

Primary Source:

*Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1945)**



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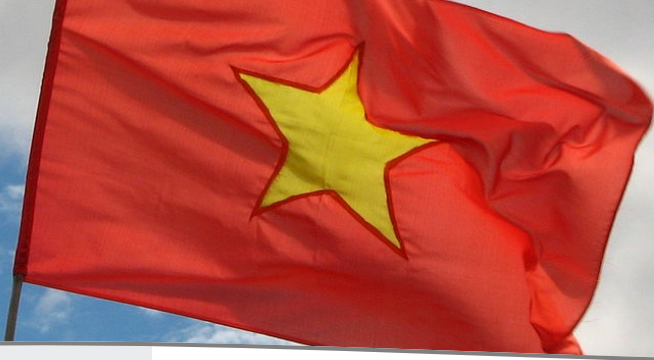
INTRODUCTION

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Introduction

In the early 20th century, Vietnam was part of the French colony of Indochina. A number of anti-colonial movements sprang up in that era, some calling for the restoration of the Vietnamese emperor which ruled until Vietnam was incorporated into the French Empire in 1884, while others supported Western or Communist agendas. During the Second World War, Vietnam was occupied by Japan. The Communist party leader, Ho Chi Minh (whose birth name was Nguyen Sinh Cung) called for a unified front against Japan, and helped to lead a relatively successful effort to oppose Japanese forces in northern Vietnam. At the end of the war, he publicly called for Vietnamese independence, in a speech that explicitly evoked both communist and nationalist themes and major documents of French and US history. A few months later, however, French forces returned and Ho Chi Minh found himself as the leader in a war, which he would win at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, after which the French withdrew forces from Vietnam.

* Ho Chi Minh, Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, September 2, 1945, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5139/>. Edited and annotated by members of the H/21 project.



Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1945)



Ho Chi Minh with a child, c. 1950s

"All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, this means: "All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free."

The Declaration of the French Revolution made in 1791 on the Rights of Man and the Citizen also states: "All men are born free and with equal rights, and must always remain free and have equal rights."

Those are undeniable truths.

Nevertheless, for more than eighty years, the French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, have violated our Fatherland and oppressed our fellow-citizens. They have acted contrary to the ideals of humanity and justice.

In the field of politics, they have deprived our people of every democratic liberty. They have enforced inhuman laws; they have set up three distinct political regimes in the North, the Center and the South of Vietnam in order to wreck our national unity and prevent our people from being united.

They have built more prisons than schools. They have mercilessly slain our patriots; they have drowned our uprisings in rivers of blood.

They have fettered public opinion; they have practiced obscurantism[†] against our people. To weaken our race they have forced us to use opium and alcohol.

[†]The policy of deliberately preventing the spread of pertinent facts about something or allowing the spread of falsehoods.

In the field of economics, they have fleeced us to the backbone, impoverished our people, and devastated our land.

They have robbed us of our rice fields, our mines, our forests, and our raw materials. They have monopolized the issuing of banknotes and the export trade.

They have invented numerous unjustifiable taxes and reduced our people, especially our peasantry, to a state of extreme poverty.

