

The U.S. Pivot to Asia: Cold War Lessons from Vietnam for Today

By [Cynthia Chung](#)

Asia-Pacific Research, March 29, 2021

[Strategic Culture Foundation](#) 17 March 2021

Region: [East Asia](#), [South-East Asia](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

All Global Research articles **can be read in 51 languages by activating the “Translate Website”** drop down menu on the top banner of our home page (Desktop version).

There were Cold War preparations underway as early as August 1945 and the two regions selected, Korea and Vietnam, were pre-planned years in advance before the actual wars were to take place, Cynthia Chung writes.

In [part one of this series](#), I discussed how a massive U.S. arms stockpile in Okinawa, Japan that was originally intended to be used for the planned American invasion of Japan was cancelled once the two atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

L. Fletcher Prouty, who served as Chief of Special Operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Kennedy and was a former Col. in the U.S. Air Force, remarks in his book “The CIA, Vietnam and the Plot to Assassinate John F. Kennedy,” that these massive arms shipments were not returned to the United States but rather, half were transported to Korea and the other half to Vietnam.

The implications of this are enormous.

It signifies that there were Cold War preparations already underway as early as August 1945 and likely much earlier, and that the two regions selected, Korea and Vietnam, were pre-planned five years in advance and the other ten years in advance respectively, before the actual wars were to take place.

What this means is that the official narrative for why the Korean War and the Vietnam War were fought are fabrications of the Cold War “reality.”

Therefore, it should be asked, what was the real reason that Americans entered these two brutal wars? Why did leading figures among the American elite, many who were so adamant on not joining in the combat against fascism in WWII, become so quickly convinced, that everything having to do with communism, was their *personal* responsibility to destroy?

These questions will be answered in this series titled “The Fascist Roots of the CIA.”

The CIA and the Pentagon: A Tale of Two Star Crossed Lovers

As discussed in [part one](#) of this series, with the Eisenhower-Nixon victory in 1952, the culmination of years of political strategizing by Wall Street Republican power brokers, the new heads of the State Department and the CIA were selected as none other than Foster and Allen Dulles respectively; and they would go on to direct the global operations of the most powerful nation in the world.

It is for this reason that the 1952 presidential election has gone down in history as the triumph of “the power elite.”

The entire period of April 12th 1945 to that fateful Election Day can be best understood as the first stage of America’s coup. This is especially clear between the period of 1945 and 1949, when a number of new pieces of legislation were passed which successfully reorganised the departments within the United States such that much of the government and military decisions would be beholden to the authority of a few men, [men who were much more powerful than the president himself](#).

The [National Security Act of 1947](#), a Trojan horse, was one of the first of this new breed of legislation and led to the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency, placing it under the direction of the National Security Council.

Although it did not explicitly authorize the CIA to conduct covert operations, Section 102 was sufficiently vague to permit abuse. By December 1947, (less than four months after the creation of the CIA), the perceived necessity to “stem the flow of communism” in Western Europe—particularly Italy—by overt and covert “psychological warfare” forced the issue and NSC 4-A was born.

[NSC 4-A](#) was a new directive to cover “clandestine paramilitary operations, as well as political and economic warfare,” this provided the authorization for the intervention of the CIA in the Italian elections of April 1948.

It was understood that the U.S. military could have no “direct” role in covert operations, since that would defeat the purpose of deniability.

The Communist Party of Italy, admired for leading the fight against Mussolini, was expected to win in Italy’s first post-war election. This, of course, was considered intolerable under the Iron Curtain diktat and American covert operations were deployed to block the anti-fascist victory. Investigative journalist Christopher Simpson writes in his book “Blowback,” how a substantial part of this funding came from captured Nazi assets. This intervention, according to Simpson, tipped the balance in favour of Italy’s Christian Democrats Party, which hid thousands of fascists in its ranks.

In just a few months from its creation, the CIA went from what was supposed to be a civilian intelligence gathering arm of the government to being responsible for covert operations including “psychological warfare.” This was a far cry from what had organised the United States prior to WWII, and which relied on a civilian army. Such a government mandate for cloak and dagger operations during a time of peace would have been considered unthinkable.

