

**DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF
VIET-NAM
(September 2, 1945)**

All men are created equal; they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights; among these 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 Viet-Nam 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.

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 bank notes 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 Viet-Nam, more than two million of our fellow citizens died from starvation. On March 9 [1945], 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 Viet Minh members that before fleeing they massacred a great number of our political prisoners detained at Yen Bay and Cao Bang.

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 Viet-Nam. The truth is that we have wrested our independence from the Japanese and not from the French. The French have fled, the Japanese have capitulated, Emperor Bao Dai 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 Viet-Nam, and we abolish all the special rights the French have unlawfully acquired in our Fatherland.

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 Teheran and San Francisco have acknowledged the principles of self-determination and equality of nations, will not refuse to acknowledge the independence of Viet-Nam.

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 Viet-Nam, solemnly declare to the world that Viet-Nam has the right to be a free and independent country—and in fact it 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.

9. Vietnam's Second Appeal to the United States: Cable to President Harry S. Truman (October 17, 1945)*

By Ho Chi Minh

Part of an unsuccessful campaign to get Western leaders to recognize the legitimacy of Vietnamese national aspirations in the immediate postwar period, this telegram from Ho Chi Minh to US President Harry S. Truman went unanswered. It was in that sense a replay of Ho's similarly unavailing attempt to get in touch with the administration of a previous Democratic president, Woodrow Wilson, a quarter century earlier (Reading 2). The communication to President Truman presented here became generally known after the release of a mass of hitherto secret material on the US war against Vietnam, material that became known as The Pentagon Papers.¹

Ho Chi Minh summarizes much recent history in this cable: the role of the pro-Nazi Vichy French government in permitting Japanese occupation of Indochina; the support given to the Allied cause by the Viet Minh, which mounted guerrilla actions against the Japanese and received some vague promises of American support for Vietnamese independence after the war; the evident aim of the anti-Vichy French government to restore French hegemony over the former Indochinese empire. Whatever validity these historical arguments had, they were insufficient to prevent an American-backed return of these former colonies to France and its inevitable consequence—yet another Vietnamese struggle for the independence they claimed in the August Revolution of 1945.

Establishment of [a United Nations] Advisory Commission for the Far East is heartily welcomed by Vietnamese people in principle. Taking into consideration primo the strategical and economical importance of Vietnam secundo the earnest desire which Vietnam deeply feels and has unanimously manifested to cooperate with the other democracies in the establishment and consolidation of world peace and prosperity we wish to call the attention of the Allied nations on the following points:

First absence of Vietnam and presence of France in the Advisory Commission leads to the conclusion that France is to represent the Vietnamese people at the Commission stop. Such representation is groundless either *de jure* or *de facto*. *De jure* no alliance exists any more between France and Vietnam. Baodai abolished treaties of 1884 and 1863. Baodai voluntarily abdicated to hand over government to Democratic Republican Government [Reading 5—eds.]. Provisional Govern-

*The Pentagon Papers (GPO ed.), Bk. 1, pp. 73-74.

1. See the discussion of *The Pentagon Papers*, including the three available editions, in Appendix C.

ment rectorated [sic] abolishment of treaties of 1884 and 1863. *De facto* since March ninth France having handed over governing rule to Japan has broken all administrative links with Vietnam, since August 18, 1945, Provisional Government has been a *de facto* independent government in every respect, recent incidents in Saigon instigated by the French roused unanimous disapproval leading to fight for independence.²

Second France is not entitled because she had ignominiously sold Indo China to Japan and betrayed the Allies. Third Vietnam is qualified by Atlantic Charter³ and subsequent peace agreement and by her goodwill and her unflinching stand for democracy to be represented at the Advisory Commission. We are convinced that Vietnam at Commission will be able to bring effective contribution to solution of pending problems in Far East whereas her absence would bring forth instability [sic] and temporary character to solutions otherwise reached. Therefore we express earnest request to take part in Advisory Commission for Far East. We should be very grateful to your excellency and Premier Attlee Premier Stalin Generalissimo Tchang Kai Shek for the conveyance of our desiderata to the United Nations.