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REVIEW ESSAY

Two Giant Steps in the Scholarship on the First Indochina War

Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: Un état né de la guerre, 1945–1954*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2012. 559 pp.

Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*. New York: Random House, 2012. 864 pp.

David Hunt

Here we have two terrific books coming out virtually at the same time, both enlarging our understanding of the First Indochina War and with the added benefit that each reinforces and raises questions about the views expressed in the other. Reading them is like listening in as top scholars put their latest findings on display and explore the areas where they agree and disagree. I begin with a commentary on Goscha, then turn to Logevall, with a brief third section offering thoughts on the dialogue between the two.

I

Vietnam: Un état né de la guerre is a text full of dazzling moments. In setting out to demonstrate how the Viet Minh resistance movement was able to build a state and an army, the author notes seemingly humble details—looking for a radio transmitter, translating a medical term, delivering a packet of mail, organizing a police file—and then, in an imaginative flight, explains how these tasks were part of a larger mosaic as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) worked to establish its authority and combat its enemies. Goscha's vast reading on a wide array of topics lends weight to the treatment, and a gift for narrative construction builds suspense as the emerging state labors to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds.[1]

Borrowings and improvisations enabled the DRV to survive after the Japanese surrender in 1945 even though, in accordance with a Big Three agreement at the Potsdam Conference, Chinese troops occupied the northern half of the country and British forces the south. Goscha declares that the new government "grafted" itself onto the already existing bureaucracy headed by the emperor Bao Dai, from which it inherited schools, hospitals, presses, newspapers, and radio, telephone, and telegraph facilities (53). Guomindang commanders forced the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) to make room for other political formations in government ministries and the National Assembly. But they declined to sponsor the restoration of French colonialism, thereby opening a

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window of opportunity for the DRV to gain traction in the north (this in contrast to the south where the British set out to reestablish French control).

The government in Hanoi allowed mandarins and civil servants of the Bao Dao administration to remain in place and invited Japanese deserters with military and intelligence backgrounds to serve as advisers. As combat units were assembled, it launched translation projects to make available military theory from Clausewitz to Mao. A handful of specialists trained in French-controlled schools volunteered to set up a modern health-care system combining western understandings with knowledge drawn from "traditional practitioners in the remotest villages" (213). They also launched their own translation project with the aim of rendering a technical literature into *quoc ngu* (Vietnamese alphabet) equivalents, an exercise that "created among highly Frenchified intellectuals a more intimate contact with their own language and identity" (210). Refusing to be discouraged by a shortage of equipment and trained personnel, DRV leadership also developed radio, telephone, and telegraph links to military units and regional party and administrative branches and eventually to stations in Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. France retained a lead in coding and code-breaking techniques, but a rudimentary electronic grid allowed the government to sustain an imagined national presence in the scattered outposts of an "archipelago state" (347).

In his remarkable chapter 6, Goscha argues that personal experience was the most effective training program for security cadres who worked underground during the interwar period. Some had been schooled in the Whampoa Military Academy run by the Soviets in the 1920s, and virtually the entire top echelon of the ICP learned how to run a prison from the inside when they were put behind bars by the French. Goscha shows how Le Gian and Tran Hieu, future leaders of Vietnam's police and intelligence branches, did time in Son La prison, then were transferred to Madagascar in 1941. Three years later, thinking they might be useful in the campaign against Japan, the British liberated the two men and shipped them first to India and later to South China. Soon after, they returned to Vietnam with the Office of Strategic Services. After the Japanese surrender, party members headed straight for police stations in Hanoi, Hue, and Saigon and combed through the records, giving themselves a crash course in fingerprint techniques, use of photographs, and methods for creating files on suspects and in the process discovering lists of Vietnamese moles, informers, and spies. Out of this international apprenticeship, with help from Soviet, British, Chinese, American, and especially French sources, ICP militants acquired what might be characterized as a "modern" understanding of how to control the population.