But that is why the Cold War narrative was so imperative, since under this paranoid

schizophrenic nightmare, it was thought the world would never be at peace until a significant portion of it was wiped out. The Cold War defined a pixelated enemy that was under-defined and invisible to the eye. The enemy was what your superiors told you were the enemy, and like a shape-shifter could take the form of anybody, including your neighbour, your colleague, your partner...even the president.

There would always be an enemy, because there would always be people who would resist the Grand Strategy.

NSC 4-A was replaced by [NSC 10/2](#), approved by President Truman on June 18th 1948, creating the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC). NSC 10/2 was the first presidential document which specified a mechanism to approve and manage covert operations, and also the first in which the term “covert operations” was defined.

From 1948-1950 the OPC was not under CIA’s control, [but rather was a renegade operation run by Allen Dulles](#). OPC was brought under CIA control in October 1950, when Walter Bedell Smith became Director of Central Intelligence, and it was renamed the Directorate of Plans.

Although the CIA was strictly in charge of covert operations, it often needed the military for additional personnel, transport, overseas bases, weapons, aircraft, ships, and all the other things the Department of Defense had in abundance. In reality, the military, whether it liked it or not, found itself forever in the embrace of its toxic lover, the CIA.

Prouty writes in 1992:

“OPC and other CIA personnel **were concealed in military units and provided with military cover whenever possible**, especially within the far-flung bases of the military around the world... The covert or invisible operational methods developed by the CIA and the military during the 1950s are still being used today despite the apparent demise of the Cold War, in such covert activities as those going on in Central America and Africa...**the distinction between the CIA and the military is hard to discern, since they always work together.**”

A Daring Declaration

On Sept. 2nd, 1945, **Ho Chi Minh** signed the Declaration of Independence for a new nation, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which stated the following lines:

“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.”

Ho Chi Minh had been leading the nationalist Viet Minh independence movement since 1941 against the colonial rule of Japan. Like most of the world, Ho Chi Minh viewed the war against the fascists as aligned to a war against imperialism. He believed that if the world was to finally make a stand against such tyranny, then there would be no place for colonialism in the post-war world. The world would have to be organised according to the

recognition and respect of independent nation states, along the lines of [Roosevelt's post-war vision](#).

After a long and horrific battle against the ruthless Japanese fascists, with support during the war from the United States and China, it was the hope of Ho Chi Minh that Vietnam could return to its former days of peace with its new-found independence from colonial rule.

The Japanese had surrendered and were leaving. The French had been defeated by the Japanese and would not return—or so it was thought.

Vo Nguyen Giap, Ho Chi Minh's brilliant military commander, while serving as Minister of the Interior of the provisional government, delivered a speech describing the United States as a good friend of the Viet Minh. That, too, was in September 1945. Ho Chi Minh had been supplied with a tremendous stock of military equipment by the United States, and he expected to be able to administer his new government in Vietnam without further opposition.

But on September 23, 1945, shortly after the Democratic Republic of Vietnam had issued its Declaration of Independence, a group of former French troops, acting with the consent of the British forces (who had been given jurisdiction of the area from the Potsdam Conference) and armed with Japanese weapons stolen from surrender stockpiles, staged a local coup d'état and seized control of the administration of Saigon, in South Vietnam, known today as Ho Chi Minh City.

By January 1946, the French had assumed all military commitments in Vietnam and reinstalled the French government.

It should be understood that the removal of the French presence in Indochina was no small feat, since it was not only their military presence that had to be dealt with, but also its business interests including French banks, among the most powerful in Asia. The French had imposed its colonial presence in Indochina since 1787.

Negotiations between the French and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam began early in 1946. Ho Chi Minh traveled to Paris, but the conference failed due to French intransigence.

The French Indochina War broke out in 1946 and went on for eight years, with France's war effort largely funded and supplied by the United States.

