set up private schools to propagate lay education in the country. In these schools, the course of study includes not only the subjects taught in state schools but also moral and religious instruction. Since World War I, the French-Vietnamese clergy has increased its educational activities in an effort to counteract the rising influences of Western-inspired revolutionary elements. At the present time, there are about three million Vietnamese Catholics, whose ardent faith has made their communities "steadfast islands of loyalty in the encircling tide of Communism." 

In spite of its power and influence, Catholicism has made little impression upon the life of the country at large, since its clergy has concentrated more upon building Christian communities than upon educating the masses. Indeed, in French-controlled Vietnam, the native society as a whole

... stagnated under the layer of Western economy and Western culture introduced by the French. Many of the old forms and traditions remained, but the center of power in Viet Nam had shifted to an alien state and an alien civilization. Under its French rulers, Viet Nam was a politically static country offering little future to its young people, and this killed initiative among them. A corroding irresponsibility afflicted all levels of Vietnamese life. Corruption and decadence were rampant.

Under those circumstances, the masses of tradition-bound peasants remained aloof from political life, and offered a passive resistance to the French rule. Their passivity was due to their superficial contact with the culture of the West and to their lack of education, which prevented them from acquiring the necessary tools and techniques to express themselves. They looked, however, to the Western-educated intelligentsia to enlighten and lead them, just as they had relied upon the Confucian scholars and mandarins to guide them.

Educated in the thought and ideals of the West, the Vietnamese intelligentsia were anxious to use their new knowledge and take an active interest in public affairs. In this they perpetuated the tradition of the old generation of scholars, whose aim had been to serve society through the state. Unfortunately, the majority of the educated Vietnamese were denied the right to assert themselves. Speaking of the elite of Vietnam, Charles A. Micaud says:

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96 Ibid., p. 276.
97 Hammer, op. cit., p. 74.
Their need for self-realization could have been partly fulfilled by the opening of responsible administrative posts to the educated natives and by the progressive introduction of self-government. But, in contrast to the practice of the British and Dutch colonial administrations, few responsible positions were open to the natives, and when subordinate posts were offered to them, the discrepancy between their salaries and those of their French colleagues was a source of dissatisfaction. On the other hand, the British aim of teaching self-government to the dependent peoples did not appeal to the national experience and psychology of the French, used as they were to a highly centralized government at home. The République une et indivisible was not to teach colonial peoples how to become independent.\footnote{Micaud, op. cit., p. 227.}

Disappointed at the unwillingness of the French to loosen their tight control over Vietnam, many educated Vietnamese organized nationalist movements with a view to arousing the masses and liberating the country from foreign domination. Thus, in the twenties, there existed such secret organizations as the Phuc Viet (Restoration of Vietnam), the Hung Nam (Renovation of Vietnam), the Viet-Nam Cach Menh Dang (Vietnamese Revolutionary Party), and the Tan Viet Cach Menh Dang (Revolutionary Party of New Vietnam). All these organizations were, however, weak and ill-coordinated, as they were led by inexperienced young men, whose enthusiasm was not shared by the poverty-stricken peasants. In the words of Philippe Devillers, the various nationalist groups were "cliques of youths and intellectuals who had no political experience and, often, no precise ideas, who were uniquely inspired by an ardent desire to oppose the existing regime."\footnote{Devillers, op. cit., p. 56. Translated by the writer of this Thesis.} As a result, they were easily quelled by an efficient police organized by the French.

It was also in the twenties that two important revolutionary organizations were created in Vietnam: the Viet-Nam Quoc-Dan Dang (Vietnamese Nationalist Party) and the Dong-Duong Cong-San Dang (Indochinese Communist Party). Both groups had competent leaders and definite programs of action.

Founded in 1927 at Hanoi, the Vietnamese Nationalist Party was originally a group of young men, whose primary aim was "to acquaint the masses with new ideas, especially with those of Sun Yat-sen."\footnote{Ibid.} Under the dynamic influence of its leader—a former teacher named Nguyen Thai Hoc—it gradually became a revolu-
tionary organization patterned after the Chinese Kuomintang, to which it looked for aid in expelling the French. Its sphere of influence was North Vietnam, where it had some fifteen hundred members by the beginning of 1929. Among its recruits were found teachers, students, journalists, government clerks, and soldiers as well.\textsuperscript{101}

In the spring of 1930, the above organization fomented an uprising at Yen Bay, a small town on the Chinese frontier. At the same time, a number of small riots took place in Hanoi and other cities. The French countered by sending their troops "through the countryside, bombing, shooting, and arresting."\textsuperscript{102} Nguyen Thai Hoc and many of his companions were captured and sentenced to death. As a result, the Vietnamese Nationalist Party disintegrated, but a number of its members went to China and joined the various nationalist and communist movements, which had been organized by the Vietnamese emigrés.

During that troubled period, Vietnamese Communism thrived both in Vietnam and in China. In 1925, Moscow-educated Ho Chi Minh\textsuperscript{103} organized an Association of Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth at Canton, and edited a weekly paper called Thanh Nien (Youth), in which Marxism was to become the main theme. He also sent his recruits to Vietnam for the purpose of setting up revolutionary cells. At the same time, other Communist groups began to plan and carry out their own programs of action within the country. It was not until 1930 that Ho Chi Minh succeeded in uniting most of them into one party, which was to be known as the Indochinese Communist Party.

In spite of the relentless efforts of the French police to suppress Communism in Vietnam, the Communists managed to implant their political faith among the masses of the people. The Indochinese Communist Party gradually branched out into a network of affiliated organizations—associations of women, peasants, and workers, an anti-imperialist league, and a unit of the international Red Aid Organization. By 1931, it had some 1,500 members and

\textsuperscript{101} For more details concerning the Vietnamese Nationalist Party and its activities, see Hammer, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 82-84.

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{103} Details concerning Ho Chi Minh's life and activities can be obtained from Vietnam News Service, \textit{President Ho Chi Minh}, Saha Thai Press, Bangkok, Thailand, 1949.
about a hundred thousand sympathizers.\textsuperscript{104} Its influences increased tremendously after World War II, when \textit{Ho Chi Minh} became the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.\textsuperscript{105}

In addition to the above-mentioned media through which new ideas and practices have been introduced to Vietnam, the press has played an important role both in education and in politics. It has been instrumental in interpreting Western culture to the people and in creating a public opinion as well. Here, it must be noted that under the French rule the influence of the press was limited, since there existed a strict censorship of all publications. Moreover, most of the Vietnamese peasants could not read, nor could they afford to buy newspapers.