As the book title indicates, Goscha regards the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) as the key institution created by the new state. A general staff was in place within days of Ho Chi Minh's speech on 2 September 1945, proclaiming

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1. The book is discussed in an H-Diplo roundtable 14 (1), 2012: www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XIV-1.pdf (accessed 28 February 2013).

A self-study room in the Whampoa Military Academy, Changzhou Island, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, China. Some security cadres who worked underground during the interwar period in Vietnam trained at this then–Soviet-run academy in the 1920s. (Credit: Rolf Mueller, 2011. Wikimedia Commons)

Vietnamese independence, and from the beginning Ho and General Giap wanted combat divisions of an advanced type, endowed with modern weaponry, equipment, and support systems and capable of conventional warfare against France. Some arms came from French reserves and the defeated Japanese occupiers, while artisanal shops produced grenades, mines, rifles, and bazookas. It was a "respectable" output (101), but far from adequate for a strategy designed to go beyond guerrilla warfare.

Additional supplies came from various sources. Guomindang units sold off weaponry before returning home, and throughout 1946–1947 traders going back and forth across the China border paid taxes on opium shipments to the Viet Minh and supplied uniforms, medicines, explosives, radio equipment, and small arms in return for rice, coal, and other raw materials. The DRV took over an import-export company in Hoi An and struck a deal with Chinese merchants who directed operations in return for first claim on two-thirds of the goods, including U.S. and Japanese military equipment that had found its way into black markets in Macao and Hong Kong. Thailand was a gold mine of contraband weaponry, and with the help of the expatriate Vietnamese community in Bangkok, the good offices of both the Thai monarchy and Thai resistance forces, and Chinese merchants in Vietnam who once again served as intermediaries, the Viet Minh was able to trade coffee, tea, and coal for Japanese stocks left behind in 1945.

These initiatives were no more than a first step toward parity with the French, whose patrols disrupted supply routes and impeded efforts to develop PAVN combat capabilities. Other Southeast Asian states declined to recognize the DRV,

Nehru offered only "moral support" (374), and Stalin, who doubted Ho Chi Minh's communist convictions and loyalty to Moscow, also refused to help. Provisioning became an even more serious problem in 1950, when Washington obliged the Thais to suspend arms trafficking with the Viet Minh. But at the same time Mao Zedong and French Communist Party leader Maurice Thorez were persuading the Soviets to change their policy. Joining the ranks of international communism, the DRV broke out of diplomatic isolation and began to receive armaments, equipment, food, medical supplies, and technical support from the USSR and the newly formed People's Republic of China. These allies taught the Vietnamese how to organize emulation and rectification campaigns that, according to Goscha, made possible the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of conscripts for the army and porters who carried the necessary supplies to combat zones. PAVN was then able to fight eight major battles from Cao Bang in 1950 to Dien Bien Phu in 1954. "If the Soviet Union had not recognized the DRV in 1950," the author asserts, in what is likely to be among the most cited of his conclusions, "it is very possible that the battle of Dien Bien Phu simply would not have taken place. It bears repetition: the war state (*état de guerre*) almost lost the conflict on the diplomatic terrain in 1950" (395–96).

Created "in record time" PAVN was "without precedent in any other decolonization war of the twentieth century" (91). Goscha salutes "the patient, laborious and often intractable work of building a modern and professional army with all that implied in competences forged, resources mobilized, from the most modest to the heaviest, rationality and cool headedness maintained in the midst of the storm" (125). But, he specifies, the DRV never caught up to enemy firepower and advanced logistical systems and had to compensate by sacrificing thousands of soldiers in combat. For their part, civilian laborers bringing food and guns to mountain encampments perished in untold numbers as disease spread through the ranks and bombs rained down. Soviet and Chinese pressure obliged the DRV to accept a disappointing settlement at Geneva in 1954. But more crucial was the awareness among Vietnamese negotiators that an exhausted society was in no condition to carry on the fight.

