the MOFA concluded that DRVN leaders may have misunderstood and thus exaggerated the immediate threat from France and from the US in particular, as their Chinese allies had done. The DRVN leadership had 'not appropriately recognized the miseries of the French' after Dien Bien Phu, the internal history reported. Consequently, it had 'not appropriately evaluated the collapse of the enemy's morale' or appreciated 'the strategic urgency of the French to withdraw their expeditionary forces [from Indochina] to protect French interests in Europe and North Africa'.[159] The VWP had in fact acknowledged its difficulties in understanding French intentions in a cable to its negotiators on the eve of the opening of the Geneva Conference.[160] Similarly, the leadership erroneously

'estimated ... that the Americans were gradually executing a plan to intensify and expand the Indochina war', the internal history commented. 'We thought that the Americans might directly take part in the war [*truc tiep tham chien*] in Indochina and bring about unfavourable changes for our forces'. However, at the time, the Americans 'were not that strong', the history affirmed retrospectively. 'After the setbacks in China [in 1949] and Korea [in 1950–53], the position of the Americans [in Asia] was very weak, and therefore they dared not jump [militarily] into Vietnam and Indochina in 1954'.[161] 'If we had clearly known the Americans would not dare intervene in Vietnam at that time, [and if we had] clearly recognized that the scheme of the imperialists was to divide our country indefinitely' rather than to invade it immediately, 'the degree of our success could have been a little greater'.[162]

Historians David Anderson and William Duiker have challenged this judgement that DRVN leaders interpreted American intentions incorrectly just before and during the Geneva Conference. In a study of the Eisenhower administration's handling of events in Indochina, Anderson concludes that Eisenhower 'was prepared to commit U.S. airpower to Indochina, provided certain of his preconditions were met'.[163] Duiker similarly thinks that Washington 'might have felt compelled to provide naval and air forces in a multinational defense of the area' had the Geneva Conference failed to produce a settlement.[164] Part of the difficulty of assessing both of these claims and the DRVN's anxieties about American intentions is the disinformation Washington calculatingly spread about its plans and purposes. A Pentagon study has acknowledged that there existed 'an element of unpredictability concerning U.S. actions in Southeast Asia' in and around the time of the Geneva Conference. That unpredictability was 'fostered purposely' to confuse Vietnamese communists, and was sustained 'by the inordinate number and wide variety of public statements on Indochina that were made by official and semi-official Washington during the months of June and July, while the Geneva Conference sat'.[165]

The pressing need to regroup, reorganise, and modernise the armed forces was another major reason the DRVN agreed to end the war in July 1954. By the Defence Ministry's own estimate, the PAVN's technical support facilities 'were very poor' and 'the majority of our weapons and equipment were infantry weapons, which were not uniform in quantity or type and were of poor quality'. Many of them in fact 'were unserviceable' and 'technically obsolete when compared to equipment used by other armies around the world'.[166] Also, rank-and-file troops in the PAVN were deficient ideologically and thus in need of education. It was therefore necessary to 'take advantage of time to increase our forces to prepare to enter into a new, more complicated and decisive period of struggle'.[167] 'We must strive for building the army, massing up more main forces, expanding arms, and improving the quality of local militias', Truong Chinh told the Sixth Plenum.[168] The armed forces 'must be prepared to defeat the enemies of the Vietnamese people', a statement that clearly suggests that that was not yet the case.[169] According to historian Chen Jian, Vo Nguyen Giap told Zhou Enlai on 3 July 1954 that 'if the United States did not intervene, in a best-case scenario, it probably would take another two to three years before the Viet Minh would

win final victory; yet it was more than possible that the war would last for another three to five years'.[170] 'Only when there is a powerful people's army', said Truong Chinh reiterating Zhou's point, 'can we restore peace, consolidate peace, and struggle peacefully for unification of the country, complete independence, and the development of democracy'.[171]

Still another factor in the DRVN's calculus that ending the war was its best option in mid-1954 was the increasingly fratricidal character of the war. That factor was detrimental to the goals of the Vietnamese revolution, and could become fatal if it continued to grow. After the French created the SOVN, the latter's government began actively recruiting an army of Vietnamese to resist the Viet Minh. That process markedly accelerated under the Navarre Plan.[172] Thus, between 1949 and 1954 the size of Indochinese forces fighting on behalf of the French and the SOVN grew from 55,000 to 292,000.[173] This 'Indochinization' of the war resulted in increasingly large numbers of Vietnamese fighting and killing Vietnamese. The DRVN Defence Ministry had acknowledged this in December 1953, expressing its concern that 'the development of the puppet army' had become 'the most essential path pursued persistently in the war of aggression' by the enemy, and 'part of a plan to . . . use war to generate more war'.[174] This circumstance lent credence to the notion, insisted upon by the French and rejected by the VWP, that the war in Vietnam was no longer an anti-colonial struggle but a civil war fuelled by conflicting domestic ideologies and rivalries.[175] To whatever degree that was indeed the case, it was another reason for the DRVN to end hostilities, for continuing them would jeopardise the future of the revolution, which based its legitimacy on principles of national unity and concern for the welfare of average Vietnamese. As self-avowed champions of the independence and well-being of the Vietnamese nation, DRVN leaders had to acknowledge that the nature of the war had changed dramatically since 1946, and in ways detrimental to their purposes.