In many urban centers, motion pictures have been an important agency for the spread of Western culture. It is a sad commentary that usually certain phases of Western life—often the less desirable—have been exaggeratedly depicted on the screen. Other media for the exchange of ideas include the radio and the various publications both in Vietnamese and in foreign languages.

In conclusion, it can be said that, in spite of the impact of French civilization, most traditional educative agencies in Vietnam have been maintained. They have been, however, modified by their contacts with the culture of the West, which has been pouring in through many channels. Some of the changes have been accompanied by confusion and violence, while others have occurred slowly but steadily. Regardless of their nature, the various innovations have been contributing to the dislocation of the old socio-political structure of Vietnam, which has yet to find a suitable way of life for herself.

\textsuperscript{104} Data taken from Micaud, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 235.

\textsuperscript{105} A detailed documentary account of Communism in Vietnam is given in Jean Dorsenne, \textit{Faudra-t-il Evacuer l'Indochine}, La Nouvelle Societe d'Edi­tion, Paris, 1932, pp. 56-127.
CHAPTER IX

A BRIEF EVALUATION OF EDUCATION IN FRENCH-CONTROLLED VIETNAM

For centuries, Vietnam had remained aloof from the main currents of European civilization, oriented as it had been almost exclusively to China. After the conquest, the French were in a position to eliminate the old form of education and replace it by an appropriate one, which might lead to mutual understanding and real co-operation between France and her Southeast-Asian possession. That might also help the Vietnamese people to learn European civilization, assimilate it, and eventually emancipated themselves.

The French succeeded in eliminating the age-old educational system not so much because they set up French-Vietnamese schools, but mainly because they secularized education by enforcing the teaching of French and Vietnamese in the place of Chinese characters. As mentioned in previous chapters, Confucian morality had been imparted to the Vietnamese people through the medium of the “scholars’ language.” The abolition of Chinese characters as a school subject was obviously an important factor contributing to the gradual disappearance of the moral foundation of the Vietnamese society—namely, Confucianism. Speaking of the results of driving Chinese methodology into obscurity, Thomas Ennis says that

... the length of time spent upon Western studies makes impossible any consistent preparation in Indochinese history, ethics, and literature. Consequently, those turned out of the local institutions are distressed hybrids, who have assimilated neither the beauties of French culture nor obtained a consciousness of their own great teachings. The Annamite [Vietnamese] past has been forgotten, and the “French” future is obscure. An alien education has transformed and separated them from their homes. The ideals of “service” and “utility,” preached by the French, do not appeal to the Indochinese [Vietnamese], who see no reason why the humanity of a mandarin, actuated by the Analects of Confucius, in his role as arbiter, is not as “useful” as the decision of a Western judge, rationalizing the Napoleonic Code.106

Since the moral and religious significance of traditional education no longer prevailed, a socio-political vacuum was created in the society of Vietnam. The quasi-sacred authority of the emperor—the Son of Heaven—was greatly undermined, for it was tightly con-

trolled by the French administration. The Confucian-educated mandarinate disappeared with the abolition of the traditional mandarinal examinations. In its place was created a middle-class of Western-trained functionaries, who identified their interests with those of the French and lacked the philosophical background to be the "fathers and mothers" of their people. Tradition-bound as they were, the rural masses could hold on to their old way of life. Nevertheless, these simple-minded peasants felt the impact of French influences through the propaganda activities of the militant intelligentsia of Vietnam. In the thirties, a French writer, Jean Dorsenne, commented on the Vietnamese peasantry as follows:

Under its apparent serenity and mask of indifference, the population of Vietnam is the prey of any agitator who will come to arouse it. The peasant is unbelievably naive. Nothing is more dangerous for the tranquillity of the French. All those poor people, who transplant their rice, lead their waterbuffaloes, and innocently go about their usual work, will perhaps be transformed tomorrow into fanatic troops marching against us [the French], without knowing why.617

Indeed, the poverty-stricken, disease-ridden peasants tended to believe in any promise of a better life. Their "naivete" was further accentuated by their illiteracy, which prevented them from understanding the real meaning of any political ideology.

So far as the small group of intellectual elite was concerned, its thirst for Western knowledge led it to adopt new ideas and customs so enthusiastically that sometimes the unity of the family was endangered. Turning away from the older generation, which was still attached to Confucian traditions, the intelligentsia of Vietnam impatiently strove to introduce reforms to the country so as to keep pace with the progress of the modern world. In its haste, it disregarded the slow tempo of evolution in Vietnam and the resisting force of traditions as well. In this connection, Phillippe Devillers comments as follows:

... In its search for new values, the youth did not perceive that it was breaking away from reality, from the still structureless and so miserable masses whom Confucius had already regarded as the original and inexhaustible source of all culture and civilization. That youth appeared to be vacillating between the stagnant and dying past which it no longer wanted, and the Occident whose profound values were still beyond its reach.108

107 Dorsenne, op. cit., p. 135, Free Translation by the Writer of this Thesis.  
Despite that mental vacillation, the intelligentsia gradually became aware of its leadership potentialities and responsibilities. Toward the late twenties, the most conscious elements of the educated Vietnamese began to realize that the new "scholars" must be, as in ancient Vietnam, the patient and devoted guides of the people. Only then could the masses be awakened and the moral and spiritual unity of the nation be reconstituted. In order to do so, the intellectual elite had to have a free hand in setting up educational institutions and in using various means of thought communication. As discussed in previous chapters, the French policy in Vietnam was characterized by an overprudent paternalism, which put strong barriers to any Vietnamese endeavor aimed at self-government. The result was that Vietnam remained "in a state of tutelage not consistent with the aspirations of its people."¹⁰⁹

Furthermore, the educated Vietnamese found themselves barred from responsible positions in the administration of their own country. Instead, they were offered subordinate posts and treated as inferiors by their French colleagues. Denied the use and benefit of their knowledge, many young intellectuals could only be inflamed and led to revolt. It was from France herself that these Vietnamese received a stimulus to revolutionary nationalism, since they had the opportunity to study the French Revolution as well as the ideas of Rousseau, Montesquieu, and the like. Here, it should be noted that the Vietnamese also learned of reform and then of revolution from China and Japan, which emerged as two modern powers in Asia.

