

# Vietnam War

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## Background to Betrayal

From Hilaire du Berrier's Important Book (1965)

According to Mr. Charles Bohlen's minutes of the Cairo-Teheran papers, it was by a secret agreement between President Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin on December 1, 1943, that France's premature elimination from Southeast Asia and the sowing of wars to come were effected. Franklin D. Roosevelt, we are told by Mr. Bohlen, "was 100% in agreement [at Teheran] with Marshal Stalin that France should not get back Indochina."

The war that France fought to retain Indochina within the French Community and free from Communism terminated on May 7, 1954, with the fall of the fortified position of Dien Bien Phu, after five months of heroic resistance.

Communist members of the French National Assembly rose to their feet and applauded when the assembly was informed that Dien Bien Phu had fallen.

It was established that a one-hour strike by American planes could have saved the beleaguered garrison and changed the course of history. On five separate occasions such a strike was discussed, but each time reasons were found to rule out American rescue from the air....

Much drivel has been written about the Communist victory at Dien Bien Phu. For eight years Americans interested in foisting Ngo dinh Diem on his countrymen and the American public, for reasons known only to themselves, held up the Washington-imposed puppet as a miracle worker. "None of the experts gave him a chance against the army that had defeated the French," was the line parroted by Angier Biddle Duke, who headed American Friends of Vietnam, the propaganda front set up to circumvent the Foreign Agents Registration Law. What experts? Angier Biddle Duke? Public relations huckster Harold Oram? Joseph Buttinger, the Austrian socialist? Lieutenant General "Iron Mike" O'Daniel, who left the U.S. army to help sell Diem in America? Wesley Fishel, who indoctrinated the students of Michigan State University with the Diem hoax and called it education?

The real experts knew that the French debacle in Indochina was no proof of Communist Vietminh invincibility. American labor leaders through their connections with French unions and French socialists knew that socialist leader Pierre Mendès — France's personal representative (who was high commissioner in Indochina by appointment of Premier Laniel) was in contact with the enemy, ironing out their peace terms for a year and a half while the French army was fighting. General Henri Navarre, the French commander, knew that the battle of Dien Bien Phu was lost the day it became known that the Laniel government had agreed to a conference in Geneva. From that moment all the force Ho chi Minh could muster was thrown into a frontal attack on Dien Bien Phu in order to gain a psychological victory to exploit at the conference table.

It was a Pyrrhic victory. Ho had no army with which to occupy Laos, seize Cambodia and threaten South Vietnam when it was over. It would have taken four years to rebuild the army he had lost. But the West was never told this, for the French left wished to justify surrender and the American left wished to portray Diem, the labor party leader's brother, as the miracle man before whom victorious Communism on the march had lost confidence and halted. The French regarded their sacrifices in Indochina as a standard-bearing struggle for Western civilization, as did the Americans in Korea....

*The fourth and final phase of our policy* in what had been known as Indochina was a natural consequence of policies one, two, and three. It can be described as America's experiment with the cult of personality, the picking of a man and the backing of that man against his country rather than that country against Communism. General O'Daniel may be regarded as the principal military exponent of this policy. Numerous senators and State Department officials advanced it on the political level. Since the brother [Ngo dinh Nhu] of the man on whom America's hopes were placed and prestige risked was a labor leader in Saigon. American labor and its allies of the international socialist left reached out to practice diplomacy and a form of international politics of their own.

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Under this fourth period of American policy in South Vietnam, the same solid front of support appeared that had protected Ho chi Minh in 1945 and 1946. A new propaganda front organization, the American Friends of Vietnam, sprang up where the old pro-Ho Vietnam-American Friendship Association had been. A loyal American could no longer write an honest report on anything that our activists in Vietnam were doing without fear of retaliation. Reports unfavorable to the man America was backing were not judged, statement by statement, on a scale of truth or untruth. They were rejected outright and their authors threatened with trumped-up charges and loss of passports for “working against America.” If they were government employees they were transferred. Nowhere else in American society or politics did this organized, high-handed machine of retaliation function so ruthlessly against all criticism. The man it protected was Ngo dinh Diem ....

The best picture to be found of America’s disastrous four-stage tragedy in South Vietnam is provided by spreading four issues of **Harper’s** magazine out on a table: April 1946 was the Ho chi Minh phase, with Harold R. Isaacs singing Ho’s praises as “the George Washington of Southeast Asia” — the man who kept life in his frail body only by his purity of aim(!) and singleness of purpose. Obscenities were heaped on French officers who opposed him.

In January 1956 **Harper’s** accorded Senator Mansfield space for the lauding of Ngo dinh Diem. Times had changed, and the Ho line was out. Then came **Harper’s** of September 1962: It was time to disclaim responsibility for Diem, so Professor Stanley Millet was provided with a press to tell **Harper’s** short-memored readers about “Terror in Vietnam — An American’s Ordeal at the Hands of our Friends.”

In **Harper’s** of December 1964, eighteen years after Harold R. Isaacs’ passionate plea for Ho, **Harper’s** patient editors completed the circle and published a call by Joseph Kraft (ex-propagandist for the Algerian FLN) to get out of Vietnam and let north and south negotiate between themselves. If one reads the signs correctly, and they were many, America’s postwar protégé, Ho chi Minh, was about to win out in the end. There was no resolute, last-hour girding for American victory.

Desperate American “advisors,” watching protected guerrillas and unhindered raiders wipe out experienced officers and young West Pointers with impunity, cried for unity — anything that would provide a semblance of a rallying point. David Schoenbrun, who on September 30, 1956 (in **Collier’s**), trumpeted for Diem to “not only remove Bao Dai, but do it in such a way that he no longer has any usefulness as a symbol of Vietnamese unity,” had by 1964 washed his hands of the whole affair and was busy burrowing elsewhere.

“How did we ever get involved in South Vietnam?” a public capable only of apathy or indignation began to cry. “Was it for this that we were bled white, our gold reserves squandered and our dollar brought to the brink of collapse?” The answer, bluntly is: Yes. A senseless, stupid crusade against colonialism, agreed upon by Roosevelt and Stalin at Teheran, led us up to our waists in the quagmire of Indochina. Determination to replace the allies we were ousting drew us in the rest of the way.

A one-hour, carrier-based airstrike could have destroyed Ho chi Minh’s decimated army in March 1954, saved the beleaguered garrison at Dien Bien Phu and changed the course of history. But there was a virus in the bloodstream of America that desired a Vietminh triumph. The story of Indochina is the story of the decline of the West. Only an informed public, such as America did not have on November 3, 1964, will bring the victory at the polls which alone will eradicate the virus and prevent many more Indochinas to come. All of the force of America’s massed left, from the White House down, was regimented to silence those who would tell America the truth.