Along the same lines, continued hostilities meant continued neglect of economic development and reform, which was also counter to the VWP's revolutionary purposes. It may be true, as Mari Olsen has argued, that Moscow urged the DRVN to accept a 'disadvantageous' settlement of the war in 1954 because 'to Moscow, the idea of consolidating the North while waiting for elections to reunite both zones was fully compatible with how a Communist society should develop'. But, in fact, the Vietnamese agreed with that prognosis, and earnestly hoped to follow it.[176] Rebuilding and transforming the economy in the area under DRVN control would not only facilitate 'consolidating the government' and 'strengthening the armed forces', but was essential to improving living standards. Since the outbreak of war in 1946, the DRVN had 'made many endeavours in terms of [improving] the economy' in the areas it controlled. Still, 'the currency and prices have not stabilized' because of continued war. 'We have spent much money on the war', the DRVN National Assembly admitted, while 'the war destroyed the production [of food and manufactured goods] and [otherwise] limited economic activities'.[177] Warfare and drought had produced malnutrition and even starvation 'in a number of places' under Viet Minh control in early 1954.[178] Restoring agriculture and developing industry were thus necessary to

'satisfy the demands of war and people's lives', and make the people understand that 'our regime protects their real interests, as opposed to the [regime] of false popular democracy of the imperialist aggressors and their puppets'.[179] Mounting problems resulting from a land reform programme launched the previous year exacerbated the economic problems confronting the DRVN.[180] Only peace could enable the Party and the government to address these problems.[181]

Throughout the long war against the French it had often been easy, even legitimate, for DRVN leaders to claim they were committed to peace but forced to fight. By 1954 that claim had diminished resonance. 'Why could ... peace be restored in Korea but not in Indochina?' Truong Chinh asked.[182] Why indeed? In June the British consulate in Hanoi reported that 'the average Vietnamese "thinking" citizen considers that nothing can now be gained by prolonging the war'.[183] Manipulation and exploitation of domestic and world opinion had always been cornerstones of the resistance, typically based on professed longings for peace ostensibly compromised by the necessities of war. Now, however, supporters of the DRVN at home and abroad wanted and expected peace. To dash those hopes and expectations was a course VWP leaders now wanted to avoid. 'We have always followed the situation in the world', read one of their own assessments, and 'coordinated with the wishes for peace of the people of the world'. Toward those ends, a negotiated end to the war would be a 'victory' that met 'the pressing needs of the world's peace lovers'. 'We must know how to take advantage of that victory', the Party insisted.[184] The DRVN needed 'the sympathy and the support of all peoples', Pham Van Dong stated, in order to contain its enemies and protect its sovereignty.[185] 'With our guideline of bringing about victory gradually and [our] policy of bringing about peace [immediately]', the Foreign Ministry later noted, 'concluding the war at that time was appropriate from a domestic and international standpoint'.[186]

Enhancing the legitimacy of the DRVN internationally was another incentive for ending the war and signing an agreement with the French. Becoming a party to an international agreement acknowledged by the great powers conferred prestige the DRVN had never enjoyed. 'That China ... and Vietnam can jointly participate in this international conference is in itself an unexpected event and one of our [diplomatic] victories', Zhou Enlai observed in April 1954.[187] This was all the more satisfying since the DRVN had almost been excluded from the Geneva proceedings along with the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Issarak, because non-communist powers did not recognise its political legitimacy. But as a signatory of the Geneva Agreement on Vietnam, the DRVN gained *de facto* recognition from the most important actors in the international system. The recent failure of the Geneva Conference on Korea also enhanced the stature the DRVN gained by accepting the results of the conference on Indochina. In adopting a constructive, even conciliatory, attitude during the negotiations, the DRVN created a favourable if grudging impression among the great powers.[188] 'The DRVN delegation was accorded a significant status at the conference in recognition of the strength and success of its army', a western scholar has noted; 'the status of the DRVN was also enhanced by [comparison with] the shabby treatment of the [SOVN]

delegation'.[189] The accords granted the DRVN jurisdiction over half of Vietnam, thus formalising the political status of the DRVN and by extension the VWP as the institutional embodiments of Vietnamese nationalism and self-government.[190] These gains paid tangible dividends. The Soviet Union had recognised the DRVN in 1950 and soon received the first Vietnamese ambassador to Moscow, but it sent no representative of its own to Vietnam. Within days of the signing of the Geneva accords, however, Moscow named an ambassador to the DRVN, and in October the first Soviet diplomatic mission arrived in Hanoi.[191]

Perhaps the largest gain from the Geneva negotiations was the French recognition of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Vietnam. Under terms of the accords France agreed to 'end its war of aggression in Vietnam and Indochina, withdraw its forces, and, along with all the parties to the conference, recognize the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of the three countries of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos'.[192] For almost 100 years, the Indochinese people had struggled to achieve those goals.[193] Though the French acknowledgement of the goals came with caveats, the achievement of them was a momentous victory for the Vietnamese revolution. In fact, one western diplomat considered that acknowledgement and the effort by Paris to achieve 'the settled and formal in their relations with the Vietminh' thereafter as 'evidence of French belief in the inevitability of Communist domination of the country'.[194]