As indicated in Chapter VIII, the various nationalist organizations in Vietnam were easily quelled by the French police because they were ill-organized and uncoordinated. The left-wing elements, however, were more successful under the able leadership of Ho Chi Minh, who set up the Indochinese Communist Party along the Soviet line. This organization had committees and subcommittees throughout the country for the purpose of training the masses of peasants and workers in the communist principles and tactics. A study made by W. MacMahon Ball for the Institute of Pacific Relations explains the communist success in East Asia as follows:

The Communist emphasis on economic security and justice has a quick and strong appeal to people whose lives are a long hard

¹⁰⁹ Dorsenne, op. cit., p. 36, Free Translation by the Writer of this Thesis.
The closer people live to the bread line—or the rice line—the more intense their preoccupation with material issues, the less their concern with the political and spiritual values so valued by those who have economic security. All over East Asia poverty and inequality has aroused resentment and hostility against the established order. Any political creed which fosters and rationalises this resentment, which points a clear road to economic security and justice, will win a deep and wide-spread response. No other political creed can successfully compete with Communism in East Asia unless it, like Communism, gives first place to the urgent economic needs of ordinary people.\(^\text{110}\)

This was true in Vietnam, where the majority of the communist converts came from among the poverty-stricken peasants and workers. Needless to say, a number of French-educated youths also joined the Indochinese Communist Party, but they did so mainly because of their belief in the Marxist doctrine. In brief, the failure of the French to provide economic security and adequate political education for the Vietnamese people was one important factor contributing to the development of revolutionary organizations in the country. Among these organizations, the Indochinese Communist Party was the best organized and, consequently, could recruit quite a number of followers and sympathizers. Early in the thirties, Jean Dorsenne already foresaw the communist threat to the French regime in Vietnam, when he made a documentary investigation of the socio-political conditions in the French possession. He concluded his study as follows:

Up to the present time, there has been no danger in the purely native seditions. But alas! the Soviets have given our proteges a taste of revolution; they have organized them along military lines and trained them in the principles of tactics and strategy.

It must be remembered that we hold Indochina with trivial military forces. We have been able to weather the troubles and riots because they have been caused by isolated bands lacking cohesion and leadership. The communists have disciplined them, and now we must reckon with them. Thus, communism may be no danger in itself, but it certainly exercises an evil influence. . . .

It is time that France understands that the land of our most beautiful colony is being undermined. Nationalism, whose incoherent manifestations have always been easily repressed, is being organized

and armed by communism. The undeniable danger that we face is the more serious because it is aimed not particularly at our Far-Eastern possession, but at every country having colonies in the Pacific. As a former governor-general of Indochina has said, Soviet Russia has turned to Asia where she has launched a big offensive against Europe—that of the entire Asian world. The time has come to resist it or to disappear.111

Beside those revolutionary movements and organizations, there were a few scattered attempts to educate the people in modern and Western ways. Mention is to be made of the Society for the Diffusion of Quoc Ngú, which was established in 1938 in North Vietnam by a small group of civic-minded teachers and scholars. It was a non-profit organization devoted to fighting against illiteracy. Although its influences were not widespread for lack of governmental aid, it had the merit of starting a mass-education movement that was to be adopted by the various post-war governments of Vietnam. A few Vietnamese newspapers and magazines were also engaged in ridiculing superstitious practices and in presenting Western ideas and usages to the population. Most of them abstained from dealing with political problems and issues, which enabled them to stay alive despite a rigorous censorship. It would be difficult to measure the educational value of these publications, but they did exercise a subtle influence upon many a literate Vietnamese.

So far as the educational system itself was concerned, many criticisms were raised against it by both the French and the Vietnamese. On one hand, there were Frenchmen who regarded the instruction given in French-Vietnamese schools as the main cause of the unrest in Vietnam. According to these people, the ideals of “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity” were imparted to the Vietnamese too prematurely. The result was that the youths attending French-Vietnamese schools were transformed “either into unbalanced individuals ready to fall into the arms of any political party which would offer them a moral pasture, or into exacerbated nationalists.”112 It is true that teachers and students led or joined many anti-colonialist demonstrations and school strikes. The various uprisings, however, were carried out mostly by the illiterate masses, which indicated that the causes of the unrest in Vietnam were

112 Ibid., p. 157, Free Translation by the Writer of this Thesis.
more complex than just the hasty absorption of Western ideas by the Vietnamese intellectuals.

On the other hand, many educated Vietnamese complained that the French administration deliberately held their countrymen in a state of ignorance, because only a very small portion of the population was literate. Their complaints were based on the fact that school facilities in Vietnam were inadequate to meet the educational needs of the people. As indicated in Chapter VII, only more than 55,000 children were enrolled in the primary classes throughout French Indochina in 1937. In the same year, about 2,660 youths completed the four years of higher-primary studies, while 365 students received secondary training in the lycées. Furthermore, there was only a small university with an average annual enrollment of six hundred students.
Not only was formal education highly selective, but the school system itself had its shortcomings. Like its French counterpart, it was overintellectualized and overcentralized. French-Vietnamese schools were institutions where bookish training prevailed to the detriment of worthwhile social and cultural activities. It is true that those students who successfully passed the rigorous examinations achieved a relatively high academic standard, but it is questionable whether they had sufficient opportunity in school to develop their social behavior as well as to explore their leadership qualities. Furthermore, the emphasis put on classical subjects tended to create an educational elite with a literary bias, which regarded itself as the cream of the Vietnamese society. As a result, technical and vocational education was neglected, whereas the study of law and humanities was favored in a nation which needed a great deal of engineers and technicians to keep up with the modern world.

Just as the French administration in Vietnam was highly centralized, each and every aspect of school business was strictly controlled and directed by the government—methods of teaching, curriculums, examinations, teacher training, school administration, and the like. This occurred on all levels of education and included both public and private schools. The result was that the school system did not have enough flexibility to meet the needs of individual students and the local interests of villages and urban centers. The ready-made programs of study did not take into account the lack of technical training in the country, nor did they attempt to improve the farming methods of a mainly rural population.