In 1949, **Bao Dai**, the former emperor who spent most of his time in the lap of luxury in Paris, France, was set up by foreign interest to be the puppet government of the State of Vietnam (South Vietnam).

On May 8, 1950, **Secretary of State Dean Acheson** announced that the United States would give both economic and military aid to France and to the State of Vietnam. The value of this military assistance surpassed \$3 billion.

There was never any official reason for why the United States changed its allegiance from Ho Chi Minh to the French colonial interests and their puppet government. Although Ho Chi Minh's belief in communism was used to justify this betrayal, the truth was that he was a threat because he considered himself first and foremost a nationalist, who believed that the Vietnamese people were one and that his nation deserved independence from colonial dominance.

It was this nationalism that could not be tolerated in areas of the world which were regarded as imperial territories and subject lands. It is for this very same reason that [MI6 and the CIA staged a coup against the beloved nationalist Mosaddegh in Iran](#), a non-communist who held a Ph.D. in law and was well on his way to removing all British imperial claims on oil in the country [after winning his case against the British](#) at the Hague and at the UN Security Council in 1951.

This is why the interests of imperialism and fascism were often linked hand in hand, as seen with Edward VIII (though he was not alone in the British Royal family in his views), the Vichy government in France, King of Italy Victor Emmanuel III who appointed Benito Mussolini as Prime Minister in 1922 (who only deposed Mussolini in 1943 when it was clear they were going to lose the war) and Imperial Japan under Emperor Hirohito.

It is for this reason that we saw, before WWII was even over, [the imperialists and the fascists in discussion with each other as to what would form the post-war world](#). It is for this reason that the countries chosen to oversee this Grand Strategy would be the U.S., Britain, France, Germany and Japan, rather than [Roosevelt's choice of the U.S., Russia, Britain and China](#).

It is for this reason that the Iron Curtain, that was originally announced, ***not by Churchill***, but rather by [German Foreign Minister Count Lutz Schwerin von Krosigk](#), reported in the London Times on May 3, 1945, was to announce the terms of an indefinite war against communism. In reality, it meant any country opposed to imperial rule, opposed to the idea that *some were born to rule and others to be ruled*, in other words, imperialism and sovereign nation states could not co-exist.

Ho Chi Minh was an ally to the Americans under the leadership of Roosevelt. However, with Roosevelt's death [and the soft coup that followed](#), Ho Chi Minh was now an enemy.

The Saigon Military Mission

On January 8, 1954, at a meeting of the National Security Council, President Eisenhower made his views clear that Americans did not belong in the Vietnam War. But that did not really matter.

Eisenhower, who was used to people diligently following his line of command as a General of WWII, was soon to learn that this did not apply as President of the United States.

Among those at the January 8, 1954 meeting of the National Security Council were Allen W. Dulles and his brother John Foster Dulles. There was no way that the Dulles brothers could have misunderstood the words of President Eisenhower.

Yet, on January 14, 1954, only six days after the President's "vehement" statement against the entry of U.S. armed forces in Indochina, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles said:

"Despite everything that we do, there remained a possibility that the French position in Indochina would collapse. If this happened and the French were thrown out, it would, of course, become the responsibility of the victorious Vietminh to set up a government and maintain order in Vietnam...[I do] not believe that in this contingency this country [the United States] would simply say, "Too bad; we're licked and that's the end of it."

Thus, the seed was planted. If the French were forced out, which was rather predictable, it was understood that the U.S. would not engage in open warfare with the Viet Minh. However, it could carry out clandestine operations against Ho Chi Minh's forces so as to cause them trouble, or in the words of Foster Dulles "to raise hell."

This is how American intervention and direct involvement in the Vietnam War began, a war in which the Americans had been arming both sides since 1945 and to which there was no official military objective except "to raise hell."

According to a record of the January 14, 1954 National Security Council meeting, it was:

"Agreed that the Director of Central Intelligence [Allen Dulles], in collaboration with other appropriate departments and agencies should develop plans, as suggested by the Secretary of State [John Foster Dulles], for certain contingencies in Indochina."