Conclusion

The DRVN had been centrally concerned at Geneva about forestalling American intervention, and in that it succeeded for a vital decade. Publicly, DRVN leaders hailed the accords as a 'great' victory for the revolution, but they were not always forthcoming about what had happened in the negotiations and why.[195] Because it served their purposes and deflected criticism as the accords fell apart, they became complicit in perpetuating the notion that the Soviet Union and the PRC were responsible for the outcome of the Geneva negotiations. The accords ended the French presence in Indochina, but not American interference, about which the DRVN could do little at the time. 'If the end of the French era transformed the modalities of exerting influence and the region's political geography', Mark Lawrence has noted, 'it did not alter the basic perceptions of American interests in Vietnam'.[196]

Historian Nguyen Phuc Luan has surmised that the DRVN 'signed the Geneva Agreement because it was the right time' to end the war and the agreement itself 'was suitable' under the circumstances then in place.[197] 'When we are in Geneva', Pham Van Dong wrote to Ho Chi Minh in a similarly circumspect assessment after witnessing the signing of the accords, 'we often think of the people in the South because after this negotiation, our people shall have to face many more difficulties'.[198] Dong's seemingly formulaic statement appears prescient in retrospect. Ensuing circumstances would preclude execution of the letter of the Geneva accords for some 20 years. As for the fate of their spirit, that remains a moot question.

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Notes

[1] Besides the works considered below see Cable, *Geneva Conference of 1954*, which posits that the Geneva Conference 'provided the last example of an independent British policy exercising significant influence in the resolution of a major international crisis' (3); Devillers and Lacouture, *End of a War*; and Randle, *Geneva 1954*, which focuses on the legal soundness and implications of the Geneva accords.

[2] Emphasis added. The original reads: '*Comment, dès lors, ne pas y voir, au moins partiellement, la conséquence d'une pression sino-soviétique*'? (Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine*, 279).

[3] Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 57, 62, 64.

[4] Chen Jian, *Mao's China*, 62.

[5] Olsen, *Soviet–Vietnam Relations*, 45.

[6] Goscha, *Vietnam or Indochina?*, 145–6.

[7] Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, 13, 23, 50. However, Gaiduk refutes the claim that Paris and Moscow made a secret deal providing for French rejection of the EDC in return for Soviet assistance in expediting the end of the war in Indochina on terms favourable to Paris.

[8] Turley, *Second Indochina War*, 17.

[9] Vickery, *Cambodia*, 36–8.

[10] Chen Jian and Shen Zhihua, 'Geneva Conference of 1954', 8. Ilya Gaiduk similarly asserts that DRVN President Ho Chi Minh 'obviously had no other choice but to acquiesce to his allies' point of view' immediately before and during the Geneva Conference (Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, 24). See also Young, *Vietnam Wars*, 38–9; Hess, *Vietnam and the United States*, 48; and Herring, *America's Longest War*, 39–40.

[11] William Duiker and Carlyle Thayer have briefly addressed that role. See Duiker, *Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 170–3; Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy*, Chapter 6; and Thayer, *War by Other Means*, 1–10.

[12] Hoang Hong, 'Nghien cuu phuong phap luan su hoc o Viet Nam', 15–25.

[13] For an analysis of the evolution of Vietnamese scholarship on the Franco-Vietnamese War see Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, 'Vietnamese Historians and the First Indochina War', 41–55.

[14] Increasingly in Vietnam, the *Van kien Dang* series is the chief source on which scholars base works pertaining to the French and American wars. In some cases entire articles rest exclusively on documents drawn for the series. See for example Vu Quang Hien, 'Su chi dao cua Bo chinh tri trong giai doan cuoi cuoc khang chien chong My', 5–8, 43.

[15] The original history is Bo Ngoai Giao, *Dau tranh ngoai giao trong Cach mang dan toc dan chu nhan dan (1945–1954), Tap 2: Dau tranh ngoai giao trong khang chien chong thuc dan phan dong Phap xam luoc va Hoi nghi quoc te Gio-Ne-Vo nam 1954 ve Dong-Duong (1947–1954)*, published in 1976. The reprint, used for this paper, is Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*. I am indebted to Christopher Goscha of Université du Québec à Montréal for sharing his copy of that revealing document with me.

[16] The Viet Minh was formed by Vietnamese communists during World War II to resist the Japanese. After 1945 the front remained under communist control and contributed to the

resistance against France. The term is short for '*Viet Nam Doc lap Dong minh hoi*', literally, 'Independence League of Vietnam'.

[17] On these and related developments see Marr, 'World War II and the Indochinese Revolution', 126–58; and Marr, *Vietnam 1945*.

[18] 'Nghi quyet cua Hoi nghi can bo Trung uong, tu 3-4 den 6-4-1947', Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dang*, Tap 8: 1945–1947, 173–206.

[19] Ho Chi Minh, *Toan tap*, 168.

[20] France established the SOVN in Saigon in March 1949 under former emperor Bao Dai as chief of state and Tran Van Huu as president. A stereotypically puppet regime, the SOVN gained a veneer of legitimacy when the French national assembly voted in April 1949 to repeal the '*département*' status of Cochinchina and grant autonomy to Vietnam (Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina) within the French Union (*Union française*). Under that arrangement, the SOVN government became ostensibly responsible for domestic and some foreign affairs of Vietnam, and had an army under its own flag.

[21] The text of the agreement is reproduced in United States Senate – Committee on Foreign Relations, *Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia*, 50–62.

[22] The 'Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference: On Restoring Peace in Indochina, 21 July 1954' and the 'Statement by the Under Secretary of State at the Concluding Plenary Session of the Geneva Conference, 21 July 1954' are reproduced in United States Department of State, *Department of State Bulletin*, 164–6.