So far as class procedure was concerned, teacher-controlled discipline tended to discourage initiative and individual responsibility for one's success. Preconceived learning activities did not offer much challenge to the creative power and native energy of the student, who did his studies in a rather routine way. Despite the overintellectualized spirit of French-Vietnamese schools, there were no adequate library facilities in the lycées, much less in the primary and elementary schools. This deficiency tended to make the Vietnamese student depend much on his notes and handbooks,

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and left him unprepared to use original documents and source materials. With the exception of maps and globes, audio-visual aids were practically non-existent in the classroom.

In addition, teaching methods were pedantic and verbal, based as they were mainly on lectures and recitations. Generally speaking, the teacher did not encourage original thinking on the part of his students, who were thus inclined to memorize and repeat what was taught. Little initiative or imagination was needed by the teacher in the way of constructing curriculums, syllabuses, and daily class activities, since the Direction de l'Instruction Publique prescribed the amount and kind of subject-matter content to be offered. It is true that such uniformity tended to keep teaching standards and educational achievements up to a relatively high level, and to facilitate the transfer of students from one school to another; it might, however, hamper the teacher's creative power and discourage his desire for self-amelioration. The fact that there was no exchange program for teachers between Vietnam and other countries also contributed to the creation of a conservative group of pedagogues evolving around age-old curriculums and using antiquated research methods. Finally, there were no parent-teacher associations worthy of the name, which resulted in an utter lack of cooperation between the school and the home for the guidance of the individual student. This deficiency did not promote active participation of parents in school activities, nor did it enhance or harmonize learning.

In summary, the above discussion shows that the French succeeded in eliminating the traditional education in Vietnam, and in implanting their civilization among a small elite. Although French-inspired education did not reach the Vietnamese masses, it resulted in opening new horizons to those who received the new kind of training. It was mainly from France that many ardent opponents of French rule acquired their ideas of freedom and the rights of men. However, the discrepancy between what was taught and the actual situation in the country tended to create discontent and frustration, and led many a Vietnamese intellectual to revolt. Revolutionary propaganda could find receptive ears among the illiterate masses, as the lack of a strong mass education prevented the French from countering the underground indoctrination activities. As for the educational system itself, there were not enough school facilities to meet the needs of an increasing population, nor were there flexible curriculums to serve the individual student or
community. On all levels of education, the schools were centered around the subject-matter, the classrooms dominated by the teachers, and the teaching methods pedantic and verbal. Furthermore, there was an utter penury of library facilities and audio-visual materials. In conclusion, it can be said that in French-controlled Vietnam education suffered growing pains which have yet to be overcome.
POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN VIETNAM DURING AND AFTER WORLD WAR II

Vietnam During World War II

When World War II broke out, the French were deeply involved in moving supplies into South China across North Vietnam. This trade went on in spite of Japan’s protests and threats. It was not until early in 1940 that the Japanese seized the strategic Chinese island of Hainan in the gulf of Tonkin, which enabled them to launch aerial attacks on the Haiphong-Yunnan railroad. Their pressure against Vietnam became irresistible after France was defeated in Europe and cut off from her Southeast-Asian possession.

Unable to defend Vietnam for lack of adequate troops and equipment, the French had to yield to Japan’s increasing demands. Thus, on June 20, 1940, the government-general of French Indochina accepted the Japanese terms, stopping all traffic with China and permitting a Japanese control mission to be sent to strategic points in North Vietnam. Three months later, Japan obtained new concessions from the French, as her troops were allowed to land at the seaport of Haiphong and three air bases were to be established in North Vietnam for her use. In the meantime, her garrisons in South China crossed the border, attacked and seized the cities of Lang-Son and Dong-Dang in the mountain region, while her sailors made surprise landings at a few coastal areas. By the end of September 1940, all French resistance in Vietnam had ended.

The Japanese, however, retained the French administration and troops in Vietnam. French sovereignty was confirmed in many an agreement, while more and more concessions were made to Japan. By the end of July 1941, the whole of Vietnam was occupied by Japanese troops, which were thus free to fight the Allies from Vietnamese soil. Japan was also allowed to take Vietnam’s surplus in rice, rubber, and minerals in exchange for manufactured and industrial products. In 1943, American and British planes began to bomb Japanese shipping and attacked Japanese installations in Vietnam. In the process, many Vietnamese industrial and commercial centers were destroyed, and the railway system and coastwise shipping heavily damaged. The resulting shortage of supplies
brought about a sharp increase in prices throughout the country. Famine broke out in North Vietnam and the northern part of Central Vietnam late in 1944, since rice from South Vietnam could not be transported to these areas.

Not only was the economy of Vietnam affected by the Japanese occupation, but its cultural and political activities were also conditioned and reoriented. In their attempt to win the Vietnamese people over to their sides, the Japanese played up their military victories and propagated the idea of a "Greater East Asia" by using every available medium of thought communication—motion-pictures, booklets, exhibitions, posters, loudspeakers, and the like. They sponsored Vietnamese-language newspapers and magazines to serve as vehicles for their propaganda, which was planned and supervised by the "Information Bureau," a branch of the Japanese diplomatic mission in Vietnam. And, in spite of French protests, a number of Japanese-Vietnamese schools were opened in the large cities, where Japanese influences prevailed.

The Japanese were also engaged in helping various political groups in Vietnam. Their agents operated throughout the country, organizing pro-Japanese parties and giving protection to the revolutionaries and nationalist agitators who were pursued by the French police. Many a Vietnamese public figure was contacted—such as, Tran Trong Kim, an ex-teacher, and Ngo Dinh Diem, a Catholic leader, who were to play important political roles in later days. All seemed to indicate that the Japanese were "in search of a competent and truly influential Vietnamese elite, which was able, when necessary, to assume the responsibilities in the country."114

To counter the Japanese politico-cultural efforts, the French opened new French-Vietnamese schools, and admitted increasing numbers of Vietnamese students to French lycées. According to Philippe Devillers, the number of school children increased from 450,000 in 1939 to more than 700,000 in 1944, and 4,800 communal schools were set up during these years.115 The Vietnamese language regained its importance in primary education, and the struggle against illiteracy was given much encouragement. The French also began to orient their teaching toward technical and vocational training.