This original and courageous work is bound to provoke debate. Absorbed in the rich detail in areas the author has chosen to address, I only gradually noticed that the book is about the north of Vietnam, with only passing mention of the center and the south. On the diplomatic front, it has much to say about the DRV and Southeast Asia, the Guomindang, the Chinese Communist Party, and the ICP's troubled relations with the Soviet Union. But Goscha is content with only an occasional mention of the U.S. role and says little about the Associated State of Vietnam (ASV) headed by Bao Dai, which was established by France in 1949.[2]

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2. Note also the puzzling references to "total war," with "total" sometimes defined as combat that blurred the line between civilian and soldier, while elsewhere the term refers to the DRV's success in establishing a chain of command down to village level and to a horizontal axis that integrated governmental branches at each echelon (a construction that nudges "total" toward "totalitarian"). The term *état de guerre* is also difficult. Goscha seems to be building on Tilly 1992, which dwells on the importance of preparing for war among leaders who built the administrative structures that came to typify the nation-states of the early modern period. But

Author Christopher Goscha credits China and the Soviet Union with teaching the Vietnamese how to organize emulation and rectification campaigns that made possible the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of conscripts for the army and porters, such as those pictured here, who carried the necessary supplies to combat zones. (Credit: Dinh Thuy / *Another Vietnam,* Tim Page, ed. National Geographic, 2002)

I most regret the author's lack of attention to the rural world. Chapter 4 argues that the DRV needed links to sources of goods and information in cities; it provides an account of urban warfare, pitting the French against the Viet Minh, each with its network of spies and informers; and it tells the story of the battle of Hanoi (December 1946–February 1947) and the more prolonged clash between ICP terrorism and French repression in Saigon. But a history of the DRV and its army cannot be written without attention to the peasant majority and the agrarian system that formed the core of the national economy.

In fashioning the administrative means to mobilize support and acquire rice and other agricultural products, the ICP expanded membership and trained specialist cadres. But the text makes it seem as if its chain of command often reached only to district level.[3] The DRV "district office" in the Red River delta was probably no more than a handful of militants, carrying an "archive" of key documents in a canvas bag, sleeping in a different place every night, and furtively making the rounds on foot while dodging French patrons. Without firm control over the hamlets, high-level DRV police and security personnel were not capable of drafting soldiers and extracting rural output by force alone.

The weak anchorage of the ICP apparatus amounted to a potentially fatal deficit. But at the same time, huge numbers of local militants and their squads of

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Tilly also shows how states formed by war took many forms and diverged over time. It would be interesting to hear Goscha on the distinctive features of the DRV in comparison to other emerging states at war in the middle of the twentieth century, as well as his thoughts on the legacy of the DRV as represented in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam formed in 1976. For a recent study, see Gainsborough 2010.

3. Goscha suggests that the party stationed trusted cadres at "district level, and sometimes even in the villages" (442).

guerrillas struggled more or less on their own. As early as 1949, there were already 300,000 to 400,000 combatants and activists at ground level (99), and soldiers were depending "on neighboring village populations to provide medical care for evacuated wounded or for food needs" (455). Goscha also calls attention to the contribution made by civilian porters, 1.7 million of them, half of whom were women. In short, modern warfare depended on a collective effort that was sustained by the participation of many anonymous people. Without that platform, there would have been no PAVN, no matter how many tons of supplies came from the Sino-Soviet bloc.

Given that villagers generated the surplus, offered up the conscripts, and provided the labor power on which the capacity to wage war depended, DRV leaders had to bargain with the rural population.[4] In explaining how negotiations unfolded, Goscha rightfully waves off Paul Mus's "mandate of heaven" and talk of "eternal Vietnamese patriotism" (435). But the argument then swings from one set of stereotypes to another with the suggestion that country people were absorbed "by their work and their daily preoccupations" and constituted a "glacial" mass, frozen in place, "apart from the efforts of the war and the revolution" (438, 435, 431).

