

THE FRENCH WAR

The rape of Vietnam by western powers began in 1858, when French troops landed near Danang to establish colonial rule throughout Indochina—Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. It came to be regarded as one of the most brutal and exploitative colonial regimes in Asia, including slavery and other forms of oppression.

At the 1919 Versailles Conference after World War I, a man who came to be known as Ho Chi Minh attempted to get a hearing for Vietnam's plight, but was totally ignored. It was during this time that he became a founding member of the French Communist Party, attracted by its forceful condemnation of colonialism.

In 1941, the French surrendered meekly to Japan, then administered Indochina as servants of the Japanese empire. U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was determined that France should not resume control after the war, because: "The case is perfectly clear. France has had the country for nearly 100 years, and the people are worse off than they were at the beginning. They are entitled to something better than that."

But Roosevelt died, and his successors chose to accommodate France—partly to ensure its support in the emerging Cold War. England and the U.S. helped the French to reoccupy Vietnam, ostensibly to supervise a "peaceful transition" to national autonomy. But instead, they attempted to reinstate colonial rule and a war of independence broke out.

Of the many resistance groups that had emerged over the years, the most effective was the coalition led by Ho Chi Minh. Known as the Viet Minh, the movement was firmly rooted in the rural masses that comprised over 80 percent of the population.

An admirer of the principles expressed in the U.S. Declaration of Independence, Ho Chi Minh entreated the U.S. government on several occasions to support the independence of Vietnam, basing his appeals on the the U.N. Charter. He never got a reply.

As it became evident to the French that they had little hope of defeating the Viet Minh, they prepared to withdraw. But the 1949 Communist victory in China unleashed hysteria in the United States, which now paid France to keep fighting, eventually covering some 80% of the costs.

As late as 1948, U.S. experts had found that there was no evidence of outside influence over the Viet Minh. But escalating French/U.S. aggression forced the liberation army into growing reliance on "Red" China and the Soviet Union.

The French were finally defeated in 1954, after having destroyed much of the country and a great many of its people. But that was a mere foretaste of what was to come.

VIETNAM HOLOCAUST

140 YEARS OF PILLAGE, SLAUGHTER & PERSECUTION

THE AMERICAN WAR

At the 1954 peace conference in Geneva, the Viet Minh were pressured by the U.S., China and the Soviet Union into accepting a temporary division of Vietnam into two sectors, with national elections and unification to take place in 1956. By the terms of the agreement, outside forces were prohibited from interfering with the reunification process. But the U.S. had already begun to take over in the south and cause havoc in the north while the conference was still in progress. The puppet regime it set up in the south was comprised mainly of the urban Catholic elite that had flourished under French rule, representing about 10% of the population.

The vast majority were traditional Buddhist peasants who rejected the U.S.-imposed dictatorship, which soon gained a reputation as the worst violator of human rights on earth. It also refused to hold the agreed-upon elections in 1956 because, as U.S. President Eisenhower noted, Ho Chi Minh was certain to get some 80% of the vote.

As resistance grew among the people, the U.S. increased its efforts to impose its puppet regime upon them, to no avail. The dictatorship's impopularity was so intense and widespread that no amount of arms and money could enable it to survive on its own. The U.S. then decided to invade the south and attack the north. Before it was done, nearly 2.5 million troops would pass through Vietnam, and some 15 million tons of explosives would rain down upon the land and its people.

After the 1956 election was scuttled, the north was entitled under international law to seize control of the entire country. Instead, it adopted a cautious approach, as resistance grew among the southern population. No

northern troops were reported in the south until 1964, when some 25,000 U.S. troops were already present, along with vast quantities of war materiel.

There followed eight years of intensifying destruction, as the U.S. tried in vain to pummel and terrorize the people of Vietnam into submission. Its leaders soon realized, like the French before them, that their project was doomed to failure. But the slaughter persisted year after year, due mainly to anxieties over the predictably ferocious reaction of anti-communists at home, should the government admit defeat.

In this way, the people and the environment of Vietnam were sacrificed on the twin altars of anti-communism and moral cowardice. Over 58,000 U.S. soldiers lost their lives in the process. For the Vietnamese, the consequences defy description, but they include the following:

- The total amount of munitions exploded by the U.S. and its allies was more than twice that used all over the planet by all sides during World War II, on an area less than four percent the size of the

United States. Approximately 23 million bomb craters were gouged into the landscape.

- 72 million litres (19 million gallons) of toxic chemicals were sprayed from the air to destroy ca. 40 percent of the south's forests, one-third of its valuable mangrove swamps, and large areas of prime cropland. The chemicals are also suspected of causing widespread health problems, including cancer, birth defects, etc.

- Although it is, for several reasons, not possible to determine exactly how many Vietnamese were killed directly in the war (estimates range from 2–5 million on both sides), a reasonable figure is 3.5 million. Proportionately, that corresponds to 17.5 million citizens



The Vietnam War Memorial, an inscribed wall of 164 yards' length, is an invisible pinprick on this map of the Washington region. A similar wall with the names of the Vietnamese dead would have to be nearly 30 miles (45 km) long—and that's only part of the story.

of the U.S., its population being ca. five times larger at the time. This is the figure used to calculate the length of the "American War Memorial" (see illustration).

- One-third of the south's population became "internal refugees", their way of life destroyed, forced to live for years in the misery of refugee camps and overfull cities, with prostitution and other social problems as a result.

- Since the war ended for the U.S. in 1975, nearly 40,000 Vietnamese (U.S. equivalent = 200,000) have been killed by residual explosives, including an estimated 3.5 million land mines. Many more have been crippled for life.

- A decade after the war, over 13% of Vietnam's population (corresponding to ca. 33 million U.S. citizens) were still suffering from some war-related injury. The psychological, social, and cultural effects were and are much greater.

- The destruction of the environment, infrastructure and way of life has led to starvation and malnutrition for tens of millions.

Clearly, the American War will haunt the land and the people of Vietnam for many generations to come.

THE ECONOMIC WAR

After World War II, the United States invested heavily in reconstructing the economies of Germany and Japan. But having inflicted on the U.S. its first military defeat in history, Vietnam was to receive a very different treatment. The U.S. continued its assault by means of propaganda and economic aggression. By leaning on allied countries and international lending agencies, it set out to further damage Vietnam's already shattered economy. It blocked loans, pressured allies to refuse or restrict foreign aid, imposed an embargo on trade with Vietnam, etc., etc.

The U.S. did not begin to loosen its grip until the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War. But, first, Vietnam was required to assume a large portion of the debt incurred by the U.S. puppet regime in the south. In effect, the victors are being forced to reimburse the U.S. for the war of aggression it conducted against them. As for the reparations that the United States promised in a 1973 agreement, not a penny has been paid.

Vietnam has also been subjected to the economic policies of international lending agencies dominated by the U.S., with harmful effects on public health, education, poverty levels, and society in general. According to some analysts, the social and economic damage resulting from all this is beginning to rival the devastation of the military war.

Through its domination of international politics and news media, the U.S. has largely succeeded in alienating world opinion from Vietnam, including a large portion of wartime sympathizers. It would appear that the world has little noted nor long remembered what has been done to Vietnam in the name of freedom and democracy.