And, just like that, the entire overseeing of the Vietnam War was placed into the hands of the Dulles brothers.

Two weeks later, on January 29, Allen Dulles, selected Colonel Lansdale to head the team that was going to be deployed in Vietnam "to raise hell."

Edward G. Lansdale, chief of the Saigon Military Mission, arrived in Saigon on June 1, 1954, less than one month after the defeat of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu, for the purpose of a covert operation to conduct psychological warfare and paramilitary activities in South Vietnam.

Prouty writes:

"It was not a military mission in the conventional sense, as the secretary of state had said. It was a CIA organization with a clandestine mission designed to "raise hell" with "guerrilla operations" everywhere in Indochina, a skilled terrorist organization capable of carrying out its sinister role in accordance with the Grand Strategy of those Cold War years.

...With this action, the CIA established the Saigon Military Mission (SMM) in Vietnam. It was not often in Saigon. **It was not military. It was CIA.** Its mission was to work with the anti-Vietminh Indochinese and **not to work with the French.** With this background and these stipulations, this new CIA unit was not going to win the war for the French. As we learned the hard way later, it was not going to win the war for South Vietnam, either, or for the United States. Was it supposed to?"

It should be noted here that although NSC and Department of State records show that the Saigon Military Mission did not begin until January 1954, there were other CIA activities in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos (such as the White Cloud teams) long before 1954, and some members of the SMM had participated in these earlier activities as far back as 1945. (1)

Though Lansdale is listed as a U.S. Air Force Col. who was put in charge of the SMM, this was just a ploy. He would continue in Vietnam, as he had in the Philippines, to exploit the cover of an air force officer and to be assigned to the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) for "cover assignment" purposes. He was always an agent of the CIA, and his actual bosses

were always with the CIA.

With Ho Chi Minh's defeat of the French in 1954 at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, ending the First Indochina War, it was understood that new oppositional leadership would be required if Ho Chi Minh were to be prevented from taking control of South Vietnam.

Ngo Dinh Diem would oust Bao Dai in a [rigged referendum vote](#) in 1955, becoming the first President of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). The South Vietnamese were not interested in either candidate.

The reader should take note here that South Vietnam (otherwise known as Cochinchina for centuries), had never had a real form of government because it had never been a nation in its entire existence but rather had been made up of ancient villages for several centuries with relatively little change. There was no congress, no police, and no tax-system - nothing essential to the function of a nation. Diem's "government" was nothing but a façade of bureaucracy.

Despite this, Diem's Republic of Vietnam was treated as an equal member of the family of nations, as if it could stand on its own two feet and respond accordingly to the crisis its people were being thrown into. The Vietnamese government that Eisenhower believed ought to be fighting the Viet Minh on its own behalf did not exist.

The choice of a predominant number of Indochinese was overwhelmingly for Ho Chi Minh. They felt no loyalty to Bao Dai, who lived in Paris, and they hated the French. Ngo Dinh Diem was a nobody, who never accomplished anything to win the hearts of his people.

The Vietnam War, as it understood today, was full of oversights. But perhaps the most serious oversight of all was that ***not one of the six U.S. administrations who oversaw the Vietnam War ever stated a positive American military objective for that war.*** The generals sent to Saigon were told not to let the "communists" take over Vietnam, period. As Prouty stated repeatedly in his book, ***this does not constitute a military objective.***

The Saigon Military Mission was sent to Vietnam to preside over the dissolution of French colonial power. The Dulles brothers knew, by January 1954 if not long before that, that they would be creating a new Vietnamese government that would be neither French nor Vietminh and that this new government would then become the base for continuing the decade-old war in Indochina.

That was their primary objective.

The Geneva Conference, A Genocidal Exodus

The defeat of the French resulted in the Geneva Accords in July 1954 which established the 17th parallel as a temporary demarcation line separating the military forces of the French and the Viet Minh. Within 300 days of the signing of the accords, a demilitarized zone, or DMZ, was created, and the transfer of any civilians who wished to leave either side was to be completed.