[23] Vu Quang Hien, *Tim hieu chu truong doi ngoai cua Dang*, 170. The Party reiterated its commitment to 'complete victory' repeatedly after 1946, including in late 1951. See 'Thong tri cua Ban Bi thu, ngay 24 thang 12 nam 1951, ve thai do cua ta voi Nghi quyet cua Hoi dong hoa binh the gio, ve cuoc chien tranh o Viet Nam', Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dang,* Tap 12: 1951, 621.

[24] On the overall military situation in Indochina see Fall, *Street without Joy.*

[25] Hoang Minh Thao, 'Chien thang Dien Bien Phu voi Hoi nghi Gionevo', 41.

[26] 'De hoan thanh nhiem vu va day manh cong tac truoc mat', Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dang*, Tap 15: 1954 [hereafter referred to as *VKD*: 1954], 175.

[27] National Archives Center 3, Hanoi, Vietnam [hereafter referred to as NAC3]/Phong Phu Thu Tuong [hereafter referred to as PPTT]/Ho so [hereafter referred to as HS] 1865: Bao cao cua doan Dai bieu Viet Nam di du Hoi nghi Hoi dong hoa binh the gioi lan thu 2 o Vien nam 1953/'Bao cao cua doan Dai bieu Viet Nam tai Hoi nghi Hoi dong hoa binh the gioi lan thu 2'/23 November 1953. See also Vu Quang Hien, *Tim hieu chu truong doi ngoai*, 171; and 'Chi thi cua Ban Bi thu, ngay 2 thang 12 nam 1953: Ve viec giai thich loi tuyen bo cua phai doan Viet Nam o Hoi nghi Hoi dong hoa binh the gioi (11-1953)', Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dang*, Tap 14: 1953, 521–2.

[28] Quoted in Cameron (ed.), *Vietnam Crisis*, 218.

[29] Ho Chi Minh, *Toan tap*, 169.

[30] Ibid., 192.

[31] NAC3/Phong Quoc Hoi [hereafter referred to as PQH]/HS 1684: Bao cao thanh tich ve quan su trong 8 nam khang chien (1946–1954)/'So thao bao cao quan su o Quoc hoi lan thu 3 (12-1953)'/undated (December 1953), 1–5.

[32] NAC3/ PPTT/HS 1886: Ban nhan xet cua TW ve Hoi nghi Gionevo truoc luoc ban ve van de dinh chien o Dong Duong ngay 27.02.1954/'May nhan xet cua Trung uong ve Hoi nghi Gione'/27 February 1954, 1.

[33] 'So thao bao cao quan su o Quoc hoi lan thu 3 (12-1953)', 5.

[34] Nguyen Phuc Luan, 'Ngoai giao Ho Chi Minh', 6.

[35] Cao Van Luong, 'Chien thang Dien Bien Phu', 18.

[36] Thayer, *War by Other Means*, 3.

[37] 'May nhan xet cua Trung uong ve Hoi nghi Gio-ne', 1.
[38] Vu Duong Ninh, 'Hiep dinh Geneva', 14.
[39] Chen Jian, *Mao's China*, 139.
[40] Without the involvement of the PRC in this process, one VWP document from this period contended, the 'Indochina problem' would 'not be resolved' ('May nhan xet cua Trung uong ve Hoi nghi Gio-ne', 1).
[41] Vu Duong Ninh, 'Hiep dinh Geneva', 12.
[42] Nguyen Phuc Luan, 'Ngoai giao Ho Chi Minh', 8.
[43] Phan Doan Nam, 'Hiep dinh Gionevo 1954', 7.
[44] From Circular 92/TT/TP quoted in Nguyen Phuc Luan, 'Ngoai giao Ho Chi Minh', 6; and Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 486.
[45] French military commander Henri Navarre designed the plan that bore his name to preclude an immediate Viet Minh victory and improve the long-term prospects for French victory in Indochina. According to the plan, from the spring of 1953 to the autumn of 1954, French and allied military units would pacify the country below the Col des Nuages located on the eighteenth parallel, and consolidate their positions there. In the north, they would prevent Viet Minh intervention and assault in Laos while avoiding large-scale confrontations and maintaining a 'defensive mentality'. Then, with supremacy attained in the south, from late 1954 into 1956 French and allied forces would launch a general offensive against enemy strongholds in the northern perimeter. In this second stage, the French would be looking for what Navarre called '*la bataille générale*', a decisive battle. See Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*, 80–2. In the estimation of Laurent Césari, 'the object of the [Navarre] plan was only to provide France with a 'graceful exit' from Indochina'. See Césari, 'Declining Value of Indochina', 189.
[46] Quoted in Nguyen Phuc Luan, 'Ngoai giao Ho Chi Minh', 6.
[47] For the standard interpretation of the 'meaning' of Dien Bien Phu by writers affiliated with the armed forces see Vo Nguyen Giap, 'Tinh than Dien Bien Phu', 3–11, which highlights the importance military historians continue to place upon the battle.
[48] Vu Duong Ninh, 'Chien cuoc Dien Bien Phu', 28.
[49] Quoted in 'Contributions to the History of Dien Bien Phu', 51.
[50] Tran Do, *Stories of Dien Bien Phu*, 27.
[51] Quoted in Cao Van Luong, 'Chien thang Dien Bien Phu', 20.
[52] Duiker, 'Ho Chi Minh and the Strategy of People's War', 172.
[53] Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine*, 66. See also Gurtov, *First Vietnam Crisis*, 188.
[54] Chen Jian, 'China and the First Indo-China War', 102, 104.
[55] On the siege of Dien Bien Phu see Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place*; Roy, *La bataille de Dien Bien Phu*; and Windrow, *Last Valley*.
[56] From the letter reproduced in Vo Nguyen Giap, *Dien Bien Phu*, 8.
[57] 'De hoan thanh nhiem vu va day manh cong tac truoc mat', 173–4.
[58] Valette, *La guerre d'Indochine*, 183–92.
[59] 'Dien cua Trung uong gui don chi Pham Van Dong ngay 27.5.1954' quoted in Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 500.
[60] NAC3/PPTT/HS 1887: Tap tai lieu ve cac cuoc hop bao cua Phai doan Viet Nam va cac phai doan khac tai Hoi nghi Gio-ne-vo nam 1954/'Nhung diem can nghien cuu trong bai noi chuyen nhan ngay 19 thang 5'/19 May 1954, 1.
[61] See for instance the statement by William Turley cited above.
[62] Vu Duong Ninh, 'Hiep dinh Geneva', 14.
[63] Vu Duong Ninh, 'Chien cuoc Dien Bien Phu', 28.