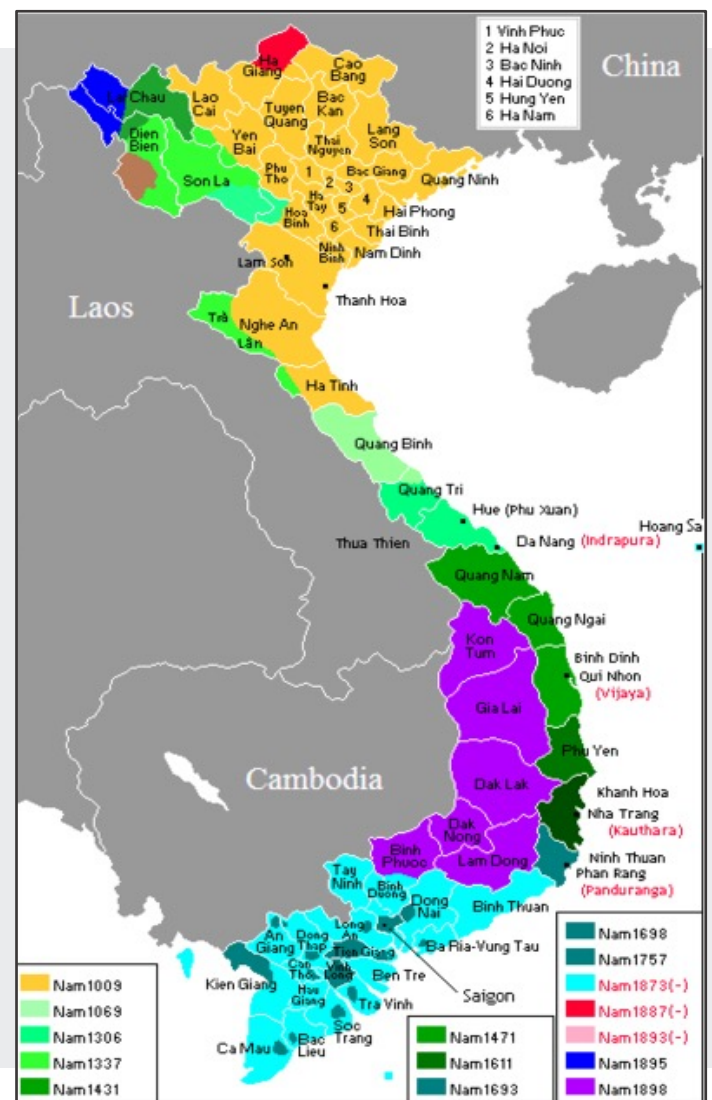
They have hampered the prospering of our national bourgeoisie; they have mercilessly exploited our workers.

In the autumn of 1940, when the Japanese fascists violated Indochina's territory to establish new bases in their fight against the Allies, the French imperialists went down on their bended knees and handed over our country to them.

Thus, from that date, our people were subjected to the double yoke of the French and the Japanese. Their sufferings and miseries increased. The result was that from the end of last year to the beginning of this year, from Quang Tri province[‡] to the North of Vietnam, more than two million of our fellow citizens died from starvation.

On March 9, the French troops were disarmed by the Japanese. The French colonialists either fled or surrendered showing that not only were they incapable of "protecting" us, but that, in the span of five years, they had twice sold our country to the Japanese.

On several occasions before March 9, the Viet Minh League[§] urged the French to ally themselves with it against the Japanese. Instead of agreeing to this proposal, the French colonialists so intensified their terrorist activities against the Vietminh members that before fleeing they massacred a great number of our political prisoners detained at Yen Bai and Caobang.^{||}



Map of Vietnam, 1945

[‡] A province in central Vietnam.

[§] The League for the Independence of Vietnam, or the Viet Minh, was a nationalist anticolonial organization that was created in 1941 by Ho Chi Minh and his Communist allies.

^{||} Provinces in the far north of Vietnam.

Notwithstanding all this, our fellow citizens have always manifested toward the French a tolerant and humane attitude. Even after the Japanese putsch of March 1945, the Viet Minh League helped many Frenchmen to cross the frontier, rescued some of them from Japanese jails, and protected French lives and property.

From the autumn of 1940, our country had in fact ceased to be a French colony and had become a Japanese possession.

After the Japanese had surrendered to the Allies, our whole people rose to regain our national sovereignty and to found the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

The truth is that we have wrested our independence from the Japanese and not from the French.