Ho Chi Minh and all northern Vietnamese believed the nation to be “one.” They did not want a division of their country, as the Geneva Agreements had guaranteed.

The closing article of the Geneva Agreements, Number 14, a scarcely noticed few lines, read; “...any civilians residing in a district controlled by one party, who wish to go and live in the zone assigned to the other party, shall be permitted and helped to do so by the authorities in that district.”

The ominous meaning of this was concealed under the guise of humanitarian words. The American-British note spoke of a “peaceful and humane transfer,” as if they were being kind and sensitive to the situation at hand, ready to uproot people who had lived all their lives in a settled village that had existed for tens of thousands of years.

The people of the world, most of whom had no knowledge of the Tonkinese, were led to believe that this offer was a most compassionate gesture. And, what is worse, the planners of this sinister plot were certain that the people of the world would never learn the truth, that this movement of one million North Vietnamese was really intended to be the kindling that would set the country on fire. It was a set-up and would lay the essential groundwork for America’s direct entry into the war.

The mass exodus of North Vietnamese to South Vietnam would be orchestrated by the Saigon Military Mission. This was a terrible upheaval for these people but it was sold to the West as if they were refugees fleeing Ho Chi Minh. In reality, they were fleeing the “psychological warfare” and “paramilitary tactics” today called “terrorism” that the SMM were unleashing in these small Northern villages.

In their own words, as found in documents released with the Pentagon Papers, leaders of the SMM wrote that the mission had been sent into North Vietnam to carry out “unconventional warfare,” “paramilitary operations,” “political-psychological warfare,” and rumor campaigns and to set up a Combat Psy War course for the Vietnamese. The members of the SMM were classic “agents provocateurs.”

Prouty writes:

“This movement of Catholics—or natives whom the SMM called “Catholics”—from the northern provinces of Vietnam to the south, under the provisions of the Geneva Agreement, **became the most important activity of the Saigon Military Mission and one of the root causes of the Vietnam War.** The terrible burden these 1,100,000 destitute strangers imposed upon the equally poor native residents of the south created a pressure on the country and the Diem administration that proved to be overwhelming.

These penniless natives...were herded into Haiphong by the Saigon Military Mission and put aboard U.S. Navy transport vessels. About 300,000 traveled on the CIA’s Civil Air Transport aircraft, and others walked out. They were transported, like cattle, to the southernmost part of Vietnam, where, despite promises of money and other basic support, they were turned loose upon the local population. These northerners are Tonkinese, more Chinese than the Cochinese of the south. They have never mixed under normal conditions. wherever these poor people were dumped on the south were given the name “Communist insurgencies,” and **much of the worst and most pernicious part of the twenty years of warfare that followed was the direct result of this terrible activity that had been incited and carried out by CIA’s**

terroristic Saigon Military Mission.

...Nothing that occurred during these thirty years of warfare, 1945-75, was more pernicious than this movement of these 1,100,000 “Catholics” from the north to the south at a time when the government of the south scarcely existed. ”

It didn't take long before the disturbance caused by the Diem-favored northern intruders onto the southern natives broke out into violence. Before long, the “friends,” according to the Diem government and its CIA backers were the one million northern Catholics, and the “enemy”—or at least the “problem”—was the native Cochinese of the south.

The time was right to fan the flames into war and to bring in the Americans.

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above or below. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

Cynthia Chung is a lecturer, writer and co-founder and editor of the *Rising Tide Foundation* (Montreal, Canada).

Featured image is from Wikimedia Commons

The original source of this article is [Strategic Culture Foundation](#)
Copyright © [Cynthia Chung](#), [Strategic Culture Foundation](#), 2021

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: **[Cynthia Chung](#)**

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). Asia-Pacific Research will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. Asia-Pacific Research grants permission to cross-post Asia-Pacific Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Asia-Pacific Research article. For publication of Asia-Pacific Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: editors@asia-pacificresearch.com

www.asia-pacificresearch.com contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: editors@asia-pacificresearch.com