[64] The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom [hereafter referred to as TNAUK]/FO 959-143/British Consulate, Hanoi to British Embassy, Saigon/2 June 1954, 2.
[65] Thayer, *War by Other Means*, 3.
[66] Devillers and Lacouture, *End of a War*, 149; Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War*, 153; Duiker, *Communist Road to Power*, 170; and Roy, *La bataille de Dien Bien Phu*, 568.
[67] From 'Dien cua Trung uong gui don chi Pham Van Dong ngay 27.5.1954', 634.
[68] Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 501.
[69] Bui Dinh Thanh, 'Dau tranh ngoai giao tai Hoi nghi Geneve 1954', 525.
[70] 'May nhan xet cua Trung uong ve Hoi nghi Gio-ne', 1.
[71] From a confidential MOFA report quoted in Phan Doan Nam, 'Hiep dinh Gionevo', 6.
[72] Khac Huynh, 'Doi dieu suy nghi ve tu tuong, nghe thuat ngoai giao Ho Chi Minh', 5.
[73] NAC3/PQH/HS 75: Ho so phien hop BTTQH khoa I ngay 28.7.1954 ve Hoi nghi Gio-ne-vo va ket qua cua Hiep dinh chien/Handwritten notes of DRVN National Assembly acting chairman Ton Duc Thang/undated (July 1954), 1.
[74] NAC3/PPTT/HS 1859: Tai lieu ve Hoi nghi Gio-ne-vo nam 1953/'Politique Extérieure du Government Provisoire de la République Démocratique du Viêt-Nam: Communiqué du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères du Government Provisoire, Hanoi, 30 Octobre 1945'/30 October 1945, 1.
[75] 'De hoan thanh nhiem vu va day manh cong tac truoc mat', 212.
[76] 'Hoan thanh nhiem vu chuan bi chuyen manh sang tong phan cong (Bao cao Hoi nghi toan quoc lan thu ba)', Dang Cong san Viet Nam, *Van kien Dang*, Tap 11: 1950, 76, 100, 101; Nguyen Xuan Ot, 'Qua trinh chuan bi thanh lap dang nhan dan cach mang Lao', 47; and Vu Quang Hien, *Tim hieu chu truong doi ngoai*, 162.
[77] *Ngoai giao Viet Nam*, 144–5; 'Dien cua Ban Bi thu, ngay 11 thang 5 nam 1954', *VKD*: 1954, 106–7; 'Dien cua Ban Bi thu, ngay 8 thang 6 nam 1954: ve lanh dao phong trao dau tranh cua quan chung o Ha Noi', *VKD*: 1954, 126–8; and Chen Jian, 'China and the Indochina Settlement', 254.
[78] Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 500.
[79] Hoang Minh Thao, 'Chien thang Dien Bien Phu', 43; Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 505–6; and The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University [hereafter referred to as VATTU]/Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 – The Early History of Vietnam/Box 04/Folder 09/Item Number: 2410409002 (Record #: 250034)/'The 1954 Geneva Conference, 23 April 1979', 40, 43.
[80] Ibid., 40–3.
[81] Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 358.
[82] VATTU/Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 – The Early History of Vietnam/Box 04/ Folder 11/Item Number: 2410411011 (Record #: 250391)/'Geneva Conference of 1954, USSR and Chinese Objectives and Strategy, 1954', C-1.
[83] Prados, 'Assessing Dien Bien Phu', 226. Buu Loc resigned on 16 June, Diem arrived in Saigon nine days later, and the new government was installed on 7 July. On Diem's rise to power see Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam*.
[84] TNAUK/ FO 959-143/ British Consulate, Hanoi to British Embassy, Saigon/7 July 1954, 1; and British Consulate, Hanoi to British Embassy, Saigon/20 July 1954, 1.
[85] *Ngoai giao Viet Nam*, 143–9. On the issue of Cambodia and Laos, the DRVN could have benefited from Chinese and Soviet support. Unfortunately, in the end, the DRVN got no agreement on most issues concerning the rest of Indochina in Geneva because of the lack of enthusiasm for them among the conference participants, including its own allies. See Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 56–7.
[86] 'De hoan thanh nhiem vu va day manh cong tac truoc mat', 211–2.
[87] Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 506, 571.