114 Devillers, op. cit., p. 93.
115 Ibid., p. 85.
For the first time in the history of French-controlled Vietnam, youth movements for sports and physical education were organized and partly subsidized by the French authorities. Paramilitary training was also offered to the Vietnamese youth, whose national spirit became so intensified as to lead them toward challenging the Japanese occupation and the French domination as well. Commenting on the youth organizations in Vietnam, Ellen J. Hammer says:

Over a million strong, the movement was revolutionary even under French control. In a country where age had always been venerated, large numbers of young people proved to themselves and to others that youth too could make a positive contribution to society. They learned to think of national service and of the national interest. The youth organizations became hotbeds of nationalism.116

In an effort to ease the tension created by the militant nationalism of the Vietnamese youth as well as to curb the discontent of the Vietnamese intelligentsia, the French opened to the people of Vietnam more and higher posts in the administration of the country. In principle, a unique salary schedule applied to both European and non-European functionaries. The number of Vietnamese occupying intermediate or higher administrative posts doubled from 1940 to 1944.117

The French also put forward the concept of an Indochinese Federation with a view to countering the Japanese appeal of a "Greater East Asia." This was an attempt to unite the different peoples of French Indochina—Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians—in a mutually beneficial bloc to be supervised by France. National traditions were to be respected and autonomous activities to be encouraged.

All those endeavors were, however, marred by the intransigent attitude of the French authorities toward the various political elements in Vietnam. A severe military and police repression of both nationalists and communists was carried on. In November 1940, all electoral bodies were dissolved and replaced by advisory councils, whose members were appointed by the Governor-General of Indochina and selected from among the conservative and traditionalist elements in the country—the so-called "elite" composed of notables, businessmen, and the like.

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116 Hammer, op. cit., p. 32.
117 Data taken from Devillers, op. cit., p. 85.
In regard to the Japanese occupation, the French policy appeared to be cautious and indecisive. Protests were made against the Japanese abuses of power or political activities, while slowdown tactics were used by the provincial and local administration in the areas where it was difficult for the Japanese to exercise control. But, as a whole, the French attitude seemed to be that of waiting for Japan's collapse. In this connection, Charles A. Micaud says:

... It is difficult to appraise the behavior of the French colonialists during the four years of Japanese occupation. The prevailing attitude seems to have been *attentiste*—wait-and-see. Frequent tours of inspection kept the illusion of continued French rule, while Radio-Saigon played up the theme of Petain-Confucius, the wise man who kept Indochina "neutral" in a world conflict. While real collaborators with fascist sympathies were a minority, the fear of native nationalism hindered the growth of an organized underground resistance, especially any based on co-operation with the Vietnamese.118

Resistance was largely in the hands of the French military group which kept in touch with the Allied forces in China. Their preparations for launching a surprise attack on the Japanese leaked out. On March 9, 1945, an ultimatum demanding the immediate placing of all French troops under the Japanese supreme command was refused by Admiral Decoux, the then governor-general of Indochina. During the night, the Japanese forces struck swiftly and effectively, eliminating most of the French garrisons in less than twenty-four hours. The next day, radio broadcasts and posters announced the end of the French domination in Vietnam.

Under the Japanese pressure, the emperor of Vietnam, Bao Dai, agreed to collaborate with Japan for the establishment of a "Greater East Asia." On March 11, 1945, he issued a declaration of independence soon followed by the resignation of his French-sponsored ministers. It was not until the following month, however, that a new cabinet was formed under the leadership of an old scholar, Tran Trong Kim. This cabinet was made up mainly of well-to-do lawyers and physicians who had little experience in political affairs. Nevertheless, sincere efforts were made to consolidate the newly-acquired independence and to achieve national unity. A constitution was planned and a fiscal reform promulgated. A general amnesty was granted to political prisoners, while political organizations were officially authorized.

To rally the young people to the national cause, youth movements were given a strong impetus throughout the country, especially in South Vietnam where organizations of “Vanguard Youth” were formed. An educational reform was carried out, substituting French with the Vietnamese language in the schools and emphasizing science and mathematics. It is to be noted, however, that no revolutionary change was made in the educational field, since the school system and the programs of studies were still basically patterned after the French ones.\textsuperscript{119}

Despite the efforts of the Vietnamese government to strengthen its position and reconstruct the country, the socio-political situation in Vietnam was still precarious. Famine continued to ravage the north, where a bad harvest and a disastrous flood made the shortage of rice desperate. The idea of independence itself was somewhat disruptive, since “no one seemed to know precisely what inde-

\textsuperscript{119} For details concerning educational reforms made under the Tran Trong Kim government, see Hoang-Xuan-Han, Chuong-Trinh Trung-Hoc [Secondary Education Program], Ministry of National Education of Vietnam, Hanoi, 1945.
pendence was or how it should, or could, be implemented." To the masses of peasants, it meant an end to all taxes and forced labor; to many an intellectual, an opportunity to assume national leadership and a Vietnamese cultural renaissance as well. Public services continued to function regularly, but frequent meetings and parades tended to absorb the government employees as much as they did the workers and students. It was in the middle of this misery and disorder that rioting and lawlessness broke out and weakened the infant government of Vietnam.

In the meantime, the Vietnamese communists continued their activities throughout the country. The League for the Independence of Vietnam, which was to be internationally known as the Viet Minh, was organized in 1941 by Moscow-trained Ho Chi Minh. It included both communists and nationalists, whose aim was to destroy colonialism and fascist imperialism. Its guerrillas succeeded in liberating several provinces in the mountain region from the Japanese troops. When Japan surrendered in August 1945, the Viet Minh partisans were ready to seize the power in Vietnam. The week of the Japanese surrender, a Viet Minh congress was held near the Chinese border for the purpose of forming a provisional government, while huge demonstrations took place in Hanoi and other large cities. The new government, known as the Vietnamese People's Liberation Committee, established itself in Hanoi on August 20, 1945. Other People's Committees took over the administration of all urban and rural centers. Order was maintained and most public services continued to function. On August 22, the Tran Trong Kim government resigned in favor of the new regime. Three days later, the emperor Bao Dai abdicated and became Citizen Vinh Thuy. A solemn proclamation of independence took place in Hanoi at the beginning of September and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam came into existence.