Trapped by this set of assumptions, the author falls back on tactics borrowed from the Soviets and the Chinese and designed to shake the village world out of its torpor. The book thus attempts to rescue the concept of "mobilization" from the margins where it was pushed after the rise of peasant studies in the 1960s and 1970s. That literature encourages a view of peasantries as complex social formations, incorporating a range of thoughts and behaviors and always striving and sometimes succeeding in making their presence felt, including in opposition to outside actors who presume to speak for them. Slogans borrowed from Mao and Stalin could not on their own have drawn from country people the sacrifices required by the war. The outcome was decided in hamlet conclaves among families and friends, the airing of differing opinions about what to do, and, finally, the complicated reasoning that led some to abstain, others to volunteer and then change their minds, and still others to stay the course. Evidence on that score will come to light only when another kind of research is launched with the same creativity that Christopher Goscha has demonstrated in telling his part of the story.[5]

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4. Tilly (1992, 101–2) grants that such situations are "asymmetrical." But he also believes that "the core of what we now call 'citizenship' consists of multiple bargains hammered out by rulers and ruled in the course of their struggles over the means of state action, especially the making of war."
5. Goscha expresses a doubt about Sino-Soviet mobilization techniques when he writes that "a sort of epiphanal grace ought to be produced" by cadre training sessions, "a conversion of all into the grand family of the party and its ideology, an absorption of the 'mass line.' At least that was the goal sought by the exercise" (442). Another hesitant note emerges when land reform is awkwardly brought into the analysis toward the end of the book. That inducement was not offered until the last weeks of the war and cannot explain why PAVN soldiers were willing to fight in the major battles occurring before then.

II

Embers of War is a page turner that does not condescend to the reader and a remarkable contribution to the political, the military, and especially the diplomatic history of the First Indochina War. This is not a work that treats diplomacy as if it were a cerebral chess game. One is instead delivered into the presence of men who exercised power, but were never entirely free, whose obsessions drove them to track enemies and quarrel with allies and whose choices brought down unintended consequences on themselves and suffering on others. Logevall tells his story with a propulsive force and in the process builds a narrative full of tragic overtones.[6]

I go some but not all of the way with the argument in the first part of the book. The author affirms that Ho Chi Minh believed the United States was "uniquely able among the great powers to grasp the nature of the 'colonial problem'" (83) and therefore a potential supporter of Vietnamese independence. Logevall himself at times sounds an exceptionalist note, as when declaring that "Americans still seemed to adhere, on some level, to a reflexive egalitarianism in world affairs, to an opposition to imperialism" (195). By the time of Pearl Harbor, he asserts, President Roosevelt "had become a committed anti-colonialist" (46) and "a major world voice for the liberation of colonial peoples in Asia and Africa" (99). The implication seems to be that before his untimely death FDR was prepared to help the Vietnamese and other subject populations.

Embers of War offers a parallel to the argument that had he lived the president might have softened the fierce antagonisms that developed during the cold war.[7] But no statesman could have found a way to reconcile the interests of the Soviets, European allies with imperial agendas, and national liberation movements against colonial and neocolonial domination. Roosevelt's anti-French sentiments are a matter of record, but as Mark Bradley has shown, they did not imply a commitment to independence for Vietnam, not when Americans perceived the Vietnamese through a "prism of racialized hierarchies" and assumed that they were incapable of self-government. FDR proposed a trusteeship for Indochina to last for twenty, thirty, or fifty years, but when it became clear that the Chinese were in no position to serve as trustees, he was boxed in. France jumped at the opportunity "to assume for herself the obligations of a trustee," as the president put it in March 1945 when he changed his mind and agreed that the French should be allowed to reestablish control over their former subjects.[8]

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6. The text is beautifully presented, with many impactful photographs: a technician with a paint brush working on a U.S.–supplied C-119 transport plane in order to change "the white star of the U.S. Air Force into the French tricolor" (232); French paratroopers in November 1953 watching from a distance as comrades descend into Dien Bien Phu (386); fly-on-the-wall snapshots of important people in unguarded moments (Eisenhower convulsed by his own joke, while Dulles and various French leaders more or less gamely nod and smile [344]).
7. For a recent statement, see Costigliola 2012, the centerpiece in H-Diplo Roundtable 14 (8), 2012: www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XIV-8.pdf (accessed 28 February 2013).
8. On the "prism," see Bradley 2000, 70, 74–75; on trusteeship for twenty, thirty, or fifty years, 78; on the president changing his mind, 102.