[88] 'Bao cao tai Hoi nghi lan thu sau cua Ban Chap hanh Trung uong Dang (Khoa II), ngay 15 thang 7 nam 1954', *VKD*: 1954, 167, note 1.
[89] This VWP assessment is quoted in Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 535.
[90] 'Bao cao tai Hoi nghi lan thu sau cua Ban Chap hanh Trung uong Dang (Khoa II), ngay 15 thang 7 nam 1954', 169.
[91] Quoted in Phan Doan Nam, 'Hiep dinh Gionevo', 7.
[92] From the VWP Politburo cable dated 4 June quoted in Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 530–1.
[93] 'Chi thi cua Ban Bi thu, ngay 3 thang 7 nam 1954: Ve viec bao ho cac thanh pho moi gia phong', *VKD*: 1954, 144.
[94] Bo Quoc Phong, *Lich su khang chien chong thuc dan Phap*, 473–4; and Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 534–5.
[95] Chen Jian, 'China and the Indochina Settlement', 257. See also Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 58–60.
[96] 'Dien cua Trung uong guy dong chi Le Duan, Nam Bo, ngay 3 thang 7 nam 1954' quoted in Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 636.
[97] Vu Duong Ninh, 'Hiep dinh Geneva', 13.
[98] *Su that ve quan he Viet Nam-Trung Quoc trong 30 nam qua*, 32.
[99] Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine*, 277.
[100] Quoted in ibid., 278.
[101] 'Bao cao tai Hoi nghi lan thu sau cua Ban Chap hanh Trung uong Dang (Khoa II), ngay 15 thang 7 nam 1954', 162–72.
[102] The report entitled 'Fulfilling the Responsibilities and Promoting the Work Ahead' is cited above as 'De hoan thanh nhiem vu va day manh cong tac truoc mat'. Its content was reproduced, and possibly vetted, in *VKD*: 1954, 179–222.
[103] This concern had alarmed Party leaders in one region of Vietnam (Military Region III), and may indeed have been serious. See NAC3/PQH/HS 205: Bao cao tinh hinh trong 6 thang dau nam 1954 cua UBKCHC LK III/'Bao cao tinh hinh Lien khu III 6 thang dau nam 1954'/undated (1954), 1.
[104] Ibid.
[105] 'Nghi quyet cua Hoi nghi Ban Chap hanh Trung uong lan thu sau mo rong, tu ngay 15 den ngay 17-7-1954', *VKD*: 1954, 223, 225.
[106] The accords did, however, acknowledge the clout of the Pathet Lao in Laos by designating the provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly as regroupment zones for its forces. Effective dates for the cessation of hostilities were as follows: North Vietnam, 27 July; Central Vietnam, 1 August; South Vietnam, 11 August; Laos, 6 August; and Cambodia, 7 August.
[107] VATTU/Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 – The Early History of Vietnam/Box 04/Folder 03/Item Number: 2410403033 (Record #: 249472)/'The Geneva Conference of 1954, Outcome & Significance for DRV, China, USSR, 1954', D-8.
[108] TNAUK/FO 371-112037/ Ministry of Defense to Foreign Office: 'Chinese Communist Aid to the Vietminh: Brief for a Perimeter Review on the Subject'/13 August 1954, 2. 'We have been struck by the absence of provisions [in the Geneva accords] for fixed inspection teams on the Cao Bang and Ha Giang supply routes, particularly since it is believed that about 2/3 of Chinese aid for the Vietminh has travelled on the Cao Bang route', the British Foreign Office observed in late August. 'Any question of adequate control of supplies from China is entirely impractical without the location of permanent teams at least at Cao Bang' (TNAUK/FO 371-112037/Foreign Office to British Embassy, Paris/25 August 1954, 1; and Ministry of Defense to Southeast Asia Department/23 October 1954, 1). Indirectly acknowledging the shrewdness of DRVN negotiators in Geneva an Indian military expert on the international control commission supervising implementation of the accords claimed to be 'at a loss to

know why' Paris had consented to leaving 'the entire Chinese frontier between Lao Kay [sic] and Langson completely unsupervised'. Even French officers he contacted 'do not know why these places were chosen at Geneva instead of Ha Giang and Cao Bang which are obviously more important'. His comments are reported in TNAUK/FO 371-112037/British Legation, Saigon to Southeast Asia Department/2 October 1954, 1.

[109] 'Bao cao tai Hoi nghi lan thu sau cua Ban Chap hanh Trung uong Dang (Khoa II), ngay 15 thang 7 nam 1954', 169.

[110] Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 543, 643.

[111] Ibid., 546.

[112] François Joyaux, to illustrate, maintained that while Zhou Enlai had applied sustained pressure on the Vietnamese throughout the negotiations, it was Molotov who prevailed over Pham Van Dong to accept the above terms and conclude the negotiations (Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine*, 286).

[113] Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 64; and Olsen, *Soviet–Vietnam Relations*, 45. Chen Jian refers to adoption by Moscow and Beijing of a 'realistic strategy' at Geneva (Chen Jian, *Mao's China*, 140).

[114] Recent scholarship is challenging that understanding. See, among other works, Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, and Connelly, *Diplomatic Revolution*.

[115] Bui Dinh Thanh, 'Dau tranh ngoai giao', 530.

[116] Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine*, 373.

[117] Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 53. See also Shu Guang Zhang, 'Constructing "Peaceful Coexistence"', 510, 518. At least one member of the Chinese delegation at the Geneva Conference recalled later that Beijing's foremost concern with regards to the situation in Indochina at that juncture was the possibility that 'after the DRV drove the French out, the United States would come in' (quoted in Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 54).