Vietnam From the Winter of 1945 to the 1954 Geneva Conference

Although independence seemed to have been achieved, the situation in the country was far from being settled. At the Potsdam Conference, the Allies decided that French Indochina—that is, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia—was to be divided into two zones

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120 Hammer, op. cit., p. 50.
with the sixteenth parallel as the line of demarcation. The task of disarming the Japanese occupation forces was shared by British and Chinese troops. In the sector south of the sixteenth parallel, the British commander, General Douglas D. Gracey, found the administration entirely in the hands of the Vietnamese, but he refused to deal with them. Instead, he helped the French expeditionary corps to seize power in Saigon on September 23, 1945. Two days later, clashes between the French and the Vietnamese broke out in the city. With reinforcements coming from France, the Franco-British forces took over strategic and urban areas, while the Vietnamese, unable to fight them in open battle, occupied the greater part of the countryside and resorted to guerrilla warfare and sabotage. When the British troops withdrew from Vietnam early in 1946, the French were left in complete charge of administrative and military operations.

Above the sixteenth parallel, the Chinese left the Vietnamese in control of the administration, while refusing permission to French troops to enter the sector. Hanoi had become the capital of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The Vietnamese government acquired wide and genuine popular support under the presidency of Ho Chi Minh, whose prestige as a symbol of the resistance to foreign rule was unrivaled and made for national unity. The thirst for independence was so great that the majority of the people rallied around the communist-controlled Viet-Minh, whose policy line was anti-colonialist and nationalistic rather than communistic.

Under the Viet Minh regime, the socio-political structure of Vietnam underwent many drastic changes. The mandarinate and councils of notables were abolished and replaced by the People's Committees, which were set up at all levels—the village, the huyen, the phu, the town, the city, and so on. Speaking of the People's Committees, Ellen J. Hammer says:

Given powers unknown in the old Vietnamese villages but not unknown in Communist countries which were based on “soviets,” they were expected to function politically, culturally, and socially—to rally support to the Ho Chi Minh government, to fight illiteracy, to wipe out what were regarded as bad habits: smoking, drinking, and gambling. Three or four villages were sometimes combined into one, further demolishing the old administration and neutralizing opposition elements. The traditional social and self-help organizations of the villages went the way of the Councils of Notables; in their stead the Viet Minh sponsored and controlled mass “national salva-
tion" organizations of peasants, workers, youth, and women which functioned throughout the country.  

A nationwide campaign was conducted against both famine and illiteracy. New crops were planted to supplement rice, and, in the beginning of 1946, starvation was practically eradicated. In the meantime, compulsory instruction in Vietnamese was proclaimed by the government, which set up an intensive program for the training of teachers of Vietnamese. A vast network of popular education committees and subcommittees were also organized to supervise the drive against illiteracy. To this end, they issued all sorts of penalties to compel people to learn written Vietnamese. In many areas, no one was allowed to enter a marketplace or cross a bridge without proof that he could read and write. Illiterate persons were usually ordered to go home and learn the first five or ten letters of the alphabet. 

In January 1946, the first general elections in the history of Vietnam was held throughout the country. Enthusiasm was so great that more than ninety per cent of the population voted. This figure might not be highly accurate, but the sentiment of the people could not be questioned. Indeed, for the great majority of the Vietnamese, Ho Chi Minh was their leader. A constitution and a modern bill of rights were adopted. Universal suffrage of all men and women over eighteen was decreed. The new political system included a unicameral legislature, a president elected by the legislature, and a cabinet.  

The presence of Chinese troops in the northern sector created many economic and political problems. Besides some well-trained units equipped with American weapons, the Chinese soldiers were "often ragged, accoutred in curious uniforms and funny puttees, and accompanied by a horde of porters, women, and children." They stationed in cities and towns, occupied the most comfortable buildings and houses, and imposed their laws upon the population. Blackmarketeering and looting swelled with their arrival, as the  

121 Hammer, op. cit., pp. 141-142.
123 Devillers, op. cit., p. 191.
Chinese residents in Vietnam were feverishly engaged in more or less illegal activities under the protection of the occupation forces. In the wake of the Chinese troops, there came the various Vietnamese revolutionary groups which had taken refuge in China. Among them were the two nationalist parties—the Dong Minh Hoi and the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang—whose members took power in a few towns in the mountain region and coastal areas. As Ho Chi Minh was reluctant to let the nationalists participate in the government, a violent campaign against the Viet Minh was started by the above groups through loudspeakers and newspapers. A series of clashes broke out between communist and nationalist elements. Supported by the Chinese, the nationalists finally obtained a few concessions from Ho Chi Minh. A coalition government was formed that included members of all major political parties. Seventy out of three hundred fifty seats in the National Assembly were reserved to non-Viet Minh candidates.

In the meantime, the French were actively engaged in negotiating with the Chinese with a view to re-establishing her sovereignty over the northern sector of Vietnam. On February 28, 1946, an agreement was reached between France and China, by which the Chinese obtained a special status in Vietnam as well as many concessions on the Yunnan railway. France was allowed to replace the Chinese troops, which were to withdraw from the northern sector before or on March 31.

While French battleships were approaching the coast of Vietnam, negotiations between France and Vietnam led to the signing of the preliminary accord of March 6, 1946. The Vietnamese government accepted to let 15,000 French troops station in North Vietnam, whereas the French government agreed to “recognize the Republic of Vietnam as a free State having its own government, parliament, army and finances, forming part of the Indochinese Federation and the French Union.”¹²⁴ So far as the reunification of Vietnam was concerned, France consented to abide by the decisions of the Vietnamese people to be taken in a referendum. The accord also stated that immediate negotiations would be undertaken concerning the diplomatic relations of Vietnam, the future status of Indochina, and French cultural and economic interests in Vietnam.