Emperor Bảo Đại on the throne, 1924

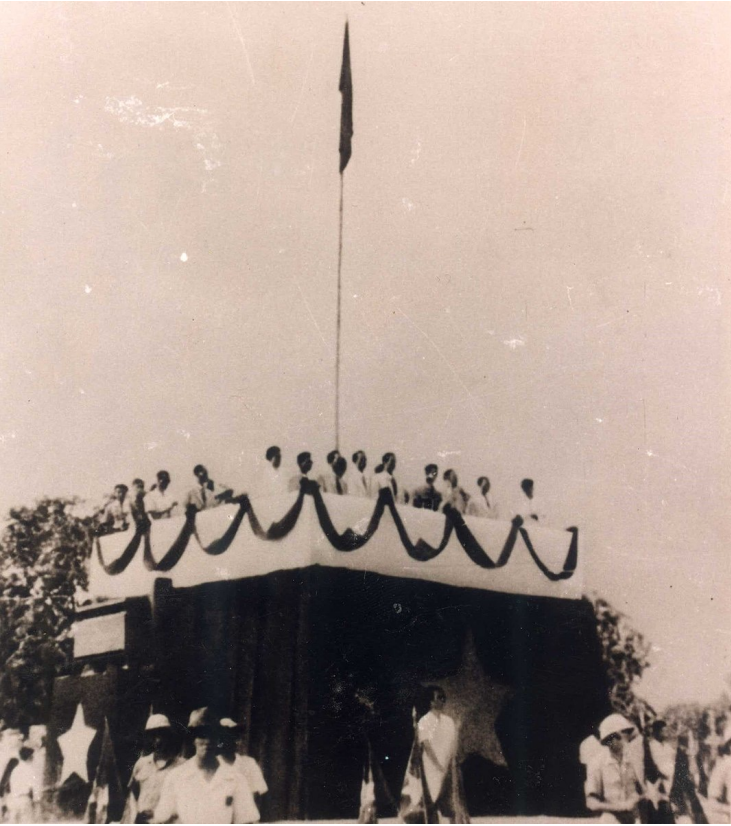


Ho Chi Minh greeted by members of Viet Minh and Lien Viet, 1951

The French have fled, the Japanese have capitulated, Emperor Bảo Đại** has abdicated. Our people have broken the chains which for nearly a century have fettered them and have won independence for the Fatherland. Our people at the same time have overthrown the monarchic regime that has reigned supreme for dozens of centuries. In its place has been established the present Democratic Republic.

For these reasons, we, members of the Provisional Government, representing the whole Vietnamese people, declare that from now on we break off all relations of a colonial character with France; we repeal all the international obligation that France has so far subscribed to on behalf of Vietnam and we abolish all the special rights the French have unlawfully acquired in our Fatherland.

** Bảo Đại was the last emperor of the Nguyễn dynasty, which had ruled Vietnam through most of the nineteenth century. In 1884, when Vietnam fell under French imperial rule, the lineage retained some honorifics at first, but those eroded. Bảo Đại ruled as a puppet of the Japanese from March to August 1945, but abdicated his throne after the Japanese surrender.



Ho Chi Minh declares independence, September 2, 1945

The whole Vietnamese people, animated by a common purpose, are determined to fight to the bitter end against any attempt by the French colonialists to reconquer their country.

We are convinced that the Allied nations which at Tehran and San Francisco^{††} have acknowledged the principles of self-determination and equality of nations, will not refuse to acknowledge the independence of Vietnam.

A people who have courageously opposed French domination for more than eighty years, a people who have fought side by side with the Allies against the Fascists during these last years, such a people must be free and independent.

For these reasons, we, members of the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, solemnly declare to the world that Vietnam has the right to be a free and independent country—and in fact is so already. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize all their physical and mental strength, to sacrifice their lives and property in order to safeguard their independence and liberty.



Viet Minh troops on September 2, 1945

^{††} The Tehran Conference was a strategy meeting of the leaders of Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union – allies in World War II – held in late 1943, following the successful Allied invasion of Iran, which was an important signal of U.S. support for the Soviet military and a strategic Allied source of petroleum. The San Francisco Conference took place in the spring and summer of 1945, at which delegates from fifty countries laid out a vision for the United Nations.

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