Logevall traces events from the beginning of hostilities in 1946 to the Geneva Accords in 1954, a full 500 pages showing the author at the height of his powers as a historian of top-level statecraft. From the point of view of policy-makers in Washington, the ideal strategy for Indochina would have involved Americans advising the Associated State of Vietnam and training its armed forces, so as to establish a polity strong enough to govern on its own. Meanwhile troops supplied by France were required for dirty work on the battlefield. Both the Truman and the Eisenhower administrations situated this endeavor within the framework of the cold war, and as fighting dragged on, President Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles called for concerted action on the part of Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, and the Philippines in order to defeat the Viet Minh.

This strategy did not and could not work, first of all because it made no sense to the French. To be sure, they proved adept at amplifying anticommunist battle cries, as in General de Lattre de Tassigny's operatic variations on that theme during a 1952 visit to the United States. But as Foreign Minister Georges Bidault never tired of pointing out, France was fighting to hold on to its colony and had no reason to shed blood for Vietnamese independence.[9] Along the same lines, the French cabinet was uneasy about internationalizing the war, a step in the logic of the bipolar U.S. understanding of "free world" combat against global communism, but one that implicitly delegitimized France's colonial agenda. From 1952 on, as French morale faltered, the incoherence of their position became more pronounced. To fight on and achieve a negotiated settlement and withdrawal with a modicum of dignity, they were all the more in need of U.S. assistance. But the Americans wanted victory, not an exit strategy, and raged against defeatism in Paris. It was an alliance destined for an unhappy ending.

In a striking passage (258–59), Logevall analyzes a further contradiction, this one at the expense of the Vietnamese "Third Force." After French creation of the ASV in 1949 and the Americans' recognition of the toothless new government, the Dai Viet and Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (Vietnamese Nationalist, VNQDD) parties were trapped in an unholy alliance with France and could not second Viet Minh denunciations of the sham "Bao Dai solution." French intransigence seconded by the administration in Washington thus strengthened the mandate of the Viet Minh and undercut its main domestic rivals.

Logevall adds weight to the case already elaborated elsewhere against President Eisenhower's reputation as a statesman who kept Americans out of a dirty war in Southeast Asia.[10] He declares that even those sectors of the administration most attuned to the unfavorable balance of forces in Vietnam continued to believe that victory was possible and pressed General Henri Navarre to take the offensive, a recommendation he accepted by inviting the Viet Minh to do battle

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9. And certainly not to clear the way for Japanese trading networks in Southeast Asia, a U.S. objective dating back to the late 1940s, as spelled out by Michael Schaller and Andrew Rotter (cited on 744, fn 9). Logevall's oeuvre amounts to a sustained critique of U.S. interventions, but this is one of the few moments where he borrows from revisionist scholarship that calls attention to economic factors shaping U.S. policies.
10. Anderson 1991.

Ho Chi Minh meets with party and military leaders in 1953 at an unknown location to plan the campaign against the French at Dien Bien Phu. (Credit: Dinh Dang Dinh / *Another Vietnam,* Tim Page, ed. National Geographic Society, 2002)

at Dien Bien Phu. The Eisenhower team "steadfastly rejected negotiations on Indochina" (429) and in March 1954 it presented the French with "Operation Vulture," a plan for massive air strikes, possibly including nuclear weapons, against the enemy. Eisenhower tried to soften up Congress for U.S. intervention and launched personal appeals to Prime Minister Winston Churchill, while Dulles badgered Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand to join the crusade.

In mid April 1954 Vice President Richard M. Nixon openly spoke of dispatching U.S. troops to Southeast Asia, and a few days later Dulles may have offered Bidault two atomic bombs to break the siege. With a characteristic insistence on pursuing the truth, Logevall first notes limits in the documentation on this purported incident, then develops an argument on behalf of its credibility. As the Viet Minh closed in, Dulles angered the British by attempting to draw Commonwealth nations into a last-minute rescue mission. In its painstakingly constructed day-by-day account, the text makes Eisenhower seem frantic for intervention even after he came to accept the reality that Dien Bien Phu was doomed. Dulles's flight from the Geneva Conference on 3 May signaled for all to see that the Americans did not want a settlement, and in mid May the administration launched a final effort to blow up negotiations by scheming once again for united action.

It could be that all of these moves were feints, meant to intimidate the Viet Minh and its Soviet and Chinese allies, and Logevall acknowledges that warmongering statements did indeed have an effect on the other side. But he insists that Eisenhower was just as bellicose as Dulles, Nixon, and Admiral Arthur W. Radford and that their combined efforts came close to prolonging a war that everyone else wanted to terminate. The author gives considerable credit for

blocking the administration to the British and especially to Foreign Minister Anthony Eden, who withstood the ravings of Dulles and played a large part in bringing the Geneva negotiations to a successful conclusion.

Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai was the one who was bluffing when, in an effort to pressure the Vietnamese, he claimed that "The Mendès- France government, having vowed to achieve a negotiated solution, must be supported, lest it fall and be replaced by one committed to continuing the war" (597). By that time, even Charles de Gaulle was saying, "We will regret [leaving] greatly, but we must go" (cited on 434), and there was no longer any prospect that a pro-war coalition could win a majority in the French National Assembly. But if Logevall is correct, warlike signals from Washington had to be taken seriously, and he is not alone in thinking that DRV leaders had their own reasons to opt for peace.[11] It is also worth noting that the accords were ill received by many Viet Minh militants in the south, who were left at the mercy of the soon-to-be installed Republic of Vietnam and its American allies, thus stoking the "embers" that were to flare up into another war in 1959–1960. Fredrik Logevall's powerfully developed analysis of the many cross-cutting agendas at work in 1954 constitutes a high point in a work of uncommon force and erudition.

There is a loss of analytic tension in the last part of the book. The author dutifully attends to the works of Philip Catton and Edward Miller, who present a fresh view of Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother Ngu, but he is not much impressed by their sort of revisionism and too quickly passes over its implications. While Diem's personal shortcomings were more than sufficient to doom his enterprise, Americans who dismissed him as a "Yogi-like mystic" and a "messiah without a message" (591) missed the stubborn patriotism that led him to insist on the sovereignty of the Saigon-based government and to conclude, usually with good reason, that U.S. advice was ill-informed and self-interested. An alternate conclusion might have underscored the continuity linking Roosevelt's trusteeship to the Eisenhower administration's attempt, as Catton puts it, to maintain a "compliant client" in Saigon. The Viet Minh and then the National Liberation Front resisted what they took to be U.S. neocolonialism, and in their own way so did the Ngo brothers. They were to pay dearly when the Americans lost patience and decided to dispense with their services.[12]

III

The two authors agree on the patriotic credentials of the Viet Minh. But Goscha is more emphatic in underscoring the communist convictions of ICP leaders, who welcomed the opportunity to forge a cold war alliance with the USSR and the PRC, while Logevall adopts a softer position, especially with respect to Ho Chi Minh, who "wore the ideology lightly" (85). In another divergence, Goscha is at pains to separate himself from a master narrative of primordial Vietnamese resistance to foreign domination, thereby diverging from Logevall's tendency to

11. As noted, Goscha agrees on this point. See also Asselin 2011.
12. For "compliant client," see Catton 2002, 9. See also, Miller forthcoming.

cite a “seething nationalism” in explaining why the Vietnamese stood up to France (35).

Goscha shows more interest than does Logevall in the non- and anti-communist sectors of the Vietnamese political scene. He characterizes battles between the ICP on the one side and the VNQDD, Dai Viet, and Dong Minh Hoi parties on the other as a “civil war,” with its origins in French prisons, where nationalist militants of varying stripes fought against each other as fiercely as against their jailers. Violence continued in 1945 and especially in 1946 as Chinese military units withdrew and the DRV forcibly took control of “provinces held by the opposition parties” (255). Meanwhile in the south, hundreds and even thousands died in clashes between Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects and the ICP, a carnage that Goscha blames on Nguyen Binh and other DRV leaders, who “magisterially bungled the incorporation (*récouperation*) of the religions groups” (260). On an even larger scale, the Associated State of Vietnam put an army of 151,000 soldiers in the field (426) and suffered more casualties than did French Expeditionary Forces in battles against the PAVN. The book stops in 1954, but one might imagine that Goscha would have wished to go beyond received views of Diem and his brother Ngu and also of other political currents within southern Vietnam in the years between the Geneva Accords and the renewal of warfare in 1959–1960.

As for the coming of the cold war to Southeast Asia, the United States is not much in the picture as Goscha follows events in the late 1940s. For him, the turning point came when the DRV lined up with the Soviets and the Chinese and “pushed the Americans to reinforce their support for the French, incited them to recognize the Associated States of Indochina, and augmented their presence in Asia, and especially in Southeast Asia” (406). The passage conveys a sense that meaningful U.S. involvement began in 1950. Logevall is harder on Washington, as when he calls attention to senior officials who “knew full well that a sizable chunk of the unrestricted U.S. economic assistance to France ($1.9 billion between July 1945 and July 1948) was being used to pay war costs” in Indochina (186). He agrees that Sino-Soviet intervention obliged the Americans to double down in support of France, a move that was all the more significant because it was publicly and loudly trumpeted. But he suggests that the move should be seen as an escalation of an already substantial commitment that went back to the last days of World War II.

Once clear of the 1950 hinge year, Logevall turns up the heat still further and leaves no doubt of Washington’s catalytic role. Goscha’s comments on Sino-Soviet assistance are not coupled with references to the far greater inputs coming from the United States, in contrast to *Embers*, which underscores the gap between the two aid flows, as in 1952 when Chinese deliveries “increased markedly” to 250 and then to 450 tons per month, compared with U.S. shipment of 8,000 to 9,000 tons per month (388). And Logevall, who massively documents words and actions coming out of Washington in favor of more war, would not agree with Goscha that in the summer of 1954 “the Americans showed themselves very cautious (*précautionneux*), but finally came around fully to the view of the French, who wished to bring the war to a close” (411).

Of course DRV leaders exercised a degree of agency. All governments do, but with varying resources and degrees of freedom to make choices. In 1954, all states were afraid of the United States, including the British and the French, who were unnerved by the readiness of Washington leaders to talk of nuclear strikes. Ho and Truong Chinh claimed that a negotiated settlement in 1954 would "isolate" the United States from its allies (Goscha, 416–17), and to be sure within a matter of weeks Great Britain recognized the PRC and the French National Assembly voted down the European Defense Treaty. But both allies were quick to signal their acceptance of U.S. hegemony in Asia, and Pierre Mendès-France recognized the newly emerging Saigon government and refused all overtures from the DRV. As the First Indochina War came to a close, statesmen in Moscow and Beijing told themselves and others that "peaceful coexistence" was the way to go forward and sought to placate the Americans, who, for their part, were sabotaging the Geneva Accords and looking for ways to resume the struggle against their enemies in Vietnam.

Even when noting points where no consensus emerges, readers are certain to come away from these two books with a keener sense of what a deep and balanced portrayal of events in the 1945–1954 period might look like, with attention to both Indochinese and external realities. Together they represent a giant step forward for scholarship on the First Indochina War.

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