[118] Hoang Van Hoan, *A Drop in the Ocean*, 285.

[119] See, for example, Le Kinh Lich (ed.), *30-Year War*, 368; and Ban chi dao Tong ket chien tranh – Truc thuoc Bo chinh tri, *Tong ket cuoc khang chien chong thuc dan Phap*, 216–7, 368.

[120] Nguyen Ngoc Mao and Vu Thi Hong Chuyen, 'Nhin lai quan he Xo-Viet', 60; Vu Duong Ninh, 'Chien cuoc Dien Bien Phu', 28–9.

[121] Vu Duong Ninh, 'Hiep dinh Geneva', 14.

[122] Phan Doan Nam, 'Hiep dinh Gionevo', 7.

[123] Nguyen Hong Thach, 'Vietnam between China and the United States', 47–8.

[124] Ibid., 43.

[125] Ibid.

[126] *Su that ve quan he Viet Nam-Trung Quoc trong 30 nam qua*, 30; and Nguyen Hong Thach, 'Vietnam between China and the United States', 44.

[127] *Ngoai giao Viet Nam*, 156.

[128] The proximate nature of the Vietnamese-Indian relationship was revealed in the aftermath of the signing of the agreement when Nehru became the first foreign head of state to visit Hanoi (Nguyen Canh Hue, 'Vai net ve quan he Viet Nam – An Do', 53).

[129] Zhou's message is quoted in Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 523–4.

[130] Ibid., 524.

[131] 'De hoan thanh nhiem vu va day manh cong tac truoc mat', 185.

[132] Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 640, 642.

[133] Specifically, the DRVN lacked 'enough cadre force, means of activity and did not yet have experience in multilateral negotiations with large countries' (Nguyen Phuc Luan, 'Ngoai giao Ho Chi Minh', 8).

[134] The MOFA cynically remarked later that even if 'we had secured a demarcation at the 16th parallel or farther into the South, that still would not have precluded the American imperialists from jumping into [*nhay vao*] southern Vietnam after the Geneva Conference' and cause the collapse of the accords (Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 642).
[135] Ibid., 639.
[136] Ibid., 638.
[137] Ibid., 640.
[138] 'The Geneva Conference of 1954, Outcome & Significance for DRV, China, USSR, 1954', D-5.
[139] Ibid., D-5, D-9.
[140] On the latter issue see Asselin, 'Choosing Peace', 99–100.
[141] British Consulate, Hanoi to British Embassy, Saigon/2 June 1954, 3. 'It cannot be said', the consulate observed shortly thereafter, 'that the morale of the French Union troops in the North has been seriously shaken by the precarious military situation which has prevailed in the [Red River] Delta since the fall of Dien Bien Phu' (TNAUK/FO 959-143/British Consulate, Hanoi to British Embassy, Saigon/15 June 1954, 2).
[142] NAC3/PPTT/HS 1684: Bao cao thanh tich ve quan su trong 8 nam khang chien (1946–1954)/'Tam nam dau tranh sau lung dich'/undated (1954), 6.
[143] Ibid., 16.
[144] 'De hoan thanh nhiem vu va day manh cong tac truoc mat', 211–2.
[145] Chen Jian, 'China and the Indochina Settlement', 254. On French military deployments to Indochina in 1953–54 see Valette, *La guerre d'Indochine*, 183–92.
[146] Thayer, *War by Other Means*, 3.
[147] Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine*, 270.
[148] Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 521.
[149] 'De hoan thanh nhiem vu va day manh cong tac truoc mat', 174.
[150] Trinh Thi Dinh, 'Ve am muu can thiep quan su cua My', 40.
[151] Quoted in *American Imperialism's Intervention in Viet Nam*, 21.
[152] 'Bao cao tai Hoi nghi lan thu sau cua Ban Chap hanh Trung uong Dang (Khoa II), ngay 15 thang 7 nam 1954', 166, 164.
[153] Military Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam*, 4.
[154] NAC3/PPTT/HS 1698: Bao cao dien mat cua VPTW Dang LDVN ve tinh hinh dich va ta trong vung tam lai chien nam 1954/'Bao cao ve tinh hinh dich-ta trong vung tam bi chien tu thang 3.1954 – 01.05.1954'/undated (May 1954), 1.
[155] NAC3/PQH/HS 143: Cap thu kien nghi cua tap the va cac co quan ve viec lap lai hoa binh o Dong Duong va Hoi dong Gio-ne-vo nam 1954/'Kien-Nghi cua QDQG Viet Nam – Tinh Doi Ha-Dong, ngay 11, thang 6, 1954'/11 June 1954, 1; and 'May nhan xet cua Trung uong ve hoi nghi Gio-ne', 1.
[156] 'Bao cao tai Hoi nghi lan thu sau cua Ban Chap hanh Trung uong Dang (Khoa II), ngay 15 thang 7 nam 1954', 163.
[157] Trinh Thi Dinh, 'Ve am muu can thiep quan su cua My', 40.
[158] Bui Dinh Thanh, 'Dau tranh ngoai giao', 530.
[159] Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 640.
[160] 'We [in Vietnam; *chung toi*] do not understand clearly the situation in France and the world', it stated ('Dien cua Trung uong gui don chi Pham Van Dong ngay 27.5.1954' quoted in Ibid., 501).
[161] Ibid., 648.
[162] Ibid., 642.
[163] Anderson, *Trapped by Success*, 38.
[164] Duiker, *Sacred War*, 94.
[165] 'The Geneva Conference of 1954, Outcome & Significance for DRV, China, USSR, 1954', D-6.