In April 1946, a preliminary French-Vietnamese conference was

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 225.
held in the summer resort city of Dalat in South Vietnam. Discussions were conducted, but no headway was made. Two months later, the French set up a provisional government for South Vietnam, thus creating a very unfavorable atmosphere for the negotiations between France and Vietnam. In July, the Fontainbleau Conference was opened in the midst of intense suspicions on the part of both sides. Again no headway was made, and the conference was suspended early in August. The only concrete achievement was the signing, on September 14, of a modus vivendi offering temporary solutions to some economic and cultural problems as well as providing for the cessation of hostilities. It was also agreed that further negotiations should be undertaken before or in January 1947.125

The September agreement aroused discontent among the nationalists, many of whom believed that the Viet Minh had compromised too far with the French. A few clashes broke out between the Viet Minh troops and the opposition groups. Many nationalist leaders were arrested or assassinated. On November 3, 1946, a new government was formed, with Ho Chi Minh as President and Foreign Minister. No opposition party was represented in it, which was completely dominated by the Viet Minh.

The situation, however, rapidly deteriorated, as a series of clashes broke out between the French and the Vietnamese. On November 23, 1946, Haiphong was bombed by the French and thousands of civilians were killed or wounded. By December, people began to evacuate Hanoi, and barricades were put up in the streets. On December 19, the Vietnamese attacked the French garrisons in the city, and fighting spread to other places on the following day. The French gradually succeeded in occupying the main cities, but most of the hinterland was under the Vietnamese control. The Viet Minh scorched-earth policy and the French bombings of villages dislocated the socio-economic life of the country and widened the gap between France and Vietnam.126

In the meantime, the ex-emperor Bao Dai, who had taken refuge in Hongkong, was contacted by French emissaries in the hope that he could return to Vietnam and counter the Viet Minh influence.

125 Details concerning the Fontainbleau Conference and the modus vivendi of September 14, 1946, can be obtained from Hammer, op. cit., pp. 170-174.

126 For details concerning the outbreak of the war in Vietnam, see Devillers, op. cit., pp. 331-357.
In June 1948, a puppet government for Vietnam was set up by the French, who gave Bao Dai the title of Chief of State of Vietnam and appointed general Nguyen van Xuan as head of the new Vietnamese cabinet. In March 1949, a French-Vietnamese agreement was signed in Paris, providing for the eventual independence of Vietnam within the French Union.

The success of the Chinese communists in 1949 strengthened the left wing of the Viet Minh. Communist China was the first country to give official recognition to the Viet Minh regime. On January 30, 1950, the Soviet Union also recognized the Ho Chi Minh government on the ground that it represented the great majority of the Vietnamese population. After the outbreak of the Korean war, Chinese military aid to the Viet Minh began in the form of weapons and training camps. The result was that, in the autumn of 1950, the Viet Minh forces succeeded in capturing most of the French-held posts on the Chinese border.

By this time, the Western powers were much concerned by the military and political developments in Vietnam, since the communist threat to the balance of power in Southeast Asia became a reality. On February 7, 1950, both the United States and Great Britain recognized the Bao Dai regime. Within the same month, the French authorities made a formal request to the American government for military and economic aid to Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Much as the French needed this aid, they were very cautious in their dealings with the United States. In the words of Ellen J. Hammer, the French officials "feared what they regarded as traditional American anti-colonialism, and it was this fear that was uppermost in regard to Indochina." As a result, they insisted that American military aid should only go to the French expeditionary corps on the ground that it was indispensable in fighting against the Viet Minh forces.

Laboring under the political incubus of continuing French control over the areas it was supposed to administer, the Bao Dai government found it difficult to rally nationalist leaders as well as to gain popular support. It also suffered from the fact that it was not created on the basis of general public choice but by the French working in collaboration with a small group of Vietnamese officials. Neither its own position nor the agreements it signed with France

127 Hammer, op. cit., p. 271.
and other nations were ratified by any sort of national assembly.

Another weak factor in the Bao Dai government was widespread corruption at both high and low levels due to the "lack of public morality on the part of a number of Frenchmen and Vietnamese."\textsuperscript{128} In spite of its shortcomings, the Bao Dai government kept on trying to rally the people against the Viet Minh. To this end, it undertook to build up a national army as well as to hold national elections. Officers' training schools were established with the help of the French. Vietnamese troops enlisted in the French expeditionary corps were transferred to the Vietnamese army which numbered some 200,000 men in the spring of 1954. The national elections were held on January 25, 1953, for the purpose of choosing members of municipal and communal councils in the French-controlled areas. Political groups emerged, advocating negotiations with the Viet Minh for a truce, a genuine unification of the country, and free national elections. There was evidence that the Vietnamese people longed for peace, unity, and independence. It was up to the leaders of Vietnam to help transform the popular aspirations into political reality.

As time went on, the areas controlled by the French Union forces began to dwindle. After a successful offensive in the fall of 1952, the Viet Minh assumed control of the northernmost part of North Vietnam and, early in the following year, advanced in force on Laos. Then, suddenly, they retreated back to Vietnam, leaving a few troops behind to support a Laotian revolutionary government. The war continued on various fronts in the winter of 1953-1954. By that time, the world became quite aware of and concerned about the grave deterioration of the French military position in North Vietnam. In February 1954, the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France reached an agreement at a Berlin conference to hold another conference in Geneva with a view to discussing Korean problems as well as to trying to settle the war in Vietnam. The announcement of the four-power agreement brought about an all-out offensive launched by the Viet Minh in North Vietnam. In March 1954, the French fortress of Dien Bien Phu, located on the Laotian frontier, was attacked and besieged, just as the Geneva conference was to meet. Commenting on the battle of Dien Bien Phu, Ellen J. Hammer says:

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., p. 273.
For the Viet Minh, Dien Bien Phu had a crucial significance. This was the last opportunity before the Geneva Conference for the Viet Minh to show its military strength, its determination to fight until victory. And there were those who thought that General Giap [commander-in-chief of the Viet Minh forces] was resolved on victory, no matter the cost, not only to impress the enemy but also to convince his Communist allies that the Viet Minh by its own efforts had earned a seat at the conference table and the right to a voice in its own future.