[166] Military Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam*, 9–10.
[167] Bui Dinh Thanh, 'Dau tranh ngoai giao', 530.
[168] 'De hoan thanh nhiem vu va day manh cong tac truoc mat', 186–7.
[169] NAC3/PQH/HS 143: Cap thu kien nghi cua tap the va cac co quan ve viec lap lai hoa binh o Dong Duong va Hiep dinh Gio-ne-vo nam 1954/'Dien van Cong doan Ton Duc Thang 19.8.1954'/19 August 1954, 1.
[170] Chen Jian, 'China and the Indochina Settlement', 254.
[171] 'De hoan thanh nhiem vu va day manh cong tac truoc mat', 187.
[172] César, 'Declining Value of Indochina', 189.
[173] Tertrais, *La piastre et le fusil*, 183.
[174] 'So thao bao cao quan su o Quoc hoi lan thu 3 (12-1953)', 1, 5.
[175] Jean Lacouture maintained that the SOVN was a legitimate state whose creation transformed the conflict in Vietnam into a civil war (Lacouture, *Vietnam Between Two Truces*, 9).
[176] Olsen, *Soviet–Vietnam Relations*, 46–7.
[177] NAC3/PQH/HS 75: Ho so phien hop BTTQH khoa I ngay 28.7.1954 ve Hoi nghi Gio-ne-vo va ket qua cua Hiep dinh dinh chien/'Bao cao cua Ban thuong truc Quoc hoi ve hiep dinh dinh chien'/28 July 1954, 5; and 'De hoan thanh nhiem vu va day manh cong tac truoc mat', 205–7.
[178] NAC3/PPTT/HS 1696: Thong tri, Chi thi, Bao cao cua Tong Quan uy Tuc dan quan v/v cham chinh cung co phat trien luc luong vu trang nhan dan va tinh hinh xay dung dan quan du kich nam 1954/'Bao cao tinh hinh hoat dong va xay dung D.Q.D.K. 3 thang dau nam 1954'/undated (1954), 3.
[179] 'De hoan thanh nhiem vu va day manh cong tac truoc mat', 205–7; and 'Bao cao cua Ban thuong truc Quoc hoi ve hiep dinh dinh chien', 5.
[180] On the shortcomings of the VWP's land reform program (1953–56) see Hoang Van Hoan, *A Drop in the Ocean*, 302–4; and Moise, *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam*. According to Moise the poorly executed land reform effort quickly became a growing concern for VWP leaders.
[181] 'Bao cao cua Ban thuong truc Quoc hoi ve hiep dinh dinh chien', 4. Within weeks of the signing of the accords the DRVN government had made 'great efforts' to 'organize at least the basis for strengthening the shaky economy of the north' (TNAUK/FO 371-117093/'Vietnam: Annual Review for 1954'/24 February 1955, 4).
[182] 'De hoan thanh nhiem vu va day manh cong tac truoc mat', 174–5.
[183] British Consulate, Hanoi to British Embassy, Saigon/2 June 1954, 5.
[184] 'De hoan thanh nhiem vu va day manh cong tac truoc mat', 175. See also 'Bao cao cua Ban thuong truc Quoc hoi ve hiep dinh dinh chien', 5.
[185] NAC3/PPTT/HS 1880: Tap hiep dinh dinh chi chien su o Viet-Lao-Mien ngay 20.21.7.1954/Pham Van Dong handwritten notes – draft of 'Déclaration de M. Pham Van Dong, Président de la délégation de la République Démocratique du Viêt-Nam à la scéance plenière du 21.7.1954/20 July 1954, 1. The statement quoted above was omitted from the final version of the declaration.
[186] Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 636.
[187] Quoted in Shu Guang Zhang, 'Constructing "Peaceful Coexistence"', 514.
[188] Vu Duong Ninh, 'Hiep dinh Geneva', 11–6.
[189] Randle, *Geneva 1954*, 559.
[190] Robert Randle wrote that the Geneva Agreement on Vietnam contributed to the 'transformation' of the DRVN 'from an insignificant force to administrators of an unquestionably sovereign socialist state' (ibid., 559).
[191] Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, 57.
[192] Hoc vien quan he quoc te, *Dau tranh ngoai giao*, 636.

[193] On Vietnamese anti-colonialism see Zinoman, *Colonial Bastille*; Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*; Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*; and Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*.
[194] 'Vietnam: Annual Review for 1954', 5.
[195] 'Loi kieu goi sau khi Hoi nghi Gionevo thanh cong, ngay 22 thang 7 nam 1954', *VKD:* 1954, 229; and 'Loi kieu goi cua Ban Chap hanh Trung uong Dang Lao dong Viet Nam, ngay 25 thang 7 nam 1954', 234.
[196] Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*, 279.
[197] Nguyen Phuc Luan, 'Ngoai giao Ho Chi Minh', 8.
[198] NAC3/PPTT/HS 1887: Tap tai lieu ve cac cuoc hop bao cua Phai doan Viet Nam va cac phai doan khac tai Hoi nghi Gio-ne-vo nam 1954/'Thu cau Pham Van Dong gui len Bac ve tinh hinh Hiep dinh dinh chien Viet-Phap'/21 July 1954, 1.

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