For the French people, who watched the siege of Dien Bien Phu with a strained attention they had not shown any previous event of the war, it became a symbol of their will to fight. Upon the outcome of the battle depended much of the spirit in which they would send their representatives to Geneva.129

With strong Chinese support, the Viet Minh succeeded in capturing the fortress of Dien Bien Phu on May 8, 1954. The Geneva conference, opened on April 26, dealt mainly with the Indochinese situation, as its discussions on Korea failed to bring about any concrete results. Present at the conference were delegations from the United States, the Soviet Union, Communist China, Great Britain, France, the Viet-Minh-controlled Democratic Republic of Vietnam, as well as from the Associated States of Indochina—Laos, Cambodia, and the French-controlled State of Vietnam. In addition, there was Nehru's personal representative, Krishna Menon, who played an unofficial but important role in Geneva because of the influence which India as a key member of the British Commonwealth exerted on Great Britain. The chances of success of the Viet Minh at the conference were enhanced by the withdrawal of French Union forces from the southern part of the Red River delta in North Vietnam. In June 1954, the French were in control of only a small area around Hanoi, whereas the Viet Minh seized important non-communist areas, including the Catholic bishoprics Phat Diem and Bui Chu.

After almost three months of proposals and counter-proposals, an agreement was reached at the Geneva conference.130 In spite of strong protests on the part of representatives of the State of Vietnam, Vietnam was to be partitioned at the seventeenth parallel. All of North Vietnam and part of Central Vietnam were recognized as

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under the control of the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The area below the seventeenth parallel was considered as the State of Vietnam. Other provisions of the Geneva agreement called for (1) a broad political amnesty throughout Vietnam and a ban on reprisals against citizens for their wartime activities, (2) the safeguarding of democratic liberties, (3) a free option for all Vietnamese to choose their place of residence in either zone until May 19, 1954, and (4) the concentrating and evacuating of the troops of one side which stationed in the territory of the other. The independence of Vietnam and the principle of Vietnamese unity were formally recognized by the signatories of the above agreement. Free general elections by secret ballot were to be held in July 1956, with a view to deciding the future of the country. An international commission, composed of Canadian, Indian, and Polish representatives, was set up to supervise the execution of those provisions.

On July 21, 1954, the Geneva agreement was signed, which ended the war in Vietnam. Neither the United States nor the State of Vietnam participated in the signing of the final documents. In a separate declaration, however, the United States stated that it would refrain from any threat to modify the agreement, and that it "would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security."131 Commenting on the outcomes of the Geneva conference, Ellen J. Hammer says:

The Viet Minh may not have won all that it wanted at Geneva but it had every reason to be pleased. Its Communist dictatorship was reinforced by international recognition. And not only was its control recognized over the larger and more populous half of Vietnam, but excellent opportunities were opened to the Viet Minh to take over the south as well, by infiltration. In large part at least, this was the inevitable result of the disastrous political and military policy pursued over the years by the French Government in Indochina, supported by the United States.132

Indeed, the communists scored an important victory in their struggle for world domination with the partition of Vietnam. The Geneva agreement enabled the communist-led Viet Minh to control about 12,000,000 persons and 60,000 square miles. In any case, the

shooting war was ended in Vietnam. On August 11, 1954, after more than seven and a half years, the cease-fire was operating throughout the country.

The Republic of Vietnam

In the immediate post-Geneva period, the State of Vietnam in the south was plagued with war-weariness, desolation, and disorder. In this respect, William Henderson makes the following remarks:

... The authority of the local government hardly extended beyond the environs of its capital. Its leadership appeared incapable of constructive action, incapacitated as much by inexperience as by the incubus of the continued presence of the French. Everywhere the population was sullen and resentful, bitterly disillusioned by military defeat after a long, costly and unpopular war. The army could not be counted on. The police were controlled by an organized band of gangsters known as the Binh Xuyen, which ruled Saigon and ran its lucrative vice rackets. Great stretches of the countryside were in the hands of two politico-religious sects, the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao, which disposed of formidable armed strength and governed their territories as autonomous states within the state.¹³³

In addition, the economy was disrupted by long years of warfare. The situation became worse with the influx of thousands of refugees from the north, who had to be resettled as well as integrated into the southern population. Meanwhile, the Viet Minh political and military cadres continued to dominate many villages as well as to spread their influence all over the south by infiltration.

Those were the major problems confronting the government of Ngo Dinh Diem, which had to rally the people and to build up the apparatus of an independent state. Appointed by Chief of State Bao Dai on June 16, 1954, prime minister Ngo Dinh Diem proceeded without much delay to form an all-nationalist cabinet, consolidate his position, and establish his control over practically all of the State of Vietnam. Known to be anti-French and anti-communist, he was regarded as a symbol of nationalist intransigence, and, as such, was held in high esteem by the opponents of communism and colonialism within Vietnam as well as abroad. His Roman Catholic faith has been instrumental in helping him secure loyal supporters from among his co-religionists. And, above all, the United States government has unflinchingly backed him in his struggle for survival and in his task of rehabilitating the southern zone of Vietnam.

The urgent problem was to take care of more than 850,000 Northern Vietnamese, who were evacuated to the south by the United States Navy, the French Navy and the French Air Force. Reception centers were quickly organized, in which the refugees were lodged, fed, and clothed. In the meantime, resettlement villages were constructed and thousands of acres of undeveloped land distributed to the refugee farmers. Provision was made to re-employ government workers evacuated from the north, while skilled artisans were helped to continue their old occupations. Spontaneous assistance came from many governments and private organizations. In addition to the generous relief efforts of the United States, the Netherlands offered money, Cambodia sent rice, and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund provided milk for thousands of children and mothers. Religious and civic organizations from all parts of the non-communist world voluntarily joined the Vietnamese government in its endeavor to provide for the welfare of the refugees. As the result, the refugee problem has been largely solved.  

In the fall of 1954, a political crisis broke out, as the Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese Army, General Nguyen van Hinh, was withdrawn from active service and ordered to leave for France. This governmental action was the climax of the growing clash between military and civilian authorities in the State of Vietnam. Supported by most of his army unit commanders, General Nguyen van Hinh rejected several orders from Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem, who wanted the Chief of Staff to leave on a military mission in France. In the meantime, discontented leaders of the politico-religious sects demanded the resignation of the Prime Minister, and some cabinet members threatened to resign unless a settlement were speedily reached. The United States government, however, gave Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem decisive support, as it announced that American military aid would be granted to Vietnam only on the condition that the Vietnamese troops give complete and implicit obedience to the Prime Minister. The crisis ended in November 1954, when Chief of State Bao Dai summoned General Nguyen van Hinh to France and, later, removed him from his post as